

SERMON: See Something, Say Something
TEXT: Luke 24:36b-48

4-18-21

Last year, the rate of hate crimes against Asian Americans in major U.S. cities rose nearly 150%. More than 2800 incidents have been reported since the start of the pandemic.

One particularly horrifying incident happened in late March outside a building in Midtown Manhattan. According to ABC News, “The New York City Police Department released surveillance footage that showed a man approaching the woman on the sidewalk and kicking her in the stomach, knocking her to the ground. The man then kicks the woman in the face multiple times while making *anti-Asian statements toward her* before casually walking away....” (Morgan Winsor, Lobby staff fired after attack on Asian American woman outside apartment building in New York City, www.abcnews.go.com, April 7, 2021)

The footage was shown over and over again on the news, and while the attack is disturbing enough, what was particularly shocking to me was that the people inside the building lobby - who could also be seen in the video - did nothing. In fact, “one of them [shut] the door [that had been propped open] as the suspect [walked] away and the woman [was] left on the ground.” It looked to me like they weren’t even trying to call for help.

While I am appalled and angered by their apparent lack of concern for such violence, let me also admit that I have never been in a similar situation, so I honestly can't say what I would have done. Nobody wants to get in the middle of a violent attack, and I'm not suggesting that people put themselves in danger. But certainly something could have been done to stop this unprovoked violence.

SEE SOMETHING, SAY SOMETHING is a familiar slogan which I recently learned originated with the Department of Homeland Security, and refers specifically to behavior that could indicate terrorism or terrorism-related crime. On their website, they explain: "Across the country, in our communities, we share everyday moments with our neighbors, family, coworkers, and friends. We go to work or school, the grocery store, or the gas station. It's easy to overlook these routine moments, but as you're going about your day, if you see something that doesn't seem quite right, say something. By being alert and reporting suspicious activity to your local law enforcement, you can protect your family, neighbors, and community."

But because there is so much distrust in our society, I'm glad to see that the DHS website also emphasizes: "The *If You See Something, Say Something*® campaign respects citizens' privacy, civil rights, and civil liberties by emphasizing

behavior, rather than appearance, in identifying suspicious activity. Factors such as race, ethnicity, and/or religious affiliation are not suspicious.”

Many times we simply don't notice what's happening around us. But too often, we don't take the time to pay attention. We don't want to get involved. We don't want to interrupt our day. We're in a hurry or distracted. But hate crimes like attacks on Asians will not stop as long as people try to insulate themselves by turning a blind eye and walking away.

“Peace be with you.” We hear these words over and over again from the Risen Jesus whenever he appears to his disciples. In today's passage from the Gospel of Luke, the disciples are understandably “startled and terrified” upon seeing Jesus, thinking they are seeing a ghost. So, Jesus shows them his hands and feet and invites them to touch him. They respond with joy, but Luke tells us they were “disbelieving and still wondering.”

This time Jesus asks for something to eat. This scene could easily be the stuff of comedy, depending on how you read it or imagine it. Is Jesus suddenly hungry because he's been in the tomb for three days and his physical body is in need of food? Maybe he's feeling impatient with the disciples and their slowness to

believe. After a heavy sigh, he asks for something to eat and sits down, as this is taking longer than he planned. Or, as many Biblical scholars suggest, this is yet another strategy to prove that he's not a ghost: he eats a piece of fish in their presence.

And once again Jesus reminds his friends, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you - that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem."

Many of us have heard this reminder from the risen Jesus, this summary of his life so many times, that we - like the disciples - also fail to really hear what Jesus is saying. To me, it starts to sound like Charlie Brown's teachers. Wah wah wah wah wah wah.

But it's the last sentence of this passage that snaps me back to attention. It's when Jesus says, "You are witnesses of these things."

To be a witness is to SEE SOMETHING, SAY SOMETHING.

But, as Presbyterians, we like to do the work of evangelism using our actions more than our words. It's understandable, and yet, we know we need to learn how to do more - in actions *and words* - to reveal the risen Christ.

After all, if Luke and the other gospel writers - Matthew, Mark, and John - had not written their good news about Jesus, from their own perspective, to their own particular audience, we would not know that he was born and baptized, that he healed and helped, fed and forgave, prayed and preached, lived and loved, died and destroyed death - all for the love of his Father God and God's beloved creation. Because of all the writers who were inspired by God to SEE SOMETHING and SAY SOMETHING, we are here today to worship, to pray, to serve, and to learn how to follow Christ's call to be witnesses of his life, death, and resurrection.

During Lent, while I was teaching the confirmation class at First Presbyterian, I encouraged the students and their mentors to keep their eyes and ears open every day to God's activity in the world, to share their discoveries with one another by text message, and to let their experiences inform their prayers. They had done this before at Vacation Bible School a few years ago, and it was called

“God sightings.” For our purposes, I decided to call it H-T-W, after a book I read by Anne Lamott titled, *Help, Thanks, Wow; The Three Essential Prayers*. In the book, Lamott - in her down-to-earth and deeply faithful way - makes the case that these three words capture most of our prayers and can get us through the good, bad, and even the ordinary aspects of daily life.

I reminded the class that there are many times when we can ask God for *help*, for ourselves and others. When an ambulance or a fire truck goes by with their sirens blaring. When we’re having a bad day. When a loved one is ill. And it doesn’t take long to realize there are a million reasons to say *thanks* to God. Our gratitude then leads us to see all the wonders and miracles from God that are all around us and say, *wow*.

This sort of focus informs our prayers as well as becoming a way for us to pray unceasingly. Furthermore, it provides a natural, easy way to be witnesses for Christ. We are witnessing and sharing our faith when we speak out loud our brief prayers of help, thanks, and wow. When we experience God in our own lives and in the world, when we SEE SOMETHING we are called to SAY SOMETHING.

Believing that the risen Jesus is real in our lives, may we be his witnesses, to
the glory of God!

AMEN.