

“Help us, O Lord, to live the faith which we proclaim”

When our organist and choir director, Marsha Reilly, selected the sequence hymn for today, little did she know that it would be really quite helpful to us as we try to comprehend the activities of this week in God's world.

The first stanza of hymn 628 opens with a prayer: “Help us, O Lord, to learn the truths your word imparts: to study, that your laws may be inscribed upon our hearts.”

A two-step process: first, learn the truths of God's word. Second, study those truths and seal them in our very being. So as we study and learn the truths of God's word, we seek to find how they might be applied to our own lives and to the world situation.

This hymn is instructive for us as we try to comprehend our world--two more egregious episodes of random, seemingly senseless violence: several people stabbed in Las Vegas, with two reported dead. Another tragedy in Thailand, where a gunman killed 36 people, 24 of whom were children.

Virtually the same day, we saw in the news that the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded. There are three recipients. One is the Center for Civil Liberties in Ukraine, which has been working for years to document evidence of Russian war crimes. A second recipient, Memorial, is one of the oldest civil rights groups in Russia. It has worked for years at uncovering the crimes of the Stalin regime and has worked to remember the victims of the Gulag. The third is a Belarusian civil rights activist, Ales Bialiatski, now in prison.

These are people and organizations recognized for having lived out their beliefs and principles, as we might seek to do if we wish to identify with the second stanza of our hymn: “Help us, O Lord, to live the faith which we proclaim, that all our thoughts and words and deeds may glorify your name.”

Sometimes—especially when we see tragedy and violence flare up in God’s world—it becomes difficult for us to have faith in God as we try to live out that faith.

(A personal anecdote, if I may)

A number of years ago, a tornado struck Xenia, a town where I had previously been rector of the church. At the time of the tornado, I was living in Columbus. The next day, I drove to Xenia and began walking through the streets. I met up with a parishioner of Christ Church who asked, in bewilderment, "Where was God? Why did he let all this happen?" Sadly, I had no answer for him.

That may seem to be our question today as we confront the violence of the stabbing in Las Vegas and the gunman in Thailand, plus of course, the myriad of violent acts that have taken place in school rooms, theaters, home living rooms, and other venues where people congregate or try to live their private, quiet lives. "Where is God in the violence in these places?" we always wonder.

Well, yes, our God is a God of peace, not a God of violence. Yet, as we know, this God of peace does not rule the actions of the men and women who live and move and have their being on this "mortal coil". Sometimes it is hard to square the belief in a God of love and peace with the hate and violence when we see it, read about it, or personally encounter it in God's world.

Maybe the hymn we sang a few minutes ago has more to tell us in the last stanza, which provides one last plea for moving forward, in a positive way, to serve the Lord: "Help us, O Lord, to teach the beauty of your ways, that yearning souls may find the Christ and live a life of praise."

Yes--our hope is to be like the people of Corinth, whom St. Paul describes as Ambassadors for Christ, women and men living the truths of the gospel in our own lives, bringing the word, the love of Christ, further into God's world, where we can, when we can.

Our prayer is to find ways to put an end to the violence we have just now seen in Las Vegas and Thailand as well as other times and places in our seared memory. Our prayer is to be as Christ-like as possible, remembering and knowing that we have been baptized in his name to be faithful apostles of the One who lived and died for us, that we might take up his cross and go forward in the name of peace and justice.

Perhaps we can all live so that we know that each of us might--in our own way and in our own place—be so positively, faithfully, and peacefully recognized by our friends, family, and companions that they may even find us, too, to be worthy recipients of the Nobel Peace Prize!