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“Post-Traumatic Jesus”

The Rev. David W. Peters, Vicar, Saint Joan of Arc Episcopal Church, Pflugerville, TX.  
(7/9/2023, Sixth Sunday after Pentecost)

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Incase you just showed up this morning and don't know who I am. I'm David Peters, it's good to be here with you. I preached here about six years ago, when we were doing our work with the veterans group, and it's a really special thing to be back here with you today. We've been through a lot in the last six years, a lot has happened. And it's neat to me to be back here with you. And, you know, certainly, just being a church planter, that's my little job in the Diocese of Texas, in Pflugerville. And to be here with you just to hear the beautiful music to hear you sing and to see you. And to be here is just an encouragement to me as a new in our new church, to be in a church that is really built on the foundation of Jesus Christ, and to celebrate that, to celebrate a life of a church in every phase of its operation. And growth is really exciting. So it's nice to be here with you today. It's very encouraging for me. I'm here today also because of a book I wrote, and we're going to do a little presentation about that book in at the adult education hour. But this book is about seeing the world through a post traumatic lens. And that's something that I've seen since I came back from the Iraq War as an army chaplain there, I've been seeing the world through a post traumatic lens. And this has affected every area of my life. And it's made life hard in some ways, in ways that I'm just beginning to discover. But it's been how I see the world. And it's also how I read the Bible, how I read the story of Jesus and the four Gospels, including this text that we have before us today in the Gospels. So I want to invite you to read this Gospel text with me through my post

traumatic lens in hopes that your experiences of life, maybe even the ones in the last six years since we last talked, might be able to find some hope in these texts for the situation that you're actually in today. Or those that you love that are in those kinds of post traumatic situations in the aftermath of trauma. The New Testament is a book written about a traumatized people about the trauma of Jesus Christ on the cross the word trauma means wound in Greek, it's a wound of the soul, the wound of the body, the wound of a mind. And unfortunately, in my book, I don't address this text. So this is all from scratch. I just can't read out of my book today. Unfortunately, the preacher actually had to do some homework. But this text today that we have in Matthew's Gospel, has in it a song that they're singing, Jesus says, of what will I compare this generation, like children sitting in the marketplace at the mall, or somewhere like that, and they're singing a song, my eight year old son is here with us today, he's not in the room, so I can talk about him. But he is in that phase of life where he just sing songs, you know, over and over again. And every time I hear it, I think, you know, I do that, too. I'm at that phase of life, too. You know how you have a song that just kind of keeps going over in your head for different things. I won't tell you the one that he's singing over and over again, it's, I don't want to embarrass him, because some of you might sing it to him, and then I'll find out that I was saying that to him anyway. But that's what the kids are doing. And Jesus says that the generation his generation, I think he's specifically speaking about his critics in this generation, the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and others, who are critiquing the way he's doing his ministry. They are saying he is saying that they are like children in a marketplace, saying, we played the flute for you, but you didn't dance. We pray that played a dirge for you, but you did not mourn. And these silly songs are very appropriate for kids to sing. That's why we have them. We want our kids to be out of touch with the harsh realities of life. We want them to sing happy songs. We don't want them to know everything we don't. We do not want them to have the knowledge of good and evil that we have. We know that they'll take the bite of the fruit soon enough. And we hope and pray that they're much older before they do. When grownups sing silly songs, though, we wonder if they really know what's going on in the world. The support groups that I attend

as a patient at the VA, I'm thankful for the VA here in Waco. It's really the hub of our region that many of you are part of and work with and thankful for that. And one of the groups that I tend in some some of the groups I attend, we talk a lot about how to process the cognitive dissonance that comes from being in a war and then coming home from a war, after the trauma of war, or any trauma, any trauma, because it's not just limited to war, PTSD and other. Other things that happened to us in the aftermath of trauma are not limited to wartime experiences. But as these groups that have been part of process these experiences, part of what we're doing is trying to figure out how we are different from the way we were before. You realize that you're no longer like yourself, like you used to be, you're no longer the person, or that you were and you're no longer like the people that you see around you and interact with. This is the weirdest thing about trauma, how much it changes how we see ourselves and the world around us. The common experience for veterans is they're standing in the line at the coffee shop, and they hear two people behind them talking about a dress that they're going to wear to a party and they say how can they talk about a dress, wear to wear to a party, when people that I love the same age as them died in Baghdad. And it's so out of touch. You can see how trauma messes with your ability to love and be in relationship with other people. You can't just laugh and move on and be happy that somebody else is happy. These little things matter way too much. And that's why we're in groups to work on these things. After the trauma of World War One, a young army officer wounded veteran named CS Lewis wrote a poem about what it was like to leave that war he wrote, what call have i to dream of anything, I am a wolf, back to the world again, and speech of fellow brutes that once were men, our throats can bark for slaughter, cannot sing. He found out that he couldn't sing. After that experience. I first learned about some of this when I was a child, I was 12. And July 5, is an anniversary of my brother's death. I was 12 he was seven, we were on a family vacation. And while he was riding his bike, and the base, the buck, the bike bus lane, there in Ocean City, Maryland, he was struck by a bus and killed instantly. And I saw that and I saw the aftermath of that as a 12 year old child and I came home from that vacation with a family that was rocked with grief. And just shut down with grief. And I didn't really understand

what's going on. I was 12. And so I processed it in my own way I went in the backyard with a big stick and I would hit the weeds that were growing in the garden that my mother could no longer garden. She didn't have it in her anymore to do that. And then one day I was back there swinging the stick and hitting the weeds. And I saw two of my friends riding their bicycles down the street. They were going to the pool, they had their towels over their shoulders, and they were going into the pool that we often swam at. And the thought struck me how in the world can anyone go swimming today after my brother died. And you know what, that's one of the moments you realize that you're different. The world is different. You've changed in the aftermath of trauma. And of course, I went swimming eventually. And it was good that they were going swimming that day. But I couldn't see it. We played the flute for you, but you did not dance. We're no longer able to do everything that others expect us to do. This Whoo, this word trauma. The Greek word for wound of body solar mind is a word that highlights the fact that these events that turn our world upside down, cut and cleave and break things. Break they break the trust in the goodness of friends and family, the safety of God, and the calm that we need to love the post traumatic Jesus that we meet in Matthew's gospel. He comes to the most traumatized people in his area in his room in his world. He comes to these people who are crushed by taxation, and the occupation of Rome, Rome that boasts proudly how great they are on every coin, every building every image, those that are occupied by Rome say different things about that experience. One of them says they make a desolation, and they call it peace. Rome had a way of doing this and it did it to the homeland of Jesus, as he was born into this world as just another tiny life crushed under the weight of that occupation.

Jesus goes to those who are diseased and sick and infected by the rapidly spreading infections of that rapidly shrinking world as people could move about faster and faster. We see the rise of epidemics and then pandemics later, they are suffering under the burdens of life. They are weary, weary, they are broke down, they've got nothing left. And Jesus says, bear with them. And all his critics can do is sing silly songs, and expect him to do things that he will not do. Nothing he does works for them, because he's not

here for their problems and their concerns. He is not here for the comfortable who are in the places of power. He is here for those people who are under the load of this trauma. He is not dancing, for their flute songs. Jesus is not here to play. He is here on a three year mission that will end in his betrayal, his trial, and his gruesome execution. He will never be everything that you want him to be. He will never be safe, and comfortable. When you are grasping for power, and prestige. He will always be in the mud and the blood, and the grit of life. And post traumatic people then and now know this about Jesus, we see him born to this family that must flee for its life. And he looks like every refugee family, we see him betrayed. And he looks like us when we are betrayed, he is beaten and hung between earth and sky. He is nailed down pinned to the wood, he cannot move in that constriction of trauma. He is helpless and alone. And when we are at our worst, he looks like us. This is the world of trauma, sickness, death, and he offers this beautiful invitation. Come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. It's a song, almost it could be a song. And it's not a silly song that they sing in the marketplace. The biggest obstacle to church attendance, and I'm a church planter. So I'm always trying to convince people to come to church that aren't going it's kind of my job in life. It's a great product to be selling in 2023, you know, great era for the church here, no bad press, nothing like that. And here we are trying to do this. And I found that most people don't come to church, not because they're questions about God and the goodness of the universe. And where is God when I'm suffering this sort of bigger philosophical questions. And it's not the scandals, either that keep them out of church, generally. It's simply the exhaustion of life. They're tired, they're weary. A lot has happened to them. They're carrying heavy burdens. Church should be a place where you can bring these burdens when you're exhausted and weary. And too often we as church leaders, I'm only talking about myself here have encouraged the placing of heavy burdens on people, requiring people to do things that they're just not able to do. And the people in Jesus day, we're doing the same exact thing. But we've got to remember who Jesus is talking to. He's not talking to everyone who has it together. He's talking to people who are living under this burden of trauma. Judith Herman's book, trauma and recovery when I use in my book

a lot, looks at the world through this lens of trauma, and says that one of the big signature wounds when people have been through life changing horrific experiences, is that nobody believes you. And that is the deepest wound of all in these events. And we are a people, a people of God who get up every Sunday and say we believe in God the Father, we believe in the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, and a lot of other stuff that sometimes kind of hard to believe in this world. We are good at believing things, or we're trying to be here today. So we ought to believe people, when they share with us their stories of trauma. I'm an Episcopalian today, because I found rest in Jesus in the Episcopal Church. After the Iraq War. I didn't think I was worthy of love. I didn't think that that was an experience I could have when I was in the throes of untreated PTSD. thrashing around in this world. I dragged myself to an Episcopal Church where I got a direct sign from God that he loved me in the body and blood of Christ at the altar. Jesus said Come unto me all you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest. And I found that they're in an Episcopal Church. He's gentle with us. He's humble in heart. He gives us the rest we need for our souls. And that rest is not found in isolation. It is found with other people. It's found with the people that you're with right now in this place that Jesus is calling to us to find rest in Him at this communion rail when you come forward. He's calling us to find rest in this community. This community built on love. You will find rest for your souls and this wolf that we talked about earlier, who cannot sing anymore, CS Lewis. Later many years later, he wrote about the creation of the world by Aslan who is a Christ figure. He wrote these words. In the darkness something was happening at last Aslan, a voice had begun to sing. It seemed to come from all directions at once its lower notes were deep enough to be the voice of Earth herself. There are no words, there was hardly even a tune. It was beyond comparison, the most beautiful noise he had ever heard. It was so beautiful. They could hardly bear it. The lion was pacing to and fro about the empty land and singing his new song. It was softer and more lifted lilting than the song by which he had called up the stars in the sun, a gentle rippling music and as he walked and sang the valley grew green with grass. You can sing again.

Come to Jesus and learn to sing again. He is recreating the world. He is recreating us.  
Amen.