

About a week-and-a-half ago a group of us pastors from the Cleveland East Conference in our synod got together for what was called a “cross-cultural conversation” focusing on racism, where I thought a good, open, honest discussion was had amongst us from different backgrounds not only in regards to skin color, but different parts of the world we grew up in, the congregations we serve now, and a variety of experiences all-around. I walked away with a deeper hope than what I walked in with, but then three days later happened. The hometown for my mother growing up in her teenage years of Westerville, Ohio, was instantly changed from a nice suburb of Columbus into an overly well-known place on the national news for a site of shock and embarrassment as two police officers were gunned down only miles away from the same house my mother grew up in, and my uncle still lives in now.

But evidently Westerville had next-to-nothing to offer to the headlines for what was about to happen another three days after that deadly crime. Parkland, Florida, took center stage, instead. Because two police officers, no matter how magnified they may have been for their uniforms, were no match for the number of seventeen that was forever etched into newspapers, and

computer and cell phone and television screens across the country and beyond. Yet another horrifying rampage not on a battle field, not in some distant country, right in our own backyard of America, as high school students walked in for just another day of potentially boring lectures and homework assignments; and, instead, got a massacre.

I remember sitting here that Ash Wednesday night, looking into the beautiful-stained glass windows of this very sanctuary, but, of course, the beauty wasn't being shown at all at the time. They were all dark. No light penetrating through at all. Just dismal. Just feelings of defeat, sorrow, disgust, shame, emptiness. And yet, today, we hear about a rainbow. Not just a single beam of light: many lights, many colors, bursting through the sky.

However, the precious detail of the story from Genesis cannot be overlooked. The rainbow isn't so much for us to see. It's for God to see, for God to remember the covenant, the deal God made with humanity and the Creation after a flood pulverized the world. God says, "no more!" But we must wonder how close does God get to wanting to break off that covenant entirely. God is, obviously, more than entitled to be angry with us by now. God is more than entitled to be so overcome with the most holy of

frustration, desperately craving for us to somehow stop doing this to each other; that God can be so enraged to the point of wanting to just start all over again. And yet beyond any human comprehension God can, still, somehow, somehow, see beauty, as if there are many color-filled lights of hope piercing through the darkest of clouds of evil that infest us.

As if a rainbow can remind us of such mind-boggling mercy; I just don't want God to stoop to our level. I don't want God to be of the human mindset that taking away human life is somehow going to fill a deep void in our heart, and even if we don't take human life away ourselves, we'll instead shout them down. We'll do our best to remove any dignity they may have whatsoever, just so that we feel better, in the end. I don't want God to stoop to our level of embarrassing inactivity, trying so much and yet getting nowhere at all to improve the already-fragile circumstances with the well-being of our own children. I don't want God to come to our level of hideous hatred that forever alters our behavior for the absolute worst we have to offer our neighbors near and far.

Nevertheless, during this journey of Lent, this *is* about God coming down to our humanity, our pride, our sin, even our death. It didn't just

happen a long time ago on a Calvary hill. It happened in Westerville. It happened in Parkland, Florida. It happens in our neighborhoods, our hometown cities, our back yard. This God is still comin' down, because, evidently, somehow, someway, God still loves the world.

The rainbow isn't reminding God to keep the divine hands off entirely, to stay in the heavens and let us humanity make our own choices and suffer the consequences. The rainbow is a reminder that God comes down to the very surface where the rainbow hits, where the light stops, where only the most dismal death resides. God comes down with the most radiant light with all the colors of the rainbow and then some; that the seventeen will be on the receiving end of God's promise too from that precious detail of a rainbow. No more death, no more pain, no more gunfire to have to worry about shattering through your classroom door, no more massacres. The Son came down that they, too, may have life, and have it abundantly. Absolutely no one can steal that away from them. May they rest in the ultimate peace we all long for in this very life. So let it be, oh God. So let it be.