

I was reminded this week of why we have to read the Passion on this day, on this Palm Sunday.

I was reminded on Thursday at 5pm when Mom texted me to say that Robert Martin had died. Robert was my pastor growing up. He baptized me in 1977. He preached with such love and wisdom that when I was a boy I felt a call to preach, a call that I never admitted to anyone for about 25 years.

20 years later he preached at my Papa Tallant's funeral and 20 years after that at Granny Tallant's funeral.

He died on Thursday after a good, long, and faithful life, and we read the Passion of Jesus because Robert was more than just a pastor. Robert was a preacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ crucified and risen, and if that is not the heart of our faith, if that is not the heart of our hope, then we proclaim that the life's work of this good and faithful man was a fallacy. That the words of hope he instilled in me and that he gave us at the grave of my grandparents was built on a lie.

Robert Martin proclaimed that Christ crucified and risen was the good news that gave us hope at my papa's grave, at my granny's grave, and this afternoon, at his own.

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Maybe we all should have been reminded this week why we tell the Passion of Jesus when tornadoes tore through Arkansas, Illinois, Mississippi, and Tennessee, as dozens lost their lives and the lives of hundreds more were shattered.

Maybe the connection between tornado victims the Passion of Jesus isn't all that obvious, but I'm thinking this morning about people who woke up this

week to a changed world, to a world where everything they counted on, depended on to chug along in their lives was suddenly...gone.

Loved ones - gone.

Homes - gone.

Jobs - gone.

Futures - gone.

We read the Passion of Jesus so that when it seems like everything that matters to us is gone we can remember that God has also known that pain, that God has both cried out and heard his Son cry out those terrible words, “Why have you forsaken me?”

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We tell of our Lord’s Passion because Monday night 39 people died in a fire at a detention center in Mexico.

At our baptisms we make a promise to renounce the evil powers of this world which corrupt and destroy the creatures of God. But Monday night we failed 18 Guatemalans, 6 Hondurans, 7 Salvadorans, and 1 Columbian.

Everybody in America, all across the political spectrum, knows that our country has failed to establish a functioning immigration policy, and Monday night our collective failure condemned 39 beloved creations of God to death.

Do you know why this story is called the Passion? The older meaning of the word means “to suffer, or to bear a burden.” We read the Passion, the account of Jesus bearing the burden of human betrayal: the failure of our leaders, the failure of us followers.

The story of Jesus' Passion is the story of human failure, the story of God's own chosen and beloved people AND the failure of the world's most powerful society, failing its responsibility as human beings.

We read the Passion to see that we did to the Lord of Love we continue to do to one another. We read the Passion because we are still in need of salvation.

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But most of all, my friends, we read the Passion of Jesus because of the 14 minutes of death that struck the Covenant School in Nashville on Monday morning.

We tell of the horrible execution of Jesus because of the horrible murder of three 9-year olds named Hallie, Evelyn, and William, because of the murder of a school custodian named Mike, a substitute teacher named Cynthia, a head of school named Katherine, and because of the death of a broken but still beloved creation of God named Audrey Hale.

We tell the Passion of Jesus because of the death that will haunt that entire community for generations, especially the death that will haunt the heroic police officers who did the only thing they could to prevent even more deaths.

Those officers can sleep knowing they acted in the only way they could but if you watched the footage of them running from room to room through spaces built in love and dedicated to learning and to sharing the love go God...well, nobody comes out of that place unscathed.

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Friends, death is real and cannot be avoided or wished away. The violent death of Jesus is not a story. It is a real event. Just like the quiet deaths of

our loved ones, and the random deaths of tornado victims, and the terrified deaths of migrants, and the tragic death of little children and their teachers.

It's natural to want to avoid this ugly story, to avoid these horrible tragedies, but we cannot. We cannot shield our children or ourselves from the reality that death is real and that evil is real.

BUT - and this is the most important point of all on this Passion Sunday, we also tell the story of the Passion so that when death and loss and evil come our way, we know that we are not alone in it.

The Passion of Jesus Christ is the revealing of the truth of our complicity in death, the revealing of our culture of death. But it is also the only hope we have of overcoming it.

We tell the Passion of Jesus Christ so that we can also proclaim the hope of Easter.

So that we can say that death is real, but also that Resurrection is real. We tell the Passion of Jesus because we are all complicit in his death.

And we tell the Passion of Jesus because through his death we are delivered from death.

Amen.