

The Rev. Dr. Mary Barber

9.14.25

Our older daughter Kennedy called me Wednesday to share something that had happened in her day, and then she said, Did you hear that Charlie Kirk was shot and killed? No, I answered, and who is Charlie Kirk? Later that afternoon, she and my wife Alleyne had almost exactly the same conversation.

Like many young adults, Kennedy and her boyfriend have been well aware of this conservative media influencer for some time, they were well aware of the things he said about immigrants, Black people, and LGBTQ people. She got us up to speed in the next couple of days, sharing quotes and video clips of his speeches. Meanwhile Kirk's supporters had practically canonized him, putting up pictures of him next to founding fathers and Jesus.

We had an uncommonly violent week this week, and that's saying a lot in these times. Yet another school shooting barely even made the headlines. Drones invading Poland's airspace barely made the headlines. And oh yes, it was the anniversary of that other horrible act of violence, 9/11.

It is after this heavy and violent week that we come here to baptize Cameron. We come here to baptize Cameron after a week that has left us shaken and afraid. Where does all this division and violence lead? Must our young people accept this as some kind of new normal? What kind of world will Cameron and his generation come of age into?

We will baptize Cameron today in the name of another person who was killed by political violence, Jesus. Jesus was killed by the Roman state through the cruellest method of torture and execution, the cross. Jesus was killed by the state in a shameful public spectacle in order to send a message, to preserve the Pax Romana, the Roman peace.

Today we celebrate that same torture instrument, the cross, as holy. In Jesus' time, this would be an unimaginable thing, almost like lifting up a semiautomatic gun as holy. And that is precisely the point. We celebrate the holy cross because of how Jesus responded to the political violence of his day, how he interrupted the cycle, showed us a new way, opened the way to resurrection for all of us. Paul spells it out for us in his letter to the Philippians.:

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.

And being found in human form,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.

Jesus emptied himself. He did not resist arrest. He told Peter and the others to put away their swords. He didn't directly answer the false accusations and rhetoric thrown at him.

But Jesus' self-emptying is not a call for the oppressed to accept their oppression, it is not a call for the abused to stay silent. It is not a call to hold back from speaking truth and acting in justice. Jesus did a lot of bold speaking out in his years of ministry, which is why he was sentenced to the cross.

Jesus' self-emptying comes from a position of great power. Paul says it clearly, "though he was in the form of God." God who could have chosen to come to earth as a king or emperor, but instead came as a poor Jew in a land occupied by Rome. Though he was in the form of God. God who could have come off the cross and killed Pilate and all the soldiers that day, but who suffered everything, with us and for us, God who interrupted the violence, who went right through death into something completely new.

It is into all this fierceness that we are baptized. It is into all this fierceness that Cameron is being clothed today. We will soon say vows on Cameron's behalf and renew them for ourselves, and they are bold and fierce vows. To seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as ourselves. To strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being.

These vows are especially hard, and especially needed, in these times. These vows do not call for us to be passive. They do not call for us to simply accept violence as some kind of new normal. They do not call for us to tolerate hate and injustice, they call for us to answer these things with love. They call for us, whenever we are the one in the position of power, to empty ourselves, to give our power away for the sake of others.

We do not know exactly what answering with love means in this time of so much hate, what answering with truth means in this time of so much spin and alternate truths. We are shaken by these events, we are afraid. This is why we need our baptismal vows, why we need community to worship and discern and love and weep together. We need to be reminded through Cameron's baptism of our deepest identity, that we are all the beloved of God.

This is where we find our strength in these times, this is where we find our joy. This is how we follow in the way of Jesus, the way through and past violence, through and past death, the way to Resurrection. Amen.