



# ST BART'S

A Sermon by  
The Right Reverend Dean Elliott Wolfe, D.D., Rector

## The Cross, Circa 2021

*Sermon preached at the eleven o'clock service, March 28, 2021*

*Palm Sunday*

*Passion Narrative According to Mark*

*Isaiah 50:4-9a; Philippians 2:5-11; Mark 15:1-39, [40-47]*

Sometimes, sometimes we can't engage with it immediately. The shock, the horror of it, is simply too much. It takes some time to process. And, like the shock and the horror of the crucifixion, we also don't know how to respond to the repeated violence against people of color we continue to witness, and, if I may be quite specific, particularly against Asian-Americans who have experienced a frightening increase in violence and violent threats in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We're always looking for someone else to blame.

Christians have historically twisted the repeated references to "the Jews" in the Passion narrative in John's Passion Gospel to justify a wholesale condemnation of Judaism. Remarkably, we've done this for centuries. When we hear "the Jews" being referred to in these ancient scriptures, it is intended that we recognize *ourselves* and those in power: all of us who employ a misplaced desire for control, power, and status.

This is why the liturgy invites us to cry out, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" Because "the Jews" didn't betray Christ. We betrayed Christ. We betray him still with our faithlessness and our indifference regarding hatred and racism, and we crucify him over and over again in every act of violence we direct towards the other.

We're always looking for someone else to blame.

Bishop Suffragan Allen Shin recently wrote about a frightening experience he and his Asian-American wife had while walking in a public park here in New York City. I'll send a copy of his recent letter to the congregation later this week, but their experience is simply another familiar example of a chilling societal trend we must acknowledge and loudly repudiate. Christians must be able to connect the dots.

Were the shootings in Atlanta motivated by racial stereotypes and the erotization of Asian women? Or was it simply a misogynistic attack on women? Or was it an attack on women who work in an industry that also employs sex workers? Early reports indicate a warped theology of sex and guilt played some role in the mind of the gunman. But anyone paying attention to racial issues in this country must conclude that race *always* plays a factor in every violent act against racial minorities, no matter how strenuously it may be denied.

Yet, if you're the child of one of the women killed, if you're a friend or a husband, all you know is that your life has been shattered. All you know is that a piece of yourself has been ripped from your body and it can never be the same. Yes, there is always the hope of healing, but the scars will remain, and you will always

walk with a limp. And the world will always feel just a little less safe. The shooting in Boulder, under very different circumstances, also expresses a deep and repressed hatred towards others. Fueled by ridiculously easy access to weapons, now only days later, the Boulder shooting has already been heaped onto the pile of other mass-casualty events in our memories—Columbine, Aurora—and our minds literally reel.

Now some might hope the preacher would not further trouble the hearts and minds of the congregation with memories of such terrifying events as we begin this Holy Week. What does all of this have to do with the Cross, you might ask? A cross stands in the middle of our faith and in the midst of our world. It is a stark reminder of the suffering our God endured and the love which he expressed. It is, at once, the most savage of symbols and the holiest of hopes. The Cross is not only an historic event but an on-going reality.

Elisabeth-Ann Steward writes:

For Christians, the cross is a sacred symbol which reminds us not only of the broken body of Jesus, but also of his great love in the face of wanton cruelty. For many, the cross is also a reminder that we need to die to self so as to rise above our selfish inclinations. Passion plays, the Stations of the Cross, the readings of the Passion narrative are some of the devotions which help us to walk with Jesus on his journey to Golgatha. Each of us is called to enter the Passion of Christ in the context of our own lives; each of us has our own Passion to endure.<sup>i</sup>

So, let us each enter into our own Passion. Let us understand that our own Passion is inescapably entwined with the Passion of others in their losses and in their humiliations, especially with those among us who are the victims of a persistent and virulent racism.

And, at the foot of this Cross this year, let us not merely wait and watch; but let us pray, and then let us act.

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<sup>i</sup> Elisabeth-Anne Stewart, "Sunday BibleTalk," March, 2015 from *Synthesis, Year B, Palm Sunday*, March 25<sup>th</sup>, 2018, p. 4

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