

*St. John Lutheran Church*

*The Sermon*

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May 22, 2022

John 14:21-25

A week ago yesterday, a young man devised a careful plan. He chose his location, the only Black-owned grocery store in Buffalo New York. He chose his route: two hundred miles away from where he lived. He would have had to stop and get gas, plenty of time driving to think about it.

This was not some fit of rage. This was not some spur of the moment reaction. This was premeditated, cold blooded murder.

He shot thirteen people, killing ten of them, all African American. Echoes the shots from the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, the Walmart in El Paso, Mother Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal church Charleston South Carolina.

We say, “Oh, these hate-filled people, this hate, I wish this hate would end.” But we are wrong when we say this. It’s not hate they’re acting on It’s love. Love. I heard it way back in the sixties and early seventies when I was growing up in southern Mississippi. People would have the Ku Klux Klan on the local talk shows—you know, the people in the white sheets and the hoods over their heads, with the burning crosses and the nooses. Talk show host would ask, “Why do you hate.” They would say, “We don’t hate. We love. We love our white race. We love our white families. We love our white culture. We don’t want our white race and our white culture to be replaced.

That idea still flies around today. It’s called replacement theory. People say, “It’s a conspiracy, a conspiracy, I tell you!” They’re trying to replace our white culture, our white race.

And who is “they?” Well, that depends. Some people say, “It’s the Jews, the Jews are trying to replace us.” It’s always the Jews, isn’t it. Other people are more genteel. They’re more clean. Don’t want to get their hands dirty so they don’t accuse the Jews and they don’t use the word, “white.” They say, it’s legacy Americans who are being replaced, and the conspiracy is conducted by corporate elites or those over educated university professors, or maybe just those horrible, stupid democrats.”

It's not true. Replacement theory is not true.

It’s not true because, what is white culture, anyway? What is white America? I can’t understand what those words mean. People say, “White people built America.” Really? Do you think so? Well, yes, white people helped build America, but they weren’t alone.

Have you ever known someone who had a blood transfusion? Many soldiers wounded in combat, their lives have been saved with blood transfusions. Police officers wounded in the line of duty have been saved by blood transfusions.

Do you know who invented blood transfusions? Charles Davis, Jr. An African American surgeon in 1941, invented blood transfusion. He helped build America.

Did you know that? I didn’t know that. Why didn’t we know that? Is it because we’re stupid? No, we’re not stupid. Is it because we’re bad? No. It’s because nobody told us.

Who built the railroads across the North American continent? Well, white folks, partly. Irish immigrants and Civil War veterans from the eastern side. And from the west, Chinese people. Blasted and drilled their way through literally, miles of granite. Chinese people built the railroads. Chinese people built America too.

But they got pushed out of the photographs at the end of the project, because people wanted only whites to get the credit.

Did you know that? I didn’t know that. Why didn’t we know that? Is it because we’re stupid? No, we’re not stupid. It’s because nobody told us. Why didn’t anybody tell us? Why aren’t we taught the whole story?

In World War II, the 158<sup>th</sup> regiment, made up mostly of Hispanic men from Arizona, fought in the Philippines, General Douglas McArthur said that they were the “greatest combat fighting team ever deployed for battle.” Hispanic folks defend America.

Have I made my point? No, I haven’t made my point yet.

The skyscrapers in New York City. Who built the first skyscrapers? You know, those people who walk on the steel beams ten, twenty, thirty stories above the pavement? Who did that? It was indigenous people, Indians. Indians built America.

There is no white America. White people did not build it. We all built it. All of us. And all of us have a right to share in its prosperity.

Now, I understand that people are scared. Lots of changes are happening. For example, sometime in the 2040’s white people will no longer compose a majority in the United States. We will be the largest of several minorities. But that’s not a conspiracy. That’s because they changed the immigration laws back in 1965 from a quota system where you had a certain number of Asians, but more white people, to a family-based system where, if you had a husband or wife, or son or daughter, you could bring them over to the United States so you could have a strong family. That’s what has brought this shift.

And I understand that people are mad. Over the last fifty years or so, globalization has benefited two groups in the world. It has benefited the very, very rich. They have increased their wealth hugely over the last fifty years. Also, to a lesser degree, the very, very poor. A lower percentage of the human population is starving to death than fifty years ago. The people who have not benefitted, however, the people who realize that they will not receive the same level of material prosperity as their parents, is the people making 50% or less of the average income in developed nations: places like the United States, Europe, Australia. They’re mad. They feel left behind.

When we’re mad and afraid, we’ll believe almost anything that makes us feel powerful again, makes us feel important, valuable. Even if it’s a lie.

Where do we get our power? Where do we get our value? Do we get it from lies?

“Peace, I leave with you,” says Jesus in our gospel lesson for today. “Peace, I give to you.”

Does replacement theory give you peace?

And then, moving over to the other side. Do you remember that banjo tune they used in the movie “Deliverance?” For a decade or two after that, every time a late night talk show made a joke about mountain people, the band would play that banjo tune. Ruined a perfectly good banjo tune.

The last group of people that it’s politically correct to make fun of is mountain people.

Why do we do that? Because we are afraid. We feel powerless and to make ourselves feel better we lie to ourselves that we are better than somebody else. Better than mountain people.

When we use a Southern accent to express the idea that something is really stupid. Makes us feel better than Southerners. It doesn’t help.

Not helping. Really.

When people look down on farmers as if they were backward and stupid. You can’t be stupid and be a farmer. You won’t survive. Farmers can be conservative. That’s different. Farmers can be different from you. But to look down on farmers doesn’t help.

Looking down of folks like truckers, steel workers. Not helping. I know you are afraid. People who don’t buy into replacement theory are afraid that democracy will be eroded to the point where we have a white dictatorship. I understand, you’re scared. Contempt won’t help.

Quite the opposite. Lies kill. Contempt kills.

Jesus says, “My peace I give to you.”

What is Jesus's peace? I think we often want the world's peace, our peace. Our peace is where we get our way and anyone who disagrees just has to shut up. Then it's nice and peaceful, isn't it? Not!

What is Jesus's peace?

There are people who have worked on the issue of white supremacy for decades. They know what works. Contempt does not work. Vast speeches by the president or the former president do not work. Here's what works.

You work. You have the power. We do not have all power. But we have a little power. And our little power works.

They call it the three P's. The first "P" is Personal. If you have a personal relationship with someone who is tied up in conspiracy theories, then they will listen to you more than anyone else. It's personal.

Second is "Push." Don't stay quiet. Lies kill, contempt kills, and silence kills too. Push back on conspiracy theories. Share the truth. Ask, "Is this the way Jesus calls us to talk about people and to treat people?" Second "P" is push.

The third "P" is "persevere." Don't cut off the person you love. Don't condemn them. Persist in the relationship, stay in contact. Let them know you love them even if they don't agree with you. This is hard. It's hard, but it works. Not all the time, but more than almost anything else.

This is Jesus's peace, because it's risky. Jesus gives us his peace, here in the gospel lesson for today, when he is about to be betrayed into the hands of people who are going to kill him. He is about to go to the cross for people who are his enemies, who would be very happy to replace him. He loves them.

This is peace. It is not a static, lazy thing, sitting in front of the television watching some pundit go on and on about how bad those people are. This is a peace that risks rejection, risks disagreement, risks being cut off by loved ones, risks conflict, but nevertheless loves.

Because, where do we get our value? Where do we get our dignity? Do we get our dignity from our race, or our culture? No, we do not. We get our dignity from Jesus Christ, and nothing, nothing can take our dignity away.

So we are free to love. Strong love changes people. Persistent love, that pushes, changes people.

This is the journey of the cross. This is Jesus's peace. It is bigger than we are. It works in our world. It gives us dignity and value, whatever our race may be, whatever our culture or nation, no matter how well off we are. Jesus's peace saves. Thanks be to God.

“Oh no, but we're being replaced!” No, we're not.

They'r trying to replace White America, when we built this nation,