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13 Pentecost A
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I have sweet memories of watching Saturday morning cartoons as a little kid. Maybe you do too. Or maybe you've watched a child, niece, nephew, or godchild get out of bed at the crack of dawn to hunker down in front of the television to watch four consecutive hours of cartoons, still in pajamas, eating a bowl of cereal on the carpet. I wonder if kids even do that anymore, given the ubiquity of tablets, laptops, phones, and stream services.

If you had a cynical streak, you might have noticed that the commercials during Saturday morning cartoons were skewed toward the bread eaters, not the breadwinners. Young children were offered dazzling new toys, candies, cartoon movie trailers, and breakfast cereals so sweet you can feel the pain in your teeth. The cereals had brightly colored mascots — Toucan Sam, Cap'n Crunch, that bee from Honey Nut Cheerios. One of the lesser known sugar cereals was called Cookie Crisps. It was literally tiny cookies masquerading as cereal. No wonder the country wrestles with type II diabetes. Cookie Crisp had two mascots — the Cookie Crook and Officer Crumb. The crook would try to steal the delicious cereal, and Officer Crumb would attempt to catch him — billy club at the ready and stereotypical Irish accent on full display.

I was thinking about this crook and this cop this week. Officer Crumb was exasperated by the Cookie Crook, but to my knowledge, he never shot the man seven times in the back.

I appreciate that people of goodwill can disagree how a just society ought to enforce its laws. And I appreciate that people of goodwill can disagree on the proper amount of power a peacekeeping force should hold. Singapore polices one

way. Britain polices another. The United States polices still another way. But I do not think that anyone can come to the conclusion that it is in any way righteous for a servant of the law to shoot someone seven times in the back. There is a disconnect between how we were taught as children to imagine law enforcement in our country and what happened this week in Kenosha. “When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways.” to quote our favorite Biblical curmudgeon, St. Paul.

In the Gospel text, Jesus yells at Peter. This isn't uncommon. Peter is often the first to do something very right and also the first to do something very wrong. In this case. Jesus is telling the disciples that he will have to enter into his own pain and suffering in Jerusalem. Peter doesn't want his friend Jesus to suffer.

The scandal of the Christian story is that God, in the person of Jesus, will go everywhere there is real human pain and suffering. Jesus was in Kenosha, receiving his gunshot stigmata. God has been there in every minute of suffering endured by brown, black, and indigenous people in our country. God is in the plight of the marginalized. In the lack of access to clean water. In the profoundly underfunded poor classrooms. In the tent cities of the homeless under the bridge on blistering hot days. God became man and dwelled among us, as we say at Christmas, but it's not all wise men and frankincense. It is grim suffering that Jesus takes on himself.

And we, crazy Christian people that we are, believe somehow that God will be able to take what is stuck, lifeless, horrible, and evil and transform it into something that is living, breathing, and good. I will admit that we are sometimes short on the details of how this happens. It is faith after all. But hours after protests began, churches in the area sent water, medical supplies, and food down to support protestors and to those who had had their business ravaged by looters. Christian people did not just see death. They saw opportunities for life — the ability to create new neighbors, to work for justice, and to feed anyone who needed it. All because of the sometimes-insane belief that God is in the suffering and God is in the remedy.

I cannot tell you what policy positions our Lord Jesus would adopt to bring more just policing into our society. Generally, Jesus had a pretty low opinion of politicians and the state powers that be, so I would be very careful before deciding that God agrees with you politically. We Episcopalians often pray a little prayer that we sometimes call the Collect for Purity — *Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy Name; through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

I think the prayer is a weekly reminder that our hearts can become entrenched, hardened, incurious. And that we need God to help us become vessels for the love of Christ rather than our own opinions, clever though I am sure they are. We are asking God to free us from our own limits so that we can be little Christs in the world. And Jesus tells us in the scriptures today that this work will come with risks. Those folks who drove water down to Kenosha? One was arrested and the truck was impounded. “If any want to become my followers, let them pick up their cross and follow me.”

There is a role in the healing of this world for you. I don't know what it is. Clear your mind and heart. Ask God how you can be a disciple in this time, at this moment. I know there is some way that your gifts can help this world. But know, it might be costly. The same powers that nailed Jesus to the cross try to creep back into the world generation after generation. And all we have to fight them with is our prayer and our bodies. When human cruelty seems too much to bear, remember that Jesus bore it first and changed us all so that we might be free to help redeem this world, even when it seems hopeless. Amen.