

Proper 14b: 8/12/18  
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It was one year ago today that  
Neo-Nazi's and white supremacists from around the country  
marched in Charlottesville VA  
in a rally that was by definition an act of hate and violence.  
Several counter-protestors were injured,  
and a young woman named Heather Heyer was killed.  
State troopers H. Jay Cullen and Berke Bates died in the line of duty  
trying to keep the peace in the face of unspeakable violence.

Apparently some of these Neo-Nazi's and white supremacists  
think this is an occasion worth commemorating.  
They've threatened anniversary rallies for later today in Charlottesville  
and in Washington at Lafayette Square across from the White House.

God help us.  
No matter what ends up happening later today, God help us all.

This is the day we find ourselves here in the middle –  
literally, the third of five weeks –  
of reading chapter 6 of John's Gospel, the "bread of life" discourse  
so called because Jesus talks (and talks some more)  
about being the bread of life that came down from heaven.

Being Jesus of course there's plenty of action to back this up.  
It begins with Jesus going up a mountain with the disciples  
followed by a large crowd, five thousand in all.  
Among them is a boy with two fish and five barley loaves,  
the bread of the poor.

You probably know what happens next because  
it's very much like what we do at the altar every Sunday.  
Jesus takes the bread, gives thanks for it and then  
distributes it to the people.  
Not only is there plenty to go around but fragments enough

to fill twelve baskets more.

The people gathered are naturally impressed,  
so much that they try to take Jesus by force and make him king.  
Jesus of course doesn't fall for this,  
and withdraws for a bit by himself.

The people catch up with Jesus the next day.  
You're following me, he says, not because you saw the sign,  
but because you ate your fill of the loaves.  
And then he proceeds to explain  
that sign of feeding all those people from that humble fare,  
that sign of loving them, feeding them body and soul,  
physically and spiritually too.

So here we are today  
reading the latest installment of this great "bread of life" teaching,  
with more to come next week and again the next.  
Throughout, Jesus assures that he is the "bread of life".  
He is the bread that comes down from heaven.  
He is the life which gives life to all life.  
He is God's word made flesh in humble human flesh.

How interesting that God chose to be incarnate  
in the dark, weather-beaten flesh of a Jew,  
someone who would surely be hated by the  
Neo-Nazi's and white nationalists who marched a year ago.  
And who are still on the march in our country today.

My friends, there are *not* "good people" on both sides of this issue.  
Racism, anti-Semitism, fascism, are wrong. Period.  
They are sinful. Period.  
And when we ourselves conjure even the slightest hint  
of racial prejudice in our hearts,  
when we refuse to acknowledge the unfair advantage  
our whiteness gives us,  
we are wrong  
and we must confess that sin.

But we're also wrong, we also sin,  
when we fail to see the humanity in those Neo-Nazi's and white supremacists  
whose ideas and actions we abhor.  
For as abhorrent as they may be to us,  
they are also children of God.  
Jesus came to incarnate their flesh too.  
As hard as it may be for us to see this,  
God sees it.  
God loves them and wants nothing more than for them  
to turn to God who is love and repent of their hate.

This is not easy.  
It's not easy for me –  
to at once dig deep to confess the racism that is in me  
AND to recognize the humanity that is in those self-proclaimed racists.

What a mess we are.  
How desperately we need a Savior.  
How desperately we hunger for  
that bread which is the life of all life,  
that bread which comes down from heaven.

Oh, how amazing – what amazing grace! –  
that God in Christ knows this,  
and loves us, forgives us, still.

In today's Gospel, Jesus himself experiences just how quick  
we humans are to judge.  
People gathered there now question Jesus' credentials.  
They judge him not by what he says and does,  
but by where and who he comes from.  
They dismiss him as just another hometown boy from a low-rent family,  
just as we so readily dismiss "the other" –  
instead of seeing them as children of God,  
sisters and brothers made in God's image.

The shame of it is that it doesn't have to be this way.

We're not made to hate.  
We're taught. We let ourselves succumb to it.  
It's like that song from the musical "South Pacific" –

*You've got to be taught to hate and fear...  
You've got to be taught to be afraid  
[of] people whose skin is a different shade...  
You've got to be carefully taught.*

But there's another song I like better:

*Jesus loves the little children,  
all the children of the world.  
Red and yellow, black and white,  
all are precious in his sight.  
Jesus loves the little children (and the big ones too!)  
of the world.*

*{Then sing together with congregation}*

AMEN.