

**The Lessons Appointed for  
Use on the  
Seventh Sunday of Easter**



Year A  
RCL

1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11  
Psalm 68:1-10, 33-36  
John 17:1-11

The Collect

**The Collect**

O God, the King of glory, you have exalted your only Son Jesus Christ with great triumph to your kingdom in heaven: Do not leave us comfortless, but send us your Holy Spirit to strengthen us, and exalt us to that place where our Savior Christ has gone before; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, in glory everlasting.

*Amen*

Psalm 68:1-10, 33-36

## *Exsurgat Deus*

- 1 Let God arise, and let his enemies be scattered; \*  
let those who hate him flee before him.
- 2 Let them vanish like smoke when the wind drives it  
away; \*  
as the wax melts at the fire, so let the wicked perish  
at the presence of God.
- 3 But let the righteous be glad and rejoice before God; \*  
let them also be merry and joyful.
- 4 Sing to God, sing praises to his Name;  
exalt him who rides upon the heavens; \*  
YAHWEH is his Name, rejoice before him!
- 5 Father of orphans, defender of widows, \*  
God in his holy habitation!
- 6 God gives the solitary a home and brings forth prison-  
ers into freedom; \*  
but the rebels shall live in dry places.
- 7 O God, when you went forth before your people, \*  
when you marched through the wilderness,
- 8 The earth shook, and the skies poured down rain,  
at the presence of God, the God of Sinai, \*

at the presence of God, the God of Israel.

9 You sent a gracious rain, O God, upon your inheritance; \*

you refreshed the land when it was weary.

10 Your people found their home in it; \*

in your goodness, O God, you have made provision for the poor.

33 Sing to God, O kingdoms of the earth; \*

sing praises to the Lord.

34 He rides in the heavens, the ancient heavens; \*

he sends forth his voice, his mighty voice.

35 Ascribe power to God; \*

his majesty is over Israel;

his strength is in the skies.

36 How wonderful is God in his holy places! \*

the God of Israel giving strength and power to his people!

Blessed be God!

**1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11**

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you.

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you. Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering. And after you

have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the power forever and ever. Amen.

**John 17:1-11**

Jesus looked up to heaven and said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him.

And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

“I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; for the words that you gave to me I have given to

them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.”

## SERMON

We have been witness this week to an act of such distilled evil that I lack the words to describe it. The bombing in Manchester, targeting children at a concert, was an act of such unmitigated evil that it has caused me to question one of my life-long assumptions – that everyone wants to be the hero in their own story. That is, people don't engage in evil actions for the glorification of the cause of evil; instead, they invent some justification for their actions so that they can appear heroic in the eyes of themselves and others. Tomorrow we honor those who have given their lives in defense of the ideals upon which our country was founded and it is good and proper for us to remember their sacrifice, but what conceivable ideal could there be in the murder of innocents? What justification could there be in the minds of those who do such horrible things which

would justify sacrificing your own life for it? It's unthinkable!

As I tried to wrap my mind around what had happened, I had to admit that I was not up to the task. I needed to consult with someone with experience in the depths of evil into which humanity will allow itself entrance, for as horrible as this act unquestionably is, it is not without precedent. I turned to Benjamin Ferencz, who, at 97 years old, is the oldest living Nuremberg prosecutor. CBS 60 Minutes interviewed him.<sup>1</sup>

A small man, barely 5 feet tall, he served as prosecutor in what's been called the biggest murder trial ever. The courtroom was Nuremberg; the crime, genocide; the defendants, a group of German SS officers accused of killing more than a million men, women, and children, shot down in their own towns and villages in cold

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to say that the material from the Stahl interview is being used by permission of CBS News, but they didn't return my phone call, so I'll say it's being used in the absence of protest.

blood. If anyone has seen evil up close and in person, it is Benjamin Ferencz. I needed perspective, and Benjamin was the man who could provide it.

History has taught us all we feel we need to know about the Nazi horror, but the passage of time has dimmed and generalized what happened. Prosecutor Ferencz, then only 27 years old, dealt with the horrors of the Holocaust still red with the blood of innocents. What evidence did Prosecutor Ferencz have? He had the reports of the defendants themselves.

**Without calling a single witness, he entered into evidence the defendants' own reports of what they'd done. Exhibit 111: "In the last 10 weeks, we have liquidated around 55,000 Jews." Exhibit 179, from Kiev in 1941: "The city's Jews were ordered to present themselves... about 34,000 reported, including women and children. After they had been made to give up their clothing and valuables, all of them were killed, which took several**

**days.” Exhibit 84, from Einsatzgruppen D in March of 1942: Total number executed so far: 91,678.**

How could you document dispassionately that it took “several days” to murder 34,000 men, women and children, making it sound as if it were just a day at the office? How could you target a concert which you knew would be filled with pre-teens and young people and indiscriminately kill those children, the youngest just 8 years old AND yourself? Why? In God’s name, why? Were these just the evil actions of corrupt people?

In the 60 Minutes interview, Lesley Stahl asked, “Did you meet a lot of people who perpetrated war crimes who would otherwise in your opinion have been just a normal, upstanding citizen?”

Benjamin answered, “Of course, is my answer. These men would never have been murderers had it not been

for the war. These were people who could quote Goethe, who loved Wagner, who were polite”

I don't want to think of the men before the bar in Nuremberg or the Manchester bomber in such positive terms. It makes them sound too much like me. I want them to be aliens – savage people born of evil. I want to be able to say “Kill them all. Wipe them out, root and branch” and feel as righteous about it as the men Ferencz was prosecuting had felt. It is at this point that Benjamin Ferencz turned my world upside down. Stahl asked him, “What turns a man into a savage beast like that?”

Benjamin replied, “He's not a savage. He's an intelligent, patriotic human being.”

“He's a savage when he does the murder though”, Stahl continued, a little shocked at his answer.

Benjamin doubled down. “No. He's a patriotic human

being acting in the interest of his country, in his mind. Do you think the man who dropped the nuclear bomb on Hiroshima was a savage? Now I will tell you something very profound, which I have learned after many years. War makes murderers out of otherwise decent people. All wars, and all decent people.”

I can only hope that his words knocked you back on your heels as they did me. Ferencz is a Jew. The documents before him were cold-blooded accounts of the number of his people – men, women and children – who had been forced to run to ditches where they were shot dead indiscriminately, then bulldozed into the graves they had been made to run to. In place of the expected self-righteous anger and lust for revenge, Benjamin offered, “War makes murderers out of otherwise decent people. All wars, and all decent people.”

How are we to understand the nameless, faceless

people behind ISIS? How do we understand the Nazis? We cannot. It is beyond us, so we devolve to an explanation that they were alien creatures, not children of God, doing evil things for the glory of evil. “The devil made me do it”, in other words. Once a man has been touched by the devil, we think, he has forfeited his place as a child of God and must be expunged. That is not how the trial at Nuremberg played out. All 22 of the men Benjamin prosecuted were convicted, but only four were hanged. All 22 did horrible things, but only four were hanged. There is gradation of guilt even in the horror of the Holocaust.

If the devil can be said to have an agenda, it seems to be to sew hatred among God’s children. When I say “the devil” I do not mean the comical caricature of a devil. If the devil presented himself in a red union suit and carrying a pitchfork, no one would listen to him. I

mean the inclination to evil which lives within all of us. We are shocked by the senseless act perpetrated in Manchester, and when we are thus weakened, our evil inclination whispers to us that we must, in turn, embrace hatred of not only the thoroughly corrupt ones who carry out such horrors, but also any like them, innocent or guilty. Thus is a war begun, and in the words of Benjamin Ferencz, “War makes murderers out of otherwise decent people. All wars, and all decent people.”

The writer of 1 Peter writes

Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering.

“...your adversary the devil”. This is the lesson we must take to heart. Our own evil inclination is our ad-

versary, not those in the world whose suffering has led them to hate us. We want to commit murder and feel as righteous about it as the men Ferencz was prosecuting had felt. We want to turn our anger on those who we fear instead of acknowledging our actual enemy, even though doing so grants victory to that adversary.

Just so are those who become suicide bombers convinced that what they do, they do out of righteousness. There are those in the middle East who are convinced that 9/11 was a Jewish plot managed by Rudy Giuliani who must be a Jew because his name starts with “Jew”. From such foolishness is ISIS formed. We must be better than that, or accept our share of blame.

What blame, you ask? What does our human sense of justice tell us we are entitled to do in response to Manchester? Is it not to return hurt for hurt, murder for murder? If we do that, are we not the same as those we

fear? Overwhelming fear is the devil's cue to make his entrance, disguised in some semblance of superficial righteousness. Everyone wants to be the hero of their own story, so evil must hide its purposes behind some worthy motive. The devil whispers in our ears, "Your horror and grief entitles you to return evil for evil. It is your duty!" We swallow this, embracing the cause of evil as does ISIS, and thus grant victory to our adversary, the devil.

Much better that we heed the word of God

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you. Discipline yourselves, keep alert.

As we prayed this day, "Forgive us when we act as though you didn't care about us or about this world." Discipline yourself to the reality that only God is good and beg His forgiveness for the times we have imagined

ourselves to be God's equal.

Amen

## BENEDICTION

Walter Brueggeman wrote:

**Peacemaking doesn't mean passivity. It is the act of interrupting injustice without mirroring injustice, the act of disarming evil without destroying the evildoer, the act of finding a third way that is neither fight nor flight but the careful, arduous pursuit of reconciliation and justice. It is about a revolution of love that is big enough to set both the oppressed and the oppressors free. Peacemaking is about being able to recognize in the face of the oppressed our own faces, and in the hands of the oppressors our own hands.**

The Lord bless you and keep you;  
the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you;  
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

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*Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.*

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