

### 8.30.20 L22P13 Taking Up the RIGHT Cross

- Watching the news the past few days, I just couldn't help but feel that this last week has been particularly ugly and nasty

- This is how bad the week was – wildfires raged throughout California scorching well over a million and a half acres, which normally would have dominated the news, but instead, that was pushed aside and almost forgotten in the midst of far worse news

- A category 4 hurricane with winds of over 150 miles an hour, and a storm surge of 10-20 feet that absolutely submerged coastal Texas and Louisiana, brought destruction and death to communities and families that will take years to repair

- In Kenosha, Wisconsin, an unarmed black man was shot in the back seven times by a police officer, and honestly, my reaction was not again!

- Being a police officer is difficult... but so is being black in America, and we need to stop taking sides and deal with race and violence without resorting to simplistic answers or slogans

- Meanwhile there's still the Coronavirus, and the death toll just keeps rising

- Even though some of the highest numbers in many states have come down, it's still bad – our country, even taking relative size into account, now leads the world by a wide margin with over 180,000 deaths

- And then there's politics

- I believe that not since the Civil War has our country been so divided, and so polarized, and in such vitriolic disagreement about what the issues of our country are, and how they should be addressed

- And if all that isn't enough for one week, many schools are starting a new school year

- From preschools to universities – students, teachers, and staff are starting a year with a hodge-podge of in-person and online education

- And while protective policies and practices have been put into place to try to prevent the spread of the virus in education, these safeguards are only as

effective as the people who either keep or ignore them... and not a day has gone by this week without hearing about yet another college party with lots of alcohol and people, and no masks or distancing

- It has been such an ugly and nasty week
- But the truth is, the world and humanity itself always have ugliness... the world and humanity always have brokenness... the world and humanity always have sin-fueled destruction running through its veins – **it just that the ugliness usually isn't as raw and visible as it has been this week**
- *And yet this is the very same ugly, broken, destructive world into which Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, came to bring the Kingdom of God*
  - The gospel for today in a very special and unique way announces the coming of the Messiah, the chosen and anointed Lord of heaven and earth
  - But the WAY that Jesus the Messiah and Lord announced his Kingdom was an absolute surprise!
  - Instead of using displays of power over ugliness, instead of bashing and further fracturing the brokenness, and instead of dealing out more destruction, in today's reading from the Gospel of Matthew we hear: "Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. [16:21]"
  - Undergo suffering... be killed... and only then be raised... *that doesn't sound very kingly.*
  - No wonder Peter objected and tried to turn Jesus to a more-kingly way – at least a more-kingly way in Peter's mind
  - But here's REALLY what Jesus did – Jesus submitted himself to undergoing persecution by the world's abusive authority, and then submitted himself even to suffering and death, Jesus endured the ugliness of the world and its destructive systems, and he even embraced the death that until then had weighed down humanity
  - And only after all that suffering and death was Jesus raised from the dead, and only then with his resurrection

Jesus demonstrated that the ugliness, the brokenness, and the sin-fueled destruction of the world and humanity **does not, and will not get the last word**

- Christ has died, Christ is risen, and nothing, not even death itself, can undo the victory of Jesus the Messiah over the world's ugliest days, and weeks, and years.
- But then Jesus said one more thing in this story – “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. [15:25]”
  - Let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow!
  - Disciples, take up the cross and follow!
  - LET ME BE ABSOLUTELY CLEAR! We have a tendency to look at our suffering, or the suffering brought on by the world, and say something like, “Well, this is my cross to bear.”
  - To be clear, fire and flood is NOT our cross to bear, violence and racism is NOT our cross to bear, and politics and pandemic and fear are NOT our crosses to bear...
  - Instead the cross that Jesus calls his disciples to take up and carry is HIS cross
  - And HIS cross declares that the risen Christ has endured humanity's worst, even death itself, and this Christ has been raised from the dead to declare God's last and final word – THE UGLINESS OF THIS WORLD AND THE SIN-FUELED BROKENNESS OF HUMANITY DOES NOT WIN!
  - And THAT... THAT is the word of hope that as cross carrying disciples we are called to take into the broken world that needs hope, not more hate
  - We need to hear, and even more-so the world needs to hear, that sin and ugliness has not and will not win, because Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead, and... and as cross carrying disciples we are called not-only to share that hope, but we are also called to stand with the suffering, to seek justice, to speak words of Christ-forgiving grace, to comfort the afflicted, and to share the cross-given love of the risen Christ with our hurting neighbors in this heart-breaking world