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# Overcoming the Brokenness

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A Sermon By  
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Grace Episcopal Church  
Silver Spring, Maryland

*An audio version of this sermon is available at*  
<http://graceepiscopalchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/2015-11-15-AAA.mp3>.

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The Nineteenth Sunday After Pentecost  
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Daniel 12:1-3  
Hebrews 10:11-25  
Psalm 16  
Mark 13:1-8

It's appealing to follow a parable-speaking, disciple-calling, synagogue-attending Jesus, who compassionately healed others and preached God's reign of justice and mercy. For most of us, it is much more difficult to understand the end-of-the-world apocalyptic prophet figure whom we glimpse in today's gospel from Mark. This passage introduces a fully apocalyptic Jesus who bluntly describes a world that has gone off the rails, replete with danger and betrayal, an upheaval of society.

Jesus' words held true for his early followers who would have been familiar with Mark's gospel. These early Christians witnessed the destruction of the Temple. They were familiar with the might and power of the Roman Empire, which tended to crush any perceived threat or opposition into submission. Early Christians would have understood all too well Jesus' words from Mark that the evil embodied in principalities, powers, and natural forces would lead to war, famine, and uprising. That was part of their experience.

And it's part of our experience too. Jesus' stark description of a world torn asunder by suffering strikes me as especially apt today. Acts of brutality, cruelty, and all around inhumanity were center stage internationally, nationally, and locally this week. Right here in our own backyard, in Rockville, Maryland, the hate-spewing group known as the Westboro Baptist Church picketed Rockville High School, protesting the school because of their unwavering support of gay and lesbian students. Meanwhile our black brothers and sisters in the Midwest at the University of Missouri have endured threats to their safety for speaking up and speaking out against the institutional racism they experience at their university. And less than 48-hours ago, in an organized terrorist attack, gunfire and explosions ripped through Paris, France killing over 120 innocent people and wounding hundreds more. These examples of intolerance, racism, and violence paint a vivid image that seems eerily similar to the chaotic and broken world of which Jesus spoke in today's gospel.

Yet even in the midst of brokenness and chaos, glimpses of the Kingdom of God are present. Even though he knew the very real fragility and brokenness of creation, Jesus didn't give up on the world. Rather, Jesus preached a message of reconciliation, proclaiming that an alternative existence was possible. It was this message and its political ramifications that got him killed by the state, but even death couldn't stop the truth of his message. Jesus overcame suffering and death and in his resurrection issued in new life of redemption and hope. This new life still burns in our broken world today by the power of God's Holy Spirit.

This Tuesday, the Holy Spirit was at work in the administrators, teachers, students, and family members of Rockville High School. When alerted that the Westboro Baptist Church, a conservative “Christian” extremist group was planning to picket their campus and protest the school’s inclusive ethos, people associated with the school rallied together. They invited gay and lesbian students and parents to speak. They all wore the school colors and united around their decision not to let hate win the day. They opted for inclusive expansion offering their support to those who are all too often marginalized. Compassion cast out hate. And what was expected to be an act of condemnation turned into an act of communication and relationship building among the school community. In the threat of human judgment and contempt, an alternative way of being emerged.

Something similar occurred at the University of Missouri. Earlier this week, anonymous threats targeting black students appeared online. The hostile messages included death threats, which came in response to black students protests against the racism inherent in the university and its systems. Many students were afraid after becoming aware of the threats, but they didn’t let their fear become paralyzing. A group of students contacted the Black Culture Center on campus and asked if they could convert the center into a safe space for black students to study, nap, eat, and gather. The students found that when they were together their fear subsided. They were reassured and they were ready to re-organize. In the face of fear mongering, they united and continue to oppose blatant racism. They overcame.

And so are the people of Paris. Yesterday, I listened to an interview on NPR with Samia Hathroubi, the European director of the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding. In the interview Hathroubi warned about the danger of lumping all Muslims into the category of terrorist and she attested to some of the Islamophobia she witnessed after the Charlie Hebdo attacks in January. But despite that, she also attested to what she calls, “a rise in awareness, a rise of people willing to act on a daily basis to be the light in their society to lead a better change.” Hathroubi has witnessed Parisian resolution to be a light in the world.

In today’s gospel Jesus says, “beware that no one leads you astray.” We are living in a world that has gone off the rail. It is broken and chaotic. Everywhere we turn we are surrounded by great suffering, violence, aggression, and despondency. But do not be led astray by the chaos that threatens to engulf you. Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life and he offers an alternative to the chaos. In the Gospel of John Jesus tells his followers, “do not be afraid. I have conquered the world.” The evil and violence that is a part of our modern world does not and will not have the final word. There is an alternative way. The people of Rockville High School, the black students at Mizzou, and the people of Paris are examples of this alternative way of being. It is an existence in which fear is met with unity, hatred with love, and death with life. We are a resurrection people. Neither violence, brokenness or even death will ever have the final word. Amen.