Tale as old as time. A new regime exercises dominion by playing on the insecurities of the populace; by playing on the need for national security and clarity of national identity, by playing on the historic amnesia of the people. Leader of the most powerful empire in the world in its day, Pharoah says *That group of Hebrews over there is becoming too numerous and too powerful* - they’re going to take over!¹ They’re going to dispossess us - the real Egyptians - they’re going to act in cahoots with our enemies.

The lie is betrayed by the story itself, isn’t it? If the Hebrews, who had come to Egypt seeking relief from food insecurity in their own land, were so powerful, how could the Egyptians so easily have enslaved them? And yet bitterly enslaved and worked they were, all for the economic construction of the Egyptians’ empire, for the Egyptians’ enrichment. Still the Hebrew spirit didn’t stop: it grew and multiplied and spread, the story tells us.

So the Egyptians and their Pharoah do what despots and their mobs do: they plan to kill. *Blood and soil.*

And that’s just it. I’m not over it. I’m not over what happened a couple weekends ago in Charlottesville, Virginia. Like many of you, on the one hand, I had gotten sick of hearing about it, or at least sick of hearing the endless stream of banter about it, but I realized writing this sermon, I’m not over it; I’m still wrestling and unsettled. Those faces; those shocking faces - young, handsome, “normal” faces - ghostly by torchlight. In an article for *Time* Brian McLaren, pastor and theologian who was present in Charlottesville, wonders aloud: “What would possess these young white men (and a few women) to chant hateful anti-Semitic and racist slogans, to shout homophobic, xenophobic and misogynistic slurs, to speak of putting Jews in ovens and driving people of color off of “their” soil?²

Of course the fever-pitch on social media and other outlets for our common anxiety and our common need to displace our anger waned almost as quickly as it came, as so often happens: the diatribe moved very quickly from shock at the real presence of organized white supremacy to debate over confederate memorials to the President’s responses, to things completely unrelated. Righteous unilateral claims and parallels between now and pre-Nazi Germany have given way to a kind of weak resignation.

Part of that weak resignation has to do with the highly charged, highly divided political climate in the United States right now; that even the smallest issues feel insurmountable because we can seem to find

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¹cf. Exodus 1:8-14.
any common ground; but I’m a priest not a politician, and so I have less to say here today about politics and more about faith.

You see, the Good News of Jesus Christ transcends traditional group identity markers; that was, in fact, one of the defining characteristics of Christianity from the very beginning, even against some of the ethnocentric tendencies of Jesus’ own disciples and the religion of their day. The Good News says that, however things might be in the world, in the Household of God the Church, all are equal in the sight of God; equally children, equally heirs, equally created in the image and likeness of God. God’s kingdom is not like our kingdoms. That’s why it was absolutely scandalous that in early Christianity rich and poor, free and indentured, male and female, gentile and Jew all came together without hierarchy or division. In Christ they were not only equal but one; and not just united but complementary. We cannot be the fullness of the Body of Christ without the widest possible diversity.

And sure, the Church has lost sight of that essential doctrine of faith from time to time; and has even colluded with the principalities and powers of this world in setting up false divisions. Christians have brought the idols of nationalism and slavery into God’s household; the Church has affirmed terribly bad behavior and has needed to repent and return to the Gospel: but even in those darkest of times the essential core remains: the Church is the community of all God’s children everywhere.

What Charlottesville tells us; indeed what the story of the Israelites in Egypt reminds us is that the powers of evil that manifest in disaffection and disenchantment, in extremism and supremacy, in the rush of domination and euphoria of terroristic violence those powers are an ever-present temptation for humankind. Until the fullness of time, we must continue to struggle against what corrupts and destroys God’s creatures. Thank God that, by God’s mercy Christ came not for the healthy, but for the sick!3

(You all know all of this - I’m preaching to the choir.)

The reason I say it to you is that Christianity - essential Christianity, our Christianity - has something to speak into this mess. I really believe that. We are called, as God’s priestly people to be constantly interceding for the world, praying for true amendment of our own lives and the unseen ways that even we don’t cooperate with God’s radical unity; and we are called, even when the culture has moved on, to keep proclaiming mercy and justice and righteousness - the Good News that in Christ, all are boundlessly one.

3cf. Matthew 9:12