

The Very Rev. Cynthia Byers Walter

WE WILL
Sermon for Easter 4C-Ps. 23, Rev 7:9-17
LPC, 4/21/13

I grew up in Lexington, Massachusetts. This means that for the first seventeen years of my life, Patriots Day was observed religiously on April 19, and later, on the Monday preceding April 19. There was a little parade in the morning, just for Lexington, and then there was a big parade in the afternoon, for all of the Boston area. We took for granted that the Boston Marathon was run in honor of Lexington and Concord, where the American Revolution began, and so we Lexingtonians felt we had a sort of stake in the Marathon. Besides we took pride that our city, Boston, did the marathon better than anyone else. So last week's events hit me hard.

Like a lot of observers I did come to take comfort in the words of Pittsburgh's native son, Fred Rogers, who was quoted as saying that when scary things are in the news, always look for the helpers.

By the grace of God, stories about helpers have abounded surrounding this tragedy. Professional first responders and ordinary citizens clearly jumped to the aid of the wounded and stunned. Locals opened their hearts, homes and businesses to runners who were barred from returning to their hotels.

I hadn't thought of this at first but those runners remained vulnerable well after the explosions were over. Dressed only in their racing skivvies and covered in sweat, they were exposed to the cool April weather and prevented from returning to their rooms where they could shower and change. Having just expended hundreds if not thousands of calories running 26 miles, they had no access to food. Runners carry nothing that is not necessary to running: not wallets, not provisions.

Many locals came to their aid. Keep in mind that these are Boston Yankees who have a reputation, which is partially deserved, for coolness and reserve toward strangers (I am one, so I can say that.)

One account especially impressed me. One runner said she was helped by a woman who had brought her young daughter with her out onto the streets to distribute provisions to the dispossessed athletes. Most people would have kept their children away from any chance of peril. But this woman said she wanted her daughter to see the goodness in people, after all the evil that had transpired.

Switching gears (only not so much, as you will see) ---

We baptize a baby this morning: Aston Cyril Martin. This is not just an event in Aston's life. He is not the only one who will be changed. This is an event in the life of this particular community, Lawrencefield Parish Church, and an event in the life of the greater church. We are all changed by this baptism. We welcome a new member into our body.

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As part of this ceremony, we all make a vow: to uphold this person in his life in Christ. That includes those of us who here this morning who have never before clapped eyes on this adorable child, and any who might be visiting today who will never see him again. How can any of us make such a bold commitment?

Here's where I get back to my opening remarks about the helpers, about those who respond to evil with goodness. We will uphold Aston whenever we fulfill our own baptismal vows, in witness to our belief in Christ, in witness to our belief in the inviolability of goodness, in witness to our belief in the fact that God's goodness will ultimately prevail, where "the Lamb at the center of the throne will be our shepherd ...and God will wipe away every tear," in the words of Revelation.

We will particularly uphold Aston when we fulfill our own baptismal vows where he can see us, to model to him what it means to be a Christian. If enough people around him do this, by the grace of God he will grow up to be a very good man. But we also uphold Aston, and every other part of creation, when we fulfill our own baptismal vows, because then we are helping to build the Kingdom of Heaven in accordance with God's wishes, and bringing closer the time when the Lamb at the center of the throne will be our shepherd and God will wipe away every tear.

Let's look at the Baptismal Covenant on page 304 of the prayer book and see what this means.

When we continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in the prayers, in other words, when we come to church, and when we observe our own private devotions, we support Aston, and, incidentally, the Kingdom of Heaven. When we persevere in resisting evil and when we fall into sin, we repent and return to the Lord, we support Aston and the Kingdom of Heaven. When we proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ, we support Aston, and the Kingdom of Heaven. When we seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as ourselves, we support Aston and the Kingdom of Heaven. When we strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of every human being, we support Aston and the Kingdom of Heaven.

Let's do these things, fulfill these vows for Aston. Let's do them for the Kingdom of Heaven. Let's do them for the love of God. I mean that literally.

And though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we shall fear no evil. And God will wipe away every tear.