

“Coming to Our Rescue”

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UCC at The Villages, FL  
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*Armenian Martyrdom Observance*  
*Integrity of Creation*

Acts 9:36-43

John 10:22-30

*‘Joppa wasn’t far from Lydda, and the followers heard that Peter was there.*

*They sent two men to say to him,*

*“Please come with us as quickly as you can!”*

*Right away, Peter went with them...’*

Acts 9:38-39a

Let us pray... O God,

Rescue us from despair. Deliver us from evil.

Let your presence be known. Strengthen us for the time of trial.

Amen

Think of it! Peter had been a working-class fisherman when he first met Jesus – and begged Jesus to leave him, because Peter thought himself to be a sinful man.

Though he could be bold and brash, he was often impulsive and had to eat his words; and in the hour of trial, his courage failed him when his Lord and friend, Jesus, was taken prisoner.

Yet in this morning’s lesson from Acts,

Peter is called upon for help, and goes without hesitation.

He shows up to save the day by bringing a woman back to life –

a beloved member of the community of Jesus’ followers at Joppa.

Confident and decisive, Peter had undergone a remarkable transformation that would not have been possible earlier...

If only it worked that way all the time.

If only we could just call upon God to fix things back to the way they were even undo an untimely death – even undo the events of this past week.

Once again, we are shattered by catastrophe –

this time, it was bombs in a crowd of families as they watched long distance runners finish the Boston Marathon...

I remember waking up the day after September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001

and realizing the world would never be the same –

that’s how I felt on Tuesday

for the people who were killed or wounded, and for those who love them.

Three people lost their lives that day with more than 180 maimed or wounded with more to die and be injured in the days to come.

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Waiting with others in the crowd by the finish line at the Boston Marathon was  
Martin Richard, an 8 year old boy from Boston;

Krystle Campbell, a young woman from Medford, a suburb of Boston;

Lingzi Lu, a Boston University graduate student from Mainland China;  
and now they are no longer with us.

Later, Sean Collier, an MIT campus policeman would join them.

As soon as the bombing happened, it was over.

Nothing to be done, but pick up the pieces of broken people's lives –  
but the Good News last Monday was the response of people  
who did just that.

Amateur videos taken during the event and its aftermath,  
showed people from the crowd not scattering, but rushing in to help.

They worked along with police and first responders,  
to tear down barricades, and care for the wounded.

There is a photo of one man literally taking the shirt off his back to use  
as a bandage or tourniquet to stop someone from bleeding out.

Strangers gave rides to strangers – even taking them to their homes  
to 'shelter' them.

Once again, the world fell apart, and yet once again,  
people stepped up to pick up the pieces.

Who knows what untold goodwill is yet to emerge despite the horrible events  
of last week?

Yet we might ask the questions that so often gets asked in times like this –

“Where was God?”, “Why did God allow this?”,

“Why didn't God do something to stop this?”

God has done something, but what that is must still be worked out  
through human history and through us.

The Holocaust against the Jewish People was recently observed in our community –  
remembering the 6 million Jews who were systematically murdered in WWII.

There was another 6 million victims of Nazi terror that included  
gay people, Gypsies, the clergy, and anyone caught trying to protect them.

Incredibly, this pattern of genocide emerged again in the 1990s –

In Rwanda, ethnic Hutus stopped an initial rebellion by the Tutsis,

but then pursued a program of genocide against the Tutsi minority.

In Bosnia, Serbians conducted a systematic genocide of Muslims  
called 'ethnic cleansing'.

This week marks the date when an earlier genocide began –  
the Armenian Holocaust.

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Armenians occupied lands in Central Asia – including part of Turkey,  
for more than 4,000 years.

After the Romans destroyed Jerusalem about 40 years after Christ,  
they brought in Armenian merchants, artists, soldiers, and administrators  
to settle in the region.

The Armenians came into contact with Christians at this time  
and by the early 4<sup>th</sup> Century CE were converted as a nation to Christianity –  
around the time that the Roman Empire itself adopted Christianity.

During the Crusades of the Middle Ages,  
the Armenian lands were conquered by the Muslims  
and in time, became part of the Ottoman Empire –  
though by this time the Armenians had established  
their own district in Jerusalem itself.

Through the years since, the Armenians in Turkey experienced  
humiliating restrictions, neglect, and indiscriminate violence.

During WWI, the Ottomans were allied with Germany  
and under the pretext that Armenia was helping Russia against them,  
the Turks organized a systematic program to destroy  
Armenian men, women, and children.

This began on April 24<sup>th</sup>, 1915, when the Turks rounded up  
250 civic leaders and intellectuals.

By the conclusion of WWI in 1918,  
it is estimated that one and a half million Armenians were killed.

Referring to the Armenian's plight, Raphael Lemkin, a Jewish lawyer,  
coined the phrase 'genocide' in 1944 which would be used  
to define the legal basis for prosecuting Nazis after WWII.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armenian\\_Genocide](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armenian_Genocide)

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raphael\\_Lemkin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raphael_Lemkin)

We live in a very violent world and it goes without saying  
there is nothing new under the sun.

The atrocities committed against the Armenians  
follow patterns of human barbarism that are all too tragically familiar.

The Armenian Genocide preceded the Jewish Holocaust –  
and so they share that bitter heritage.

There is something else they share – a part of Old Jerusalem itself.

Old Jerusalem is divided into quarters – Jewish, Christian, Muslim,  
and Armenian.

Though it would appear to be a special favor to the Armenians,  
their presence in the Old City, having their own district has been  
longstanding even before the Medieval era.

It seems ironic and even remarkable, that Armenians would be honored this way  
in having their own quarter of the Old City.

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But this was because of their history – or perhaps a “love note” from God  
acknowledging their mutual suffering from genocide, like the Jewish people.  
Where was God? Where was God for the Armenians? For the Jews?  
Where was God for the people waiting at the Boston Marathon finish line?  
Where was God in those events of loss in your life?  
Does God come to our rescue? Can we expect that?

In today’s Gospel lesson, Jesus says,

*My sheep know my voice, and I know them.  
They follow me, and I give them eternal life,  
so that they will never be lost.  
No one can snatch them out of my hand.  
My Father gave them to me, and he is greater than all others.  
No one can snatch them from his hands,  
and I am one with the Father.*

John 10:27-30

This is true now as it will be true in the time to come.

When we start realizing we have a relationship with God that means  
we are connected with the Holy Spirit that gave life to this world  
and we are in fellowship with Christ who walked in it as one of us,  
then we are not so much worried for ourselves.  
Then, we can just start being ourselves and allow God’s love to work through us –  
like Peter raising Tabitha back to life.  
We can start re-enchanting the world with hope.

We have a bold hope, that – as God’s people,  
we not only have a future in the time to come beyond this world,  
but a better future that is possible for our world, now.

Amen

*Our lesson today is from Acts 9:36-43  
and we get a glimpse of life in the early Church.  
Peter – who often seemed to falter as a disciple,  
now demonstrates his understanding and skill as an apostle.*

- <sup>36</sup> In Joppa there was a follower named Tabitha.  
Her Greek name was Dorcas, which means “deer.”  
She was always doing good things for people  
and had given much to the poor.
- <sup>37</sup> But she got sick and died,  
and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room.
- <sup>38</sup> Joppa wasn’t far from Lydda, and the followers heard that Peter was there.  
They sent two men to say to him,  
“Please come with us as quickly as you can!”  
<sup>39</sup> Right away, Peter went with them.
- The men took Peter upstairs into the room. Many widows were there crying.  
They showed him the coats and clothes that Dorcas had made  
while she was still alive.
- <sup>40</sup> After Peter had sent everyone out of the room, he knelt down and prayed.  
Then he turned to the body of Dorcas and said,  
“Tabitha, get up!”  
The woman opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter, she sat up.
- <sup>41</sup> He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet.  
Peter called in the widows and the other followers  
and showed them that Dorcas had been raised from death.
- <sup>42</sup> Everyone in Joppa heard what had happened,  
and many of them put their faith in the Lord.
- <sup>43</sup> Peter stayed on for a while in Joppa  
in the house of a man named Simon, who made leather.

John 10:22-30 [CEV]

22 That winter, Jesus was in Jerusalem  
for the Temple Festival.

23 One day he was walking in that part of the temple known as Solomon's Porch,  
24 and the people gathered all around him. They said,  
"How long are you going to keep us guessing?  
If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly!"

25 Jesus answered:

I have told you, and you refused to believe me.

The things I do by my Father's authority show who I am.

26 But since you are not my sheep, you don't believe me.

27 My sheep know my voice, and I know them.

They follow me, 28 and I give them eternal life,  
so that they will never be lost.

No one can snatch them out of my hand.

29 My Father gave them to me, and he is greater than all others.

No one can snatch them from his hands,

30 and I am one with the Father.