**Homily – 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Cycle B**

**Paul Mast - Homilist**

I try to read a book a week. An e-book if it’s a novel. Hard copies if it contains material I wish to underline for my own writing or preaching. Last week I read “**#** **Never Again.”** It is a pseudo-journal of the mass shooting at Parkland High School in Florida. The authors are brother and sister survivors. David Hogg is a member of the graduating Class of 2018. His sister, Lauren, is a member of the Class of 2021. With honest and mature sensitivity, they have penned a poignant account of the Valentine’s Day shooting. Woven into their tearful and heartbreaking experience are the raw feelings they faced. What they did with those feelings colors their efforts to join their fellow students in mobilizing a national movement to stop the indiscriminate killings of future generations of the country’s brain trust. What they are now committed too is not the constitutional dismantling of the second amendment. Rather, they are calling for respectful dialogue and positive action to put an end to educational environments becoming America’s “killing fields.” They want decisive action from elected leaders, not canned words about prayers and condolences.

In so doing, they have become modern day prophets like Jeremiah. His call to be God’s prophet, somewhere between the ages of 15 – 18, makes his mission and message meaningful with theirs. David Hogg is 18 and Lauren Hogg is 15. Let me weave these stories together to see how much they have in common. Could it be that God is once again using young voices to wake up a nation about valuing life over guns, extolling the “right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,” over a constitutional amendment?

When Jeremiah was first called by God to the role of prophet he backed-off, with his famous line, “I am too young.” God’s reply put him back on his feet. “Say not you are too young. I will put my words in your mouth.” Unlike an actor or comedian who memorizes lines, all Jeremiah had to do was let God use his voice. He was only an instrument.

In today’s first reading (chapter 23:1-6) the teenage prophet gives a stinging oracle to the corrupt monarchy of the Hebrew people. The state of things is “sad.” He accuses the monarchs of misrule, of scattering the flock and setting the stage for their defeat and long exile in Babylonia. He predicts God himself will shepherd his people in their captivity and will raise up a new king --- a ruler from the line of King David who will be wise and caring, putting the people first, after they return home.

Jeremiah’s prophecy, God’s words from the mouth of a youth, proposes a clean break between the failed past and the promised future. One of the clues to a message of hope is the relational language in the oracle --- ***my pasture, my people, my flock.*** Future shepherds will administer God’s rule by fostering justice, and keep his people safe.

The gospel reading (Mark 6:30-34) is clear that this future king is Jesus. He is the good shepherd who sends his disciples out on their first mission. When they return, they’re so excited about the marvelous things they accomplished, that they forgot to mention that John the Baptist had been executed while they were on the road. Hurt by that news, and facing a restless crowd, Jesus gets the idea that they should hop in a boat and go on a retreat. He and the disciples had a lot to process. When they get to the other side of the lake, they attract a crowd. Instead of ignoring them, Jesus takes **pity** on them. That **pity** was more than a public display of emotion.

First, it was the fulfillment of Jeremiah’s prophesy that the future king would pasture God’s people differently than the corrupt leaders of the past. Jesus will shepherd them by fostering justice and keeping them safe. So, he transcended his issue of the loss of his cousin and paid attention to them. It was a new form of divine caregiving.

Second, the seashore became a classroom. It was field education, where the disciples learned how to take pity on people, how to care for the flock like their Master was demonstrating. They were being schooled in the art of “Compassion 101.” They were learning how to value people above all other things, and how to pasture them in caring ways.

**#Never Again** is a current account of teenagers-called-to-be-prophets; a modern-day story of people in bad need of good shepherds. I view the teenage survivors of the Parkland massacre as a new generation of young Jeremiah’s. Who am I to say that hidden in their experience of coming face-to-face with evil, fear and death is the presence of God calling them to use their voices to defend the “right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness,” as much as a young Jeremiah called adult leaders of a corrupt nation to change its ways?

This “mass killing” generation is now fully awake to a moral flaw in the fabric of our nation. There is an overabundance of adult politicians who are playing political chess with lobbyists at the expense of the mass murder of children. Future leaders, scientists, doctors, health care professionals, teachers, inventors, truck drivers, landscapers, etc., are now pawns in a political battle to value guns over human life. Our founding fathers never wrote the second amendment with the intention of Americans having the right to indiscriminately kill other Americans. It was written, specifically, to form a militia in defense of our borders.

The survivors of the Marjorie Stoneman Douglas H.S. killings are bypassing adult politicians and beginning a new mission. Their protection and safety are in the ballot box. The action they are taking, to elect leaders who do not laugh in the face of accountability, is non-violent, creative, mobilizing and prophetic. I say to all these young Jeremiah’s, “you go kids.”

May you put a new face on those words in Mary of Nazareth’s “Magnificat,”

*God has cast down the mighty from their thrones,*

*And lifted up the lowly.*

This is my prayer for this young generation of prophets who are speaking out, and speaking oracles so that the generations after them will not have to be afraid about going to school, will not have to worry about someone writing their obituary because their young lives ended by a hail of bullets, before it was lived.

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May they shout their oracles from rooftops and from pulpits – from stages and from stadiums – from street corners and from classrooms. Shout the need for change for the sake of middle school, elementary and kindergarten students who are hoping they initiate a change that assures them greater safety, protection and care in schools. Shout for them and all the future generations who journey after them. Shout to make a difference for their future.

*The Hassidic Masters tell a tale of an old teacher who ran through the streets shouting, ‘greed, corruption, abuse of power….’ ‘greed, corruption, abuse of power….’ One day a child asked him, “Rabbi, don’t you realize that no one is listening to you.” And the Rabbi said, “Oh I know that.” “Then why do you go on shouting if nothing changes,” the child asked?” “You don’t understand,” the Rabbi said, “I don’t shout in order to change them, I shout so that they don’t change me.”*

The **Road to Change** bus tour will be in Philadelphia on Tuesday August 7, 2018. I plan to be there. I plan to join my voice with the voices of these new Jeremiah’s. Something tells me they may teach me some new things about being a Good Shepherd. They are sending signals that our long exile of silence may be over. The haughty voices of lobbyists have bullied their way for too long. The voices of distrustful and deal-making politicians have gambled with our future, for too long.

Our time has come, to speak out and work for change. May all the voices of Jeremiah’s and the followers of Jesus, young and old, speak of a new day coming, when human life is once again the most valuable gift to respect and defend. As this change unfolds, may we see the divine hand leading and guiding us on a new path, helping to bring the declaration of “the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” to a new fulfillment.

Amen.

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