

St. Andrew's Episcopal Church
Proper 7, Year C
June 19, 2016
The Rev. Grayce O'Neill Rowe

My husband, Carl, known by one of our grandchildren as Mr. Trumpet Man, used to play with the Maryland Symphony Orchestra's Kinder Konzertz - a group of brass players who educated and entertained Elementary age students in Washington County, Maryland. In one of their skits, rather, lessons, Carl would suggest that the children imagine that it is a very, very long time ago and that it is three o'clock in the morning and that they are all snuggled in their beds, sound asleep. Some of the brass players on stage started to snore; so, too, did some of the young children. Some were giggling, of course. Carl then told them that there is a very important message for them to hear and that someone needs to awaken them so that they can hear the message. What better way for them to be awakened than for the trumpet to play

(Carl plays)

I bet that if you had been sleeping, you would be awake now!

Carl just played the fanfare from Beethoven's only opera, Fidelio. This opera tells the story of an innocent man who was locked away because he had spoken out about the injustices that he observed in the local government. His wife, dressed in a disguise as a man, got a job working in the prison so that she could rescue her husband. At just the moment when they feared that all was lost and that he would be killed, they heard the bugle sound. . .

(Carl plays)

The Minister of State arrived just in time and released everyone from prison. All were saved.

The trumpet, this fanfare, tells us to wake up, to be alert, to expect something exciting and, as in this opera, something lifesaving, something life giving. The fanfare tells us to expect Jesus.

Our Gospel today, yet another healing story, is about the fanfare of Jesus' arrival and his amazing healing of a man filled with demons. We don't know why or for how long this man had suffered - and once again, that is not information that we need to know. What we do know is that this deeply troubled, suffering man met Jesus when Jesus arrived in the country of the Gerasenes and in a great fanfare he shouted at Jesus and he was healed.

A fanfare, wake up, be alert.

The horrific event in Orlando at the Pulse nightclub last weekend was also a fanfare, a wake-up call telling us to be alert, to pay attention. Sadly to say, I don't know how many of these fanfares will have to happen before we, as a nation, wake up and really, truly begin to address the violence, the hatred, the bigotry, the fear from which our country is so painfully and so alarmingly suffering. I know that there are many different viewpoints, there are many different sides to these issues. I also know that the Gospel, and this Gospel in particular, the Gospel compels us to do something.

What might that something be? Our bishop shared a powerful reflection that is a possible answer for the leadership of the church. Listen to a part of what our, what your bishop said: "What if we said, 'Violence, and the means to violence (such as automatic weapons), are forbidden to believers.' What if we made it a policy, 'It's your choice, AR-15s or Holy Communion?' What if we banned all guns from church buildings (a few of our Arizona congregations have done so)? What if we bishops wore our clerical collars and had a sit down in the entrance to the NRA headquarters? Maybe by taking such actions, instead of just praying for peace, people would begin to see their church leaders as the conscience of society instead of just chaplains to those in control. Maybe the American public would listen more carefully to what spiritual leaders have to say."

Powerful and challenging words from our bishop. This is one possible approach for religious leaders. But what about the rest of us? What is the something that we can do? Today's Gospel has a suggestion. We just

heard that the man who was healed, after begging Jesus that he might be with him, Jesus sent him away saying, "Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you."

You are each here this morning because God has done something for you. In our hurting world, a world to which Jesus yearns to bring healing, a world for which Jesus died to bring healing, in our world there are people who need to hear, there are people who are dying to hear your story of how much God has done for you. I am convinced that this healing which is so desperately needed, this healing will begin when each and everyone of us begins to tell others all that God has done for us. Use Social Media, talk with your neighbors, think of your understanding of the Gospel each time that you enter into a conversation about any of the dangerous, painful issues that are facing our country, our world. The trumpet has sounded, the fanfare, the wake-up call has rung out and we each need to live our lives as if we believe that Jesus really is coming with healing and life. We need to share our lives telling others about our own healing, about our own experience of renewed life. Our very lives depend on it.

Today's Gospel also clearly points out why it is that we oftentimes don't do that one something, why it is that we don't seem to do what we need to do to start to bring about change in the world, why sometimes we don't even hear the fanfare, the alert, the wake-up call. Think of the many ways that we are all distracted, think of how we, like the man in this Gospel story, how we are like him, filled with legions of distractions, succumbing to so many influences that take us away from relationship with God - being so caught up in the busyness of our lives that we think of God only on Sunday morning, if even that often; if we let ourselves get caught up in financial concerns so that we hoard what we have or we lose sleep over what we do not have; when we stay focussed on our anger or our having been hurt, if we get lost in the violence, the hatred, the bigotry fearing that it is just too much and so we shut down, then we are like the man in this Gospel who was so caught up with demons that he lost his life, we too can get so caught up that we lose our lives.

This Gospel can be a wake up call for us; it can be the fanfare that comes in the middle of the night, the fanfare that tells us to be alert, to know that Jesus comes to rid us of these distractions, that Jesus comes to offer

healing in our broken world; it can be the fanfare that tells us that we must begin to do something no matter how small; it can be the fanfare that tells us that Jesus comes to bring us back to life and that once brought back to life we, too, are to go out and tell others all that God has done for us.

Listen for the fanfare. It is here, today, it has come to save your life.

Listen, respond and live.

(Carl trumpet)

Amen.