**St. David’s Episcopal Church**

### Bean Blossom, Indiana

### May 29, 2022

### Easter 7C

### Sermon by The Rev. Kate Wilson

Acts 16:16-34 Psalm 97 Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20-21 John 17:20-26

Spring was blooming joyfully last year – except for the scores of tulips I had planted in the fall. Nothing there, yet. I took stock of my patio tables: wrought iron, and looking as if I had left them out all winter. I learned while selecting the best Rust-o-Leum black glossy spray paint that you need to be 21 to buy spray paint. Something about kids and either sniffing or graffiti. No one carded me at Lowes when I checked out, and I was both elated and disappointed. There’s a thrill in being carded when you proudly carry a Medicare card. I wasn’t as lucky at Kroger where I *was* carded while checking out pipe cleaners. Pipe cleaners are sold from the tobacco area and you are carded no matter what you buy from those shelves, under lock and key or not. “Kindergartners use pipe cleaners for artwork!” I protested. I still had to show my driver’s license. I wanted the pipe cleaners to tame the Medusa tangles that were my cables.

So yes, you need to be 21 to buy spray paint in the US. You also need to be 21 to buy handguns. But in Texas you only need to be 18 to buy a “long gun”. Time was a “long gun” was likely used to kill rodents and rabbits and squirrels around the farm. Now, due to conscientious planning and legislation, assault rifles are classified with long guns. And so loner, bullied, baby-faced birthday boy Salvador Ramos bought not one, but two assault rifles. How ironic and heartbreaking is it that *Salvador* means *savior* in English.

Back in the 50’s, family fun came in a box of foot-long, metal tipped lawn darts. After a couple of kids were killed in accidents, though, the government quickly banned them, warning people to go through their attics and garages to destroy them before another child was hurt. But in the 1970s, the manufacturer lobbied the government and, after annoying the powers long enough, the manufacturer was allowed to sell the lawn darts as a game *for adults only*. The game came with a tiny, insignificant warning to keep the metal darts away from children. In 1987, David Snow was getting ready for a lot of family fun and bought a combo game box including badminton, croquet, and lawn darts which he stored in the garage. His seven-year-old daughter and neighbor kids found the colorful package, excitedly opened it, and went immediately for the colorful metal darts. Within minutes, Michelle was dead.

Mr. Snow raised the issue to the highest authorities. He was interviewed for 60 Minutes; he went to Washington and, after a full year of protesting and working with legislators, Lawn Darts were banned once again. Ronald Reagan signed the law, and no other child has died in this freak way. David Snow had succeeded in his urgent labor of love for child safety. Mr. Snow died in February of this year. I wonder what he thought of our mass shootings.

Not even being 21 will get you a box of lawn darts today. Parents of Sandy Hook children have labored for a decade to achieve the same result with assault-style weapons and sensible gun laws. Fred Guttenberg and David Hogg have fought since the Parkland shootings as have many others impacted with gun violence. You have seen them. We have seen them for years. Arguments and counter arguments are written, released on social media, and shouted in rallies and marches. Without solution to gun violence, we have become a nation even more fractured. Remarkably, many of the participants on both sides of this conflict call themselves Christians.

Christians. Are they all Christians? Are you and those who manipulate voting itself and laws to serve expansionist views on weaponry all really one? It’s incomprehensible, isn’t it?

Without digging too deep, you can find arguments by one “kind” of Christians denying that another “kind” of Christians are, in fact, Christians. There are those who say that anyone who passionately embraces Jesus as their savior and who is baptized is, indeed, a Christian. Others deny them, saying we will know one another by our love, and love is expressed in actions, and Jesus himself would reject the actions taken by some in his name. Others go farther, saying that Christianity has long been a divisive evil that has been at the root of justified murder, abuse, and hate. It has to be stopped. ALL religions have to be stopped!

Let’s face it: We are weak, and we find it easier to attack one another than to lead one another to God.

Our key words in last week’s Gospel of John were Jesus’s words *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.”* Jesus’s message is a gift summarizing his life’s work and Way. Jesus knows how argumentative his band of disciples are among themselves. He knows that despite his best efforts they still jockey for position. Even though he has told them he will be tortured and killed, their hearts remain venal, their thoughts remain self-interested. Their souls remain in this earthly realm, blind to the mystery of Jesus’s love.

Today’s Gospel is also from the final words between Jesus and his followers. The timing of this interaction, and last week’s as well, is confusing because we celebrated the Ascension of Jesus just this past Thursday. It’s placing in the calendar makes us view these words as Jesus’s last interactions before his Ascension. But no. The disciples had not yet experienced the betrayal Jesus had foretold and is still to endure. They have not yet experienced the bread and wine, blessed at the Last Supper and shared by Jesus as his own body and blood – surely a sign of unity among all those who partake. John’s message of today shifts from Jesus’s ***teaching*** his heartfelt and urgent wish of peace to them, to Jesus’s ***praying for them***, and for their unity, *“That they all may be one.” I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.*

Jesus is earnestly, urgently praying for unity among and with his father and his followers, within the love of that father, and within his own love for his father and for them. If you were about to lose your beloved leader, rabbi, friend, would you be comforted more by another lesson, or by his fervent prayers for you?

Members of our faith have been fractious since before the beginning of the Church. Pastor Peter J. B. Carman is more generous, calling Christians a feisty group. He also notes that John Chrysostom, a fourth century bishop of the bustling, crossroads city of Constantinople, would know well the squabbles and arguments of his believers. Chrysostom paraphrased Jesus in writing,

… if disciples would but keep the peace among themselves, that they had learned from him [Jesus], the people around them ‘would know the teacher by the disciples’ He went on to suggest pointedly that the quarrelsomeness of those same disciples would cause others to ‘deny that they are the disciples of a God of peace and will not allow that Jesus, not being peaceable, had been sent from God.

That is, we undermine Jesus completely if we cannot rise to his calls of peace and love. Even now. Even in the heartbreaking mess of the shootings in Buffalo and at Robb school in Uvalde, Texas. It seems we are called to live peace and love and unity even when faced by people we would call heretics and our self-righteous rage wants gone. Our hearts are to be guided to God, not discord.

“But this is too hard! These people are crazy and I am done with them!” No one said this Christian gig would be easy. We heard from Jesus himself that we, too, would have our crosses to bear. Even when we are righteously offended and want to engage the offenders and punish them, we must find a Jesus-centered way. Express love, pray for unity among Christians and nation, bring peace. Stand firmly for right. Protest. Disagree firmly, but from love and not hate. Vote. Vote. Vote at every level, learning first who seeks power for its own sake and personal gain, and who seeks power to serve the needs of God’s people. And always, always, invite them to join us. John wrote in the portion of *Revelation* shared this morning,

It is I, Jesus, who sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star."

The Spirit and the bride [that is, the Church] say, "Come."
And let everyone who hears say, "Come."
And let everyone who is thirsty come.
Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift.

And so, too, we invite you to join us in Communion at this altar today. You are welcome here.

Next Sunday we celebrate Pentecost in God’s nature at Waycross, dressed in our best red t-shirts or whatever red ensemble we might be able to put together. We will celebrate the glorious embrace of the followers of Jesus by the Holy Spirit. In that moment, the disciples began, just began, to have more clarity on what Jesus was all about. They had experienced the crucifixion. They saw Jesus in the upper room, again saying, *Peace be to you.* Amazing! *Peace be to you.* Even after his brutal death, he returns in peace. In love. And to bring unity, not blame.

Let us pray.

14. For the Unity of the Church (page 818 of the Book of Common Prayer)

O God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, our only Savior, the Prince of Peace: Give us grace to lay to heart the great dangers we are in by our unhappy divisions; take away all hatred and prejudice, and whatever else may hinder us from Godly union and concord; that, as there is but one Body and one Spirit, one hope of our calling, one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of us all, so we may be all of one heart and of one soul, united in one holy bond of truth and peace, of faith and charity, and may with one mind and one mouth glorify you*;* through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Thanks be to God.