

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

“Do you think Harm is capable of murder?” Commander Rabb’s lawyer asked Harm’s colleague Major Sarah MacKenzie in an episode of the popular TV program JAG. *“Under the right circumstances,”* she replied matter-of-factly, *“we’re all capable of murder.”* Under the right circumstances, we’re all capable of murder.

Do you think that’s right? Certainly that statement is provocative. After all, murder is the intentional “killing of a human being with malice aforethought and with no legal excuse or authority.” Not that we’re not all guilty of breaking the 5th commandment: *“You shall not murder,”* as Luther explains it: *“We should fear and love God that that we may not hurt or harm our neighbor in his body, but help and support him in every physical need.”* Surely, we all fall short of that mark. Surely, I’ve murdered in that sense, but murder according to the legal definition? Not that...but am I capable?

This question is set before us today with the backdrop of what happened in Orlando, Florida, a couple weeks ago: the murder of 49 persons in that Orlando nightclub and the wounding of many more. With the killer’s Arabic calls of Allahu Akbar (god is great) and his pledge of allegiance to ISIS and ISIS’s leader al-Baghdadi, the act was called an act of terrorism almost immediately, and one of hate.

Then, in the days following, came the most bizarre turn of events, to my mind. People everywhere began doing all sorts of mental gymnastics to make sure that no one blamed all of Islam for this terrorist atrocity. You know them. This gunman was attracted to the Islamic State which, its name notwithstanding, it being led by a man who has a doctorate in Islamic studies notwithstanding, is not really Islamic at all, because we all know that Islam is a religion of peace. Blah! Blah! Blah! We’ve heard it many times before, after San Bernardino and Boston, after Paris at the Bataclan theater and at the Charlie Hebdo offices. We hear it as school girls are kidnapped in Nigeria, as a mall is attacked in Kenya, as a hotel is attacked in Somalia, as Christians are beheaded in Libya, as Christian churches are bombed in Pakistan on Easter, as Christian homes are burned in Egypt.

Are all Muslims guilty of these atrocities? Not at all. Not at all. That’s no more valid than thinking all blacks are criminals or all white people are racists or all Asians are smart or all whatever. Indeed, when it comes to human beings, perhaps only God Himself is able to classify all of us as we are: *“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,”* and all *“are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,”* and *“the grace of God ... appeared [in Christ Jesus], bringing salvation for all people.”* And this is what we

preach: not our perfection, but salvation for sinners through the blood of Jesus, received through faith. And then love of God and neighbor.

Certainly it is true that Christians do go astray—they sin. They do things that God does not desire, like murder, for we know what God desires. He tells us: He takes *“no pleasure in the death of anyone,”* and He *“desires all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.”*

Even so, Christians, though redeemed by the blood of Jesus, still have flesh. They often step outside of God’s desire and *“gratify the desires of [their] flesh.”* Even Jesus’ own disciples did. Did you hear it today? Jesus was passing through Samaria, heading toward Jerusalem. He could have gone east to the other side of the Jordan and bypassed Samaria, but His own will and purpose wouldn’t allow it. The fullness of His time here on earth was upon Him. The cross loomed large ahead of Him. He needed to get to Jerusalem—He *“set his face to go to Jerusalem”*—to do the work given Him by the Father: save sinners.

But the Samaritans didn’t like that. For them, Jerusalem was a place of false worship. True worship, they thought, happened only on Mount Gerizim. And so, our text says, *“the people did not receive him.”* James and John became upset at this slight. They asked Jesus, *“Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?”* as Elijah did when fire came down and consumed two of the king’s companies of soldiers. (2 Kings 1)

But that is not the Christian response, Jesus let the disciples know, rebuking them. And it’s not the only time Jesus commanded the disciples not to take up arms. At His arrest, Jesus told the disciples to put away the sword, *“For all who take the sword will perish by the sword.”* That’s not to say that Christians are forbidden to wield a sword for Caesar, whether as soldiers or as officers of the law, but Christians are not to seek vengeance on their own. Moreover, when it comes to Jesus’ kingdom, it is not like Caesar’s, and Jesus’ kingdom would not spread by a sword of iron—or by wind or earthquake or fire, for God is not in them with His grace. Jesus’ kingdom would spread by the sword of the Spirit, that is, the word of God, by the low whisper of the Gospel and the Sacraments.

And indeed, after Jesus completed all that He came to do in Jerusalem, that’s exactly what He commissioned the disciples to do. Go and use the sword of the Spirit. Spread the Good News to all peoples as His *“witnesses”* starting *“in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”* He called upon the church and her pastors to preach salvation in His name, to call people to repentance and to *“preach ... the forgiveness of sins.”*

How surprising, then, in the last couple of weeks, when the media’s mental gymnastics turned so vitriolic against Christians with respect to the Orlando

massacre. According to one commentator, Christians are the real culprits in the shooting because we call homosexuality a sin, because we don't support homosexual marriage, and because we are seeking legislation that protects the free expression of our faith. That's just hate, we're told. That has produced an "anti-queer climate," claimed an ACLU lawyer, and that is to blame for the "Orlando Carnage." And a NYT reporter wrote that a "Republican congressman read his colleagues a Bible verse from Romans that calls for the execution of gays." I'll bet you didn't know that was in the Bible, did you? That's because it isn't! Molly Hemingway of *The Federalist* wrote an article criticizing this journalist and setting the record straight. That article, titled "New York Times Claims 'Romans' Calls For 'Execution Of Gays'" laments that "[r]eligious illiteracy among journalists is reaching crisis levels."

This illiteracy makes our own Kevin Leininger's 3-year-old prediction even more ominous. Maybe I should call it a prophecy? It has come true. He wrote of a "day when daring to oppose gay rights – even by quoting the Bible – will be condemned as 'hate speech'." Buckle up. That day is here. We're in for some difficult times — the world will hate you on account of Jesus and His word.

And yet, Jesus tells us here, we are not to respond with murderous rampages as the Orlando terrorist did (although I do think, indeed, we are all capable of murder under the right circumstances). We're not to respond with calling down fire from heaven as the misguided disciples did, or with hate. Do you want to know how St. Paul says we as Christians, saved by the grace of God in Christ Jesus, are to act according to Romans? Let me read it: "*Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.*"

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.' To the contrary, 'if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

And St. Peter says, do it with "*a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.*"

That's who we are as Christians, not hate-mongers, but sinners redeemed by Christ Jesus, lovers of God and of neighbor. God grant that we may rejoice in that redemption and the freedom we have in Christ Jesus, and God grant that we may ever seek to live in the Spirit, bearing the fruit of the Spirit: *“love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, [and] self-control.”*

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.