

*In the name of God, who makes us, loves us, and keeps us. Amen*

Now, wait a minute...did Jesus just tell Peter to SHUT UP! And did the author of the Book of James just tell us to hold our poisonous tongues? And did Wisdom, sitting over there in the corner in the Book of Proverbs, just cry out that, if we ignore her, we will face disaster? Our Bible passages today all seem pretty rude, don't they?! When Jesus takes a little break with the disciples and asks them what they have been hearing people say about him, and what they, too, think about him, they answer that they are pretty sure that he is the Messiah. And what does Jesus say? He sternly tells them to SHUT UP and not tell anyone, that they should hold their tongues! And then he proceeds to tell them how his divine work will lead him to torture and death. So, Peter tells *Jesus* to SHUT UP! He rebukes Jesus! But Jesus says NO, you SHUT UP! Not only is this a bizarre and disturbing conversation for the disciples to have, and for us to overhear, but it gets worse. Did we just hear Jesus say something about crosses? What crosses?! The disciples had never heard that there would be a cross involved. Did the Master mean those awful crosses that the Romans used for brutal execution? How do they figure into all this?!

Clearly, there must be some misunderstanding here, the disciples must be thinking. We know, after all, what a Messiah is; for generations we have known that the Messiah, when he comes, will be a strong, princely, heroic leader, who will overcome the Roman evil and restore us, as a people, to a Jerusalem which will, for all intents and purposes, be a replica of the Garden of Eden. And we've really been looking forward to it. And we're pretty sure that you, Jesus, are going to be that person. Well, eventually. Once you have cleaned yourself up a bit and raised your army, like David did, and have cast out all the demons in the Ancient Near East anyway. We have been following you because we have faith in you...that you will be that guy. That's what a Messiah is, and that's what we will be proclaiming about you. And Jesus, unexpectedly, tells them to just SHUT UP! The real heroism in the face of calamity and panic and whirlwind, when (as Wisdom says) distress and anguish come upon you, the real heroism is to face evil down with love in your hearts. In the time of trial, the Messiah, the Christ, will find victory in rising again after evil assumes it has prevailed. If you can't understand that, and the people around you can't heed that bit of good news, then best you hold your tongues. Better they come and see for themselves.

But in this conversation, Peter is just too reluctant to give up on the familiar vision, and says: Jesus you must be kidding, right?! Don't speak such foolishness! Just shut your mouth! No Messiah of mine is going to face torture and destruction. Don't be so pessimistic; we've got your back. And, as we heard, Jesus puts him in his place. He calls everyone together and explains that those who wish to follow his way of love, who wish to imitate his passionate expressions of true heroism, will need to set aside their own fears and pride and deny even their own safety. They will need to set their minds on divine things, not human ones. Divine things like love. Divine things like personal sacrifice. Divine things like forgiveness. Divine things like creating opportunities for others, especially for those who need them most and find them so seldom. And, yes, ironically there may be crosses involved. And the irony is that those who are most concerned about their human things become those who will be most likely to lose them, and perhaps even their lives. In explaining this, Jesus is not necessarily speaking about their biological lives. The danger, the judgement, the consequence, is in losing their souls, their

integrity, their faithfulness. Those who look to their souls and can imitate the Christ, even in the shadow of a cross, will become advocates and agents of God's holy dream. They will live their lives fully. Sadly, down the road, during Jesus' time of trial, Peter will deny this truth three consecutive times. When the servant girl insists that he is a follower and imitator of the Christ, Peter tells her to just SHUT UP!

And sadly, but purposefully, dear friends, we have had an important occasion this weekend to reflect on true heroism and true evil. Making the sacrificial decision to selflessly run into a burning, crumbling, melting building out of love for possible survivors is clearly an imitation of Christ. Those who looked into their souls and bore those crosses, denying both self and safety, are true disciples. Those who, after knowing their fatal destiny by cell phone reports, voted to act and face down evil for the sake of others who would be destroyed by the continued flight path of their jetliner over Pennsylvania, carried their crosses with true love. All those whom we honor on this dreadful anniversary for their bravery had set their minds on divine things. We mourn for the innocent whose terrible deaths are unimaginable, and we marvel at those whose faithfulness became engaged so deliberately to save the lives of strangers. It is an important reflection, one from which Jesus would hope we might learn wisdom.

We might become wise enough to see that evil is a distortion of God's dream. Evil does certainly seem to have intent, and you might find it helpful to condense all that intent into some discernable personality, like Satan, for example. Personally, I think it's more complicated than that, but I won't try to discourage you from believing in some particular devil if that's what you choose. Jesus uses that word, Satan, when scolding Peter, but that rebuke, or dressing-down, has more to do with ignorance than evil. When we pray that God might 'deliver us from evil', we are asking not only for protection, but for insight. If evil distorts God's dream, then it is something to be overcome, for sure, but something which can be defeated with wisdom more often than with violence, perhaps, or more often with love than hate. In any case, the presence of evil requires vigilance, lest the good news, the gospel, be unheard or unknown. If evil does somehow have intent, if the presence of evil somehow has a deliberate intention, I think it must be to divert us from receiving the blessings God has intended for us. Mind you, though, those blessings have a purpose, an ongoing purpose. Blessings, we believe, enable us, entitle us, to join with God in the great mission of creativity, creating opportunities for others. Blessings are the faithful building blocks of creation. Whether by design or by coincidence, evil distorts the architecture; it perverts the usefulness of blessings. It must be faced down heroically and selflessly in order that the construction be continued.

If you can bear to hear some good news this weekend, and don't tell me to just SHUT UP, I will share with you that God's dream never gives up in the face of evil. The Son of Man and Son of God rises from even the ashes of the crosses we are called to bear. If evil causes one building to fall, God continues building up the holy city. Despite evil intent, despite calamity and grave losses, God's blessings are not interrupted. Despite ignorance and misunderstanding, despite the noisy distortion from many sides, despite plagues and pandemics, God's creative dream dependably and heroically continues to blossom and bear fruit. Evermore and evermore. Amen.