



Crossings

Church of the Holy Cross ✠ Episcopal
875 Cotton Street, Shreveport, Louisiana
August 3, 2022

Services (until further notice)

Please see calendar.

The Vestry

David Richard, Senior Warden
Ginger Paul, Junior Warden
Becky Snodgrass, Secretary
Tommie Sue Brooks
Georgiana Gleason
Lyman McKellar
Marshall Middleton
Reid Raymond
Jackie Songy
Monty Walford, Treasurer
(non-vestry)

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Church of the Holy Cross
Shreveport

Contact the Editor

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The Masterpiece of the Old Testament

What are we to make of God after reading stories like the one about the destruction of Sodom?

God would indeed go on to destroy Sodom for its wickedness, but true to his word, he directed out the one righteous family in the city,

Abraham's nephew Lot, and his family. It seems harsh to us. Much like the story of the flood, and the final plague over Egypt, the destruction of Sodom stands out in our collective imagination. Not least because of the unfortunate association of the supposed sin of Sodom with what we once called sodomy.

In our Bible study classes, we have been talking about the times in which the Bible tells us people were killed either on God's orders or in God's name. Why would God do that? My initial response to these questions is, "That's above my pay grade." And it is. But I think it's important to frame how we think about this story and all of the stories in the Bible that we might find unsavory.

There are three questions I want you to remember to ask yourselves whenever you come across stories such as these:

1. Do you find God's behavior to be morally dubious or wrong?
2. If you, in your limited, human viewpoint think so, do you think it's possible that God, in his infinite loving-kindness might also think so?
3. If so, then what is the larger point this story is trying to convey?

For instance, in the Book of Joshua, God commands the Israelites to go into the land of Canaan and clear it out of all its inhabitants. And Joshua reports that this is exactly what they did. A massive genocide. A harem. "Leave alive nothing that breathes." But then, just a few verses later, we find instructions on how to live in the land with the Canaanites, principally that they're not to marry them. Also, modern archaeology has all but proven that there was no Canaanite genocide.



Might it be that this small, fledgling nation would do some PR in the telling of its history? Look what we can do! Look what our God can do! Don't invade us. You wouldn't want to end up like Sodom now, would you?

So if the point of these stories is not God's cavalier destruction of entire cities, what then is the point? The point is that moral depravity is bad, and those who do it, even to the extent of whole civilizations, will reap what they sow. What do you think is the end result of a city which collectively wants to gang rape two angels? In this story, it's fire raining down from heaven. In history, it's societal collapse, civil war.

But just saying that is not enough. Case in point, you will probably not remember this sermon in ten years, or maybe even one year. But the story of Sodom has been remembered for three thousand years. These stories, especially in Genesis, exist as artful, masterful stories filled with literary and poetic genius. And surely they are the works of people inspired by God. Why on earth would we read these carefully and faithfully written, edited, and curated texts and think, "Gosh, God sure seems awful!"

Christians need to understand that the purpose of the Bible is not to be a history book like you have in school. The dates might be off. The principal actors and actions might vary depending on who's telling the story. If God had meant for the Bible to be read like a history textbook, it would. And since it doesn't, why would we read it as such?

For example, the story of Sodom's destruction mirrors two earlier stories in Genesis. If that were sheer happenstance, that would be neat. But if it's the intentional work of an author, maybe there's something we should be paying attention to.

Lot's visitation by angels is an exact mirroring of Abraham's visitation by the angels that we read in Bible study. Also, the destruction of Sodom is an exact mirroring of the flood story. In both, God sets out to destroy a wicked populace; in one it's with water, in another it's with fire. A family is picked out of the destruction to carry on. And they both end with the father-figure getting drunk and being sexually violated by his children.

There's a lot to unpack there. I could go on and on about the cyclical nature of societies toward self-destruction, the need for moral fortitude in the face of such destruction, the shame of even the righteous falling prey to losing their moral compass, and so forth. But instead, the question that most often surrounds this and other stories is, "Why would God do that?" My brothers and sisters in Christ, why would *we* do that?

We throw up our hands, stained with the blood of millions, and point our finger at God and say, "How could you?" when we are not willing to lift a finger even to save ourselves. How could God flood the world? we say, as sea levels continue to rise because of us. How can God rain fire on Sodom? we say, as each summer continues to be the hottest on record because of us. Why would God turn Lot's wife into a pillar of salt just for looking back? we ask, frozen in nostalgia, pining for "the way it was when I was growing up," salty about our present circumstances.

The beauty we so often see in the masterpiece that is the Old Testament is how the writers managed to hold up a mirror, not just to their society, but to all of humanity. So why is the Bible so full of these kinds of stories? Because we are full of these things: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, along with greed (which is idolatry), anger, wrath, malice, slander. And many of the stories we read in the Bible—particularly, but not exclusively, in the Old Testament—are there to warn us about who we will become if we follow that path.

The prophets knew this, and they knew it well. The prophet Ezekiel, directly addressing the city of Jerusalem, compares her to her sister Sodom. I recommend that you go read Chapter 16 in its entirety. Here is an excerpt:

How sick is your heart, says the Lord God. . . . As I live, says the Lord God, your sister Sodom; and her daughters have not done as you and your daughters have done. This was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy. They were haughty, and did abominable things before me; therefore I removed them when I saw it. Samaria has not committed have your sins; you have committed more abominations than they, and have made your sisters appear righteous by all the abominations that you have committed. (Ezekiel 16:30, 48-51)



Why would God do that?

It's not God who's bloodthirsty, it's us. It's a fact that never escapes me at every Eucharist I attend. It's not God who wants to break us. We want to break each other. We can't help ourselves. And so in the midst of our self-

destruction, God places himself before us and says, “Break me. You who hunger for the flesh of your fellow man and thirst for his blood, here, eat and drink.” We are the crowd of Sodomites hammering away at a cross-shaped door.

We long for a scapegoat to take away our sins. We pick a group and blame them. It’s the Jews. It’s the Blacks. It’s the immigrants. It’s the communists. It’s the Muslims. It’s the Mexicans. It’s the gays. It’s everybody who ain’t me and mine. And God shows up and says, “It’s me.” And so, as we’ve done from the foundation of the world until today, we laid our hands on our scapegoat and hoisted him up on his cross.

But to our surprise, this time it was different. Because this time we were forced to see that we weren’t doing this to please God. We were doing this to please ourselves. This time our sacrifice was God. And there at the cross, our centurion reached out his spear to get one last jab at the person we want to blame the most, and like the flood, like the fire raining down on Sodom, blood and water burst from his side down upon us. Destroying our wickedness if we will let him.

Why would God do that?

Fr. Garrett Boyte

The Continuing Feast will be a Spaghetti Feast to welcome our new Organist/Choirmaster Ben Gessner

Benjamin “Ben” Gessner will be the honoree at The Continuing Feast next Sunday, August 7. He has joined Holy Cross as Organist/Choirmaster, and although we will greatly miss Bruce Power, who will be enjoying a well-deserved retirement, we welcome Ben Gessner and are eager to get to know him.



On Sunday, August 7, we’ll welcome him with a spaghetti lunch prepared by the Holy Cross Kitchen Crew. Although this is the usual day for the Continuing Feast potluck lunch, **this time you need not prepare any dishes.** The Kitchen Crew will provide spaghetti, salad, garlic bread, and desserts. Bring your appetite, and help us welcome Ben Gessner to Holy Cross!

If you care to donate to cover the cost of the food, you are more than welcome to do so.



Calendar for August

Saturdays	Evening Prayer, Rite II	6:00 pm	Online
Sundays	Morning Prayer, Rite II	9:00 am	Chapel
	Parish Choir rehearsal	9:45 am	Nave
	Holy Eucharist, Rite II	11:00 am	Nave
Mondays, Tuesdays	Evening Prayer, Rite II	6:00 pm	Online
Wednesdays	Book Club	10:30 am	Library
	Holy Eucharist, Rite II	Noon	Chapel
	Evening Prayer, Rite II	6:00 pm	Nave and online
	Bible Study	6:30 pm	Library
Thursdays, Fridays	Evening Prayer, Rite II	6:00 pm	Online
Sunday, August 7	Spaghetti feast to welcome our new organist/choirmaster	after the 11:00 service	Undercroft
Tuesday, August 16	Vestry meeting	6:00 pm	Library

Children's Sunday School will resume after Labor Day

Prayer List

Steve Abramson Stella Rhea Bergman Ellen Dunlop Belote Mark Boydston Nikki Brown Mary Berth Margaret Boudreaux Sara Lou Coyle John Craig Drew Dodson Family Jean Dooley Deanna Dyck Floyd "Buzzy" Farrar Maggie Fowle Wes Gearhart	John August Gianforte Austin Gleason Richard Hadwin Sandra Hadwin Mike Hathaway Zoe Hathaway Ann-Marie Henderson Kay Hunnel Kay Hunter Elizabeth Ingram Peggy Kirkland and family David Lewis Richard Liles Maureen Locke Mim McCoy	Della McCranie Michael McKenzie Jesse Paul Kelly Rutz Brady Sessions Mary Ann Shemwell Wade Shemwell Linda Sirman and family Angela Smith Paul Smith Catherine Spaht Paul Spaht Robert Todd Cynthia Walker Louis Wallace	David Walsh Connie Wiggins Bill Wright Mary Wright Sheryl Wright The people of Ukraine Survivors of gun violence The faculty, staff, students, administration, and parents of Northwest Louisiana parish schools
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We pray for those who serve and are served by Holy Cross Villas and Holy Cross Villas West.

In the diocesan cycle of prayer, we pray for St. Luke's, Jennings, the Rev. John Clark (Phyllis); for Ascension, Lafayette, the Rev. Joseph Daly, the Rev. Deacon Honey Becker, the Rev. Andrew Christiansen (Rachel), the Rev. Jordan Hylden (Emily +); and for St. Barnabas, Lafayette, the Rev. Michael Bordelon (Lauren).

Say Ministries

The Ninth Sunday after Pentecost: August 7, 2022

Lectors: Kirk Fontenot, Pembroke Roeder
Prayers of the People: Kirk Fontenot
Eucharistic Ministers: Robert Henley, Herschel Richard
Acolyte: Kris Jackson
Ushers: Carolyn Mahlen, Donna Neal
Altar Guild: Tommie Sue Brooks

The Tenth Sunday after Pentecost: August 14, 2022

Lectors: Robert Henley, David Richard
Prayers of the People: Robert Henley
Eucharistic Ministers: Robert Henley, Ginger Paul
Acolyte: Lindy Jackson
Ushers: Becky Snodgrass, Steve Snodgrass
Altar Guild: Tommie Sue Brooks, Ginger Paul

Holy Cross ECW

Don't forget:

Holy Cross Pickle-making

The making of the pickles will take place on Wednesday, October 12 at 10:00 am in the Undercroft. Volunteers are needed and welcome! Also, if anyone has the wide-mouth pickle jars left over from last year, please take them to the church.

Fall Festival

The Fall Festival will be held Saturday, November 5, from 10:00 am to 1:00 pm.

More information will be forthcoming about the need for baked goods and soup. Meanwhile, it isn't too early to gather up new or gently-used items to donate for the bazaar. They include:

Jewelry	Table linen	Scarves	Nicknacks
China	Flatware	Yard art	?????
Crystal	Pictures	Handcrafted items	
Books	Purses	Christmas decorations	



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Mission Statement: *The Church of the Holy Cross, Shreveport, Louisiana, strives to be the presence of Jesus Christ in our community and beyond, through worship of Almighty God, open inquiry, sharing fellowship, valued diversity, genuine inclusiveness, and servant leadership—encouraging all to exercise God’s gifts and calling as we share the Gospel of Hope in programs, to serve without regard for religious affiliation, race, or economic status.*



Hope House: There is an ongoing need for coffee, sugar, creamer, laundry detergent **pods**, disposable razors, and personal-size hygiene products (soap, shampoo, deodorant, etc.) Please take your donations to 762 Austen Place or to the church office. Thank you for your continued support.

Forward Day by Day for **August** and **September**, in both standard and large-print editions, is available in the Narthex and the Undercroft.

The Most Rev. Michael B. Curry, Ph.D., D. D.
The Rt. Rev. Jacob Owensby, Ph.D., D. D.
The Rev. J. Garrett Boyte, M.Div.
The Rev. Mary Richard
The Rev. Kenneth W. Paul
The Rev. Donald D. Heacock
Mr. Bruce Power
Mrs. Laurie Connell
Mr. Charles Alford
Mr. Brian Jackson

XXVII Presiding Bishop
IV Bishop of Western Louisiana
Rector
Rector Emerita
Rector Emeritus
Director, Holy Cross Child Placement Agency
Organist-Choirmaster
Office Administrator
Sexton
Assistant Sexton