

Easter Day, Year C – April 20, 2025
“When Christians Act Like Christians”
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Isaiah 65:17-25 | Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24 | 1 Corinthians 15:19-26 | Luke 24:1-12

Whether Easter is the end of your Lenten journey, or a day set aside to reconnect with St. Paul’s, this is the holiest day of the year. It’s a day to remember who we are as a Christian people, and that we are called to live differently.

Sometimes stories about things that happened hundreds or thousands of years ago resonate—for some of you it might be Homer’s Iliad and Odyssey or maybe a fantasy like the Lord of the Rings. But ancient epic stories can also be hard to relate to. So today I decided to share a modern-day parable with you. With parables, the details aren’t as important the way you connect to the story and make meaning of it in your own lives.

This story happened eight years ago in a small farm town in West Liberty, Ohio, one long day’s drive from here. It has about 1800 people, so it’s a small town, not a little city. Logan Cole was a junior in high school in 2017. One morning, he was getting ready to go to a Mock Trial event. The team was waiting for the bus, all dressed up. The substitute teacher was late, so Logan popped into the bathroom to check his hair. He looked to his left, and saw a man with a mask on pointing a 12-gauge shotgun at him. The man shot Logan twice, once in the front, once in the back. Logan fell to the floor and blacked out. Hearing the gunshots, a teacher looked in the bathroom and then went to raise the alarm. The man with the gun followed the teacher into the hallway, firing at classroom doors. He came back into the bathroom to reload, just as Logan was regaining consciousness.

Years later, when Logan was interviewed for a documentary, he said, “I was there, a mess. He was there, getting ready to go hurt more people. That’s kind of the point at which we had a conversation. I pretty much told him, ‘Please go get help. You haven’t killed anybody yet. If you care anything about me, go get help.’ At one point in the conversation, he pointed the gun to himself and said, ‘Why don’t I just do this?’ I said, ‘No, you don’t need to hurt yourself. You don’t need to hurt anybody. Just please, please go get help.’”

The principal and assistant principal entered the bathroom with their hands up, saying they just wanted to talk. Logan was on the floor, holding his side. He looked at them, then glanced toward a bathroom stall with the door open, where the man was hiding. The assistant principal asked Logan a question. When the man with the gun heard his voice, he said, “I’m sorry, Coach. I messed up, Coach.” He slid the gun the gun out to them, then stretched out on the floor. The masked man with the gun was a student at the school, one of Logan’s classmates. The crisis had peaked, but no one else in the school knew that, and Logan was gravely injured.

After help was on the way, the principal called Logan’s parents. His Dad arrived first, because he was going to watch the Mock Trial that morning. When he saw Logan, he asked, “who did this to you?” Logan gave the name of the student who shot him, then said, “but Dad, it doesn’t matter.” Logan said later, “I went down to my core,” he said, to the lessons his parents had taught him about sacrifice and service, grace and patience. He was able to see God in the situation.

Prayer invited God into this community as well, into this crisis. Everyone’s first instinct was to pray. The school nurse was a combat nurse, and she prayed out loud as she was caring for Logan. The kids who fled the school gathered in a nearby farmer’s home, and their first instinct

was to gather in a circle and pray. Logan's grandparents lived by the highway and had a practice of stopping and praying for ambulances when they passed. They prayed for the ambulance that was on its way to help their grandson. There were many other stories of how prayer invited God's mercy and compassion and healing into their community that day.

Later, when the family set up a gofundme account to cover medical expenses, Logan asked that the funds be divided equally among the school, the family of the classmate who shot him, and his own family.

Logan's character was shaped hearing the stories of Jesus' life and ministry throughout his life, and by living like Christ. When we know the story, it seeps into our core, and we become like Christ. Guided by his parents, he cultivated habits that made his first response one of humility and humanity. The pastor of his church said later, "when Christians act like Christians... that had a bigger impact than any sermon I could have preached." There was fear, but fear didn't cause Logan to freeze. There was no blaming or shaming. Logan saved his own life, the life of the classmate with the gun, and many other lives because he responded the way he did.

An active faith life means that certain behaviors become ingrained—the daily practice of praying, of turning everything over to God, of reading scriptures, and performing acts of mercy and compassion. These habits become our default response in any conflict or crisis.

Logan recovered almost fully within a year physically, but he admitted that he struggled later to forgive his classmate. He described forgiveness as the process of giving the situation back to God over and over again. That process was critical to his own mental health and recovery.

How do we make sense of violence on Easter Day? This symbol (point to crucifix) is violent and problematic. We have the urge to hide it, or to just show a bare cross with nobody nailed to it. And we also have the urge to soften the words at Communion, “the Body of Christ, the Bread of Heaven,” “the Blood of Christ, the Cup of Salvation” to leave out the reference to Body and Blood. But when we say these words, we’re simply calling the real presence of Christ to be with us and in us.

As we celebrate the resurrection on Easter Day, this symbol—the crucifix—reminds us of God’s faithful, sacrificial love. Frederick Buechner wrote: “God so loved the world that he gave his only son even to this obscene horror; so loved the world that in some ultimately indescribable way and at some ultimately immeasurable cost he gave the world himself. Out of the terrible death, John says, came eternal life, not just in the sense of resurrection to life after death but in the sense of life so precious even this side of death that to live it is to stand with one foot already in eternity. To participate in the sacrificial life and death of Jesus Christ is to live already in his kingdom. This is the essence of the Christian message.” This is what we are called to do...to stand in the world with one foot already in eternity.

This symbol and these words call us to live like Christ lived. The church is here to feed you with spiritual food and fellowship on your journey (the wafers do look a lot like lembas bread), but there are other ways to be a good Christian. Buechner explains: “It is possible to be on Christ's way and with his mark upon you without ever having heard of Christ, and for that reason to be on your way to God though maybe you don't even believe in God.”

When we gaze on the crucifix, we see the magnitude of God’s love for his children, our God, who chose to be present with us in the world, and we also see a call to live life like Jesus

with integrity and innocence, grace and humility, mercy and compassion. May this Easter season bring you all joy and hope. May you commit to practicing love, mercy and compassion in your daily lives, and may you stand with one foot in eternity.