
A Public Service Announcement

A sermon by the Rev. Canon David Boyd
The Eighth Sunday after Pentecost: Proper 13, Year C

This is a Public Service Announcement!

There is a crisis unfolding right here, right now. It affects all of us, all ages and all stages. Its shadow stretches from Main Street to Wall Street. It's dramatized on shows like *The West Wing* and *The Wire*. It's present in your home and my home. It's all pervasive.

You may think the threat doesn't concern you. You may believe it belongs to the past: that its ways are primitive, ancient, barbaric. But it's not ancient history. It's here now, patient, persistent, always demanding just a little more.

I'm talking, of course, about *human sacrifice*.

No, I'm not trying to spark a Satanic panic. This is not a sermon about the perils of death metal or the danger of Dungeons & Dragons. Nor do I mean to suggest there is an epidemic of volcanic Temple of Doom-style rituals, with pagan chanting and the hoisting of beating hearts. But the logic behind such fiery rituals - the idea that human life can be exchanged for worldly power and material security - is very much alive today, if you know where to look.

In the modern era, human sacrifice manifests in subtler, more socially acceptable forms. It appears as a cost-benefit analysis in a boardroom, where profits take precedence over the wellbeing of workers. It happens on the school playground, when the mean girl sacrifices the dignity of the fringe friend to secure her social standing in the popular clique.

It echoes in quiet homes, where a busy parent misses one more dinner, one more bedtime, one more ballgame. "*Cat's in the cradle and the silver spoon, little boy blue and the man in the moon...*" You know how the rest of the song goes!

And it shows up in our national conversations. For example, it shows up when the lives and dignity of immigrants are scapegoated as if their suffering could purchase our prosperity, as if sacrificing their wellbeing could somehow make our society whole.

We convince ourselves that this sacrificial system is simply how the world works. That we'll make it up later. That it's only temporary. Just this once.

But the problem with the logic of human sacrifice is that it never stops demanding more. Each time, it raises the price. And every time we say yes, every time we acquiesce to its demands, a little more of us disappears.

Jesus sees this. He can play the tape forward and sees where this stinking thinking ends. Jesus refuses to accept this logic, to play by its rules. At no point does the Gospel tolerate little deaths in pursuit of greater life. Christian thinking cannot permit the sacrifice of human life, ours or another's, as a pathway to abundance, to security.

These little sacrifices do more than erode our relationships or hollow out our souls; they also destroy our ability to imagine anything different. Each time we give in to the logic of human sacrifice, we lose a bit of our moral imagination. The more we compromise with death, the harder it becomes to envision another way. We forget

how to dream as God dreams for the world. We lose sight of grace, of abundance, of the Kingdom.

And so when a man steps out of the crowd and interrupts Jesus: "Teacher, settle my financial dispute with my brother," Jesus refuses to referee. Jesus knows the issue isn't one of inheritance law. The problem is much larger than that! Before him stands a man ready to sacrifice his relationship with his brother on the altar of money.

So, Jesus tells a story. A parable. A cautionary tale about someone who made that same bargain one too many times.

There once was a man whose land produces so abundantly that his silos spill grain out onto the ground. His barns are filled to the brim. Faced with unexpected prosperity, he does what we might expect: he builds bigger barns.

Notice, please, who he consults as he formulates his plan: only himself! He speaks to no one, trusts no one, thanks no one. "What should I do?" he asks. "I will do this," he answers. "I will build, I will store up, I will enjoy." There is no *we* in his vocabulary. No thought of community. No mention of family. No friends to be found.

And where's his imagination, his creativity? Not once does he wonder if his surplus might bless someone else. Not once does he consider the hungry at his gate, the widows in his village, the generosity he could unleash on his neighbors. His vision for the future is as small as his circle of conversation: just him, his barns, and his own ease. He can only think to hoard, because the logic of sacrifice has choked out his ability to dream. His moral imagination is gone.

Maybe the man thought that having the biggest barn in the village would guarantee his immortality, or at the very least secure his personal agency for the foreseeable future. And then God enters the picture and reveals the vanity of his ambitions: "You fool! This very night your life is demanded of you. All these possessions, whose will they be?"

There is no answer, because there is no one left.

A lifetime of accumulation and compromise has left the man entirely alone, speaking only to the echo of his own ego. The barns are full, but there's nothing left.

This parable raises a haunting question: *When all is said and done, what will be left of you?* What is left after we've sacrificed connection, integrity, and joy in pursuit of security? What remains after rust and moth consumes, when our treasures stored up on earth fall into other hands? Is there no alternative to a life laboring towards vanities we may never enjoy?

The alternative to the logic of death is the way of resurrection. God through Christ invites us into that very alternative. The same Jesus who tells this parable also walks the road to Calvary. He knows what it means to be emptied, to give everything for love. For redemption. For us.

And we must be clear: Jesus' sacrifice on the cross is not some glorified version of human sacrifice. His death is not a transaction to appease an angry God or secure a divine payoff. The cross is a revelation: the ultimate sign that God refuses to follow this world's fallen logic. Jesus' death does not demand more death. It interrupts the whole system of scapegoating and sacrifice and replaces it with a model of mercy. The cross reveals that God does not save through taking life, but by giving life away that we might have life more abundantly.

And the resurrection! What unbridled imagination! What cosmic creativity! Through Christ's very undoing of death, God brings forth a harvest that cannot be hoarded, cannot be earned, and cannot be lost: the gift of grace, the promise of eternal life.

We do not enjoy this gift of grace alone. The church, the gathered community of Christ, is where we practice living the way of resurrection. Growing in faith together, we move beyond narrow thinking. We encounter difference, share burdens, and exercise moral imagination. Through prayer and worship, service and sacraments, we can imagine a world beyond death. We can imagine the Kingdom.

I need your imagination. The world needs our imagination. There must be more creative, more life-giving solutions to our problems. I confess: I am exhausted by the logic of death and its lack of options. Maybe you are too. I'm tired of thinking that the only use for extra grain is bigger barns. I'm so tired of being told that the lives lost to gun violence this last week in Manhattan, and Reno, and on Edgewood Avenue are necessary sacrifices to the Second Amendment. I am so tired of watching families be torn apart by masked agents

claiming that this is the only way we can make our country great. Every time I am exposed to or participate in the logic of human sacrifice it feels like my soul is eroding inside of me. When all is said and done, when my life is demanded of me and my soul returns to its Creator, I just want something to be left: something holy, something human, something that resembles who God dreamed me to be.

And so, I crave your imagination. I crave the Kingdom. I crave resurrection.

Thanks be to God that God's way is different. The way of resurrection surprises us with generosity, disrupts us with mercy, and restores our weary souls with grace. God's way transforms scarcity into abundance, isolation into community, death into vibrant, unstoppable life. Christ's resurrection frees us to bear witness to the Kingdom already breaking into our midst, a world more beautiful than we dared imagine, a hope more powerful than any fear. Thanks be to God!