

Where was Jesus in the Baptist church in Sutherland Springs last Sunday?

Why has such violence become a regular occurrence instead of a rare exception?

These questions have been in our hearts and minds all week.

- We are reeling from the shock of such violent rage.
- We feel vulnerable in the very space we call sanctuary.
- Our hearts are broken by the deaths of brothers and sisters in Christ – such senseless tragedy.
- We long for answers and solutions where we know there are none, though Democrats will push gun control and Republicans will push gun freedom, and somebody somewhere will suggest that pastors be armed.

But this morning we are not here as Democrats and Republicans – **we are here as people of the party of Jesus.**

We are here right now not as citizens of the United States, **but as citizens of the kingdom of God.**

And as the people of God, joined by baptism to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and heirs with Him of the riches of heaven,

- We confront these big questions differently than the rest of the world.
- We speak of such things in a different language and with different expectations.
- **We are different because we know a man who died and defeated evil and death and who lives to tell about it.**

His name is Jesus.

...

So where was Jesus last Sunday in Sutherland Springs?

To begin to reflect on this entails a wrestling match between evil and love.

- I think most of us –I know I do –carry in the back of our minds the notion that as God’s people doing good we should be immune from evil.
- God will keep us safe as we worship, unleashing the hosts of guardian angels at the least sign of danger.

Yet we know from Scripture that it isn’t as simple as that.

- In love we were created for love.
- And love means being able to choose.
- To love someone is to choose to give oneself to the beloved.

In the traditional marriage liturgy, the language is “forsaking all others...”

This freedom to choose was tested in the very beginning when the Lord God gave Adam and Eve instructions for how to enjoy their life in the garden of Eden **an they chose to believe the deceitful serpent instead.**

Why was that serpent, also called Satan or the devil, there at all?

- Why did God create the world with the possibility of sin?
- Why didn’t God just let Adam and Eve live in the garden happily ever after with no restrictions?

Because that would not have been love.

That would have made humanity mere puppets of God's will,
playthings for God's own amusement. Pets.

No, love involves both choosing and being chosen.

For love to be real, humanity must be able to say yes or no to God's love.

And for that freedom to exist there must be an alternative – another voice to say “Yes” to when saying “No” to God.

When the serpent contradicted the Lord's word, that choice was presented to Eve.

She could either say “Yes” to God's love by trusting God's word or “No” to God and “Yes” to Satan by trusting the serpent's word.

The choice Eve – and then Adam too – made to say “No” to God and “Yes” to Satan has repercussions down to this very moment.

We call it original sin and it fractured the entire created order.

The world we live in and the hearts we carry within our breasts are flawed, damaged, and unsound.

We cannot by our own strength of will say “Yes” to God and “No” to Satan. **Left to ourselves, we will always say “Yes” to Satan.**

What we *need* to live with this reality is not hosts of guardian angels to protect us from the power and consequences of sin and evil, **but a Savior to deliver us from them.**

We need Jesus.

Jesus gives us a second chance to say “Yes” to God.

Rising from the dead and pouring his Holy Spirit into us,

Jesus works in our hearts to reveal Satan’s dead-end and turn us toward his own eternal life.

The Holy Spirit turns our eyes to Jesus on the cross and invites us to say
“Yes, Lord, I accept your love for me,

your forgiveness of my sins, your grace for my life.

Yes, Lord, Yes I love you too.”

For Jesus is risen from the dead and makes promises Satan cannot:

– “I will be with you always”.

I will deliver you from all your troubles.

Whoever believes in me will not perish, but will have life everlasting.

Loving and trusting Jesus means enduring the fading power of Satan

in the sure and certain hope of our resurrection,

our deliverance, our life beyond the grave.

Where was Jesus last Sunday in Sutherland Springs or any of the other places where Satan has had his way?

Jesus is taking the bullets.

Jesus is hanging on the cross, naked, whipped,

- crowned with thorns,
- mocked,
- and taking his last breath with the words, “Father, Into your hands I commend my spirit.”
- Jesus is bleeding along with the victims of Satan’s evil.
- Jesus is weeping with the survivors and those in mourning.

Jesus is present as the Suffering Servant, taking in his own body the sins of all humanity and defeating the forces of evil.

And he is present as the living Savior – for whom death is not the end.

Evil does not have the last word. Satan does not have the final say.

So as people of God, as citizens of the kingdom of heaven, we confront tragic episodes of evil with this **conviction and hope:**

– **that Jesus has already defeated this evil and is delivering us from it.**

It is a second chance for us to say “Yes” to God and “No” to Satan.

And when we say “Yes” to God’s love, we give our whole lives to showing our love-- trusting Jesus, following him, obeying him.

Which brings us to the second question raised by last Sunday’s tragedy:

Why has such violence become a regular occurrence instead of a rare exception?

I can’t help but wonder if it is partly because as a culture we have allowed Satan to bombard us with violence – even chosen it.

- We are bombarded on TV

- In video games where our brains and hearts commit horrific acts of violence against others
- In sporting events that encourage fighting to solve problems.
- In speeches and online postings that violate the dignity of other people
- Our culture stimulates the brain to commit violence – even deadly violence—against others.
- In these ways, we regularly break the 5th commandment – You shall not kill.

As Christians, we are called to repent of this and pray for the power of the Holy Spirit to help us say “No” to Satan’s violent ways.

We are called instead to live as God’s beloved people.

And whenever we are faced with tragedy, Satan’s last gasp,

let us, the people of God’s love, weep with those who weep – but not as those without hope.

Let us wipe the tears of grief

with faith in Jesus, who delivers his people,

and reach out to others with our hope in the life to come.

With Joshua and the people of Israel, let us choose to say “The Lord our God we will serve, and him we will obey.”

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen