

Year B - 3rd Sunday of Easter – 15 April 2018
Praying for Humboldt

This morning we gather on the 3rd Sunday of Easter, in a season of new hope, resurrection, the belief in new life – everlasting life. And as we gather, particularly on this day, we are also taking time to step out of our normal ecclesial pattern to remember and stand in Christian solidarity with the Humboldt Broncos team – those who have died and those who are learning how to live again; with their families and friends; with their communities wherever they are found, and indeed, with our nation and the world ... This is a day that is very difficult, but it is also a day that fills us with joy, as we celebrate the gift of resurrection which those who have died are already experiencing.

On Tuesday, our Primate, Fred Hiltz sent this letter to the Anglican peoples in Canada:

With thousands of other Canadians, we watched CBC's coverage of the Vigil for all those impacted by the horrible Friday night crash that killed fifteen of the Humboldt Broncos Junior A Hockey Team and left the rest of the team with very serious injuries. As families grieve, a community grieves with them. As a community grieves, a nation grieves with them.

In the face of such tragedy as this people come together. In tears they embrace one another. They listen to messages of condolence and feel the sympathy offered. They join in prayer. Some bow their heads. Some lift their heads. Some close their eyes. Some look out as if to a distant horizon looking for the tender mercies of God. When invited to hold hands they do. They know their need for each other and for God. They share their pain and seek comfort through one another and in the balm of God's kindness.

That vigil in the arena that is home to the Humboldt Broncos was preparation for what will be a very hard week...a hard week for that community and several others where funerals will be held, a very hard week for the world of hockey. Let us then remember in our prayers all those who will conduct these services and all those to whom they are ministering.

As we pray for those who have died and for their families in anguish and sorrow at this time let us also pray for those who survived the crash and for their families who keep vigil at their bedsides. Let us remember the medical teams who are tending to their sons and brothers and all who support them through their presence and professional care. Pray too for the young men whose beds are positioned in a way that enables them to hold hands so bravely in their fight for life.

And finally let us remember before God those called to Emergency Health Services and to Policing Services. Collectively known as The First Responders in the wake of tragedies, they face carnage and chaos with great courage. They do all they can to save lives and they indeed do save many. They go about their work with an efficiency of skill that is remarkable. But they also go about it with a huge heart for serving those in crisis. They know trauma and its immediate and lingering impact. They know it for individuals, families, and communities. They know it for themselves too. They work, and they weep...they weep, and they work time and again.

As we turn our hearts to the very wide community of the Humboldt Broncos, we turn them to God in prayer for mercy and comfort in the midst of their deep sorrow.

In all we see and hear and think and feel in a time like this we are reminded of the simplicity yet full measure of our faith in God and our care for one another. We have come to know that faith and care as The Summary of The Law. In response to a question concerning the greatest of all the commandments Jesus said, "The Lord our God, the Lord is one; and you shall love the Lord you God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this, "you shall love your neighbour as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these." (Mark 12:29-31)

In these and all our days we pray,
"Lord, have mercy upon us and write both these your laws in our hearts." Fred Hiltz

There may be some of you who do not understand why the Church would expect that we might take time to remember and pray about this tragedy when there are so many that we seemingly do not stop to recognize. To you I would say that we need to stop and share in grief with those who are in pain. We reach out to them, and indeed we reach out to one another, for support and hope and comfort for those who have so recently died but also for those we have lost and for whom this tragedy calls up again tragedies and losses that have gone before. As Christians it is our responsibility and privilege to come alongside others – individuals or even whole communities – who need to know that they are not alone. And so, we gather, we remember, we mourn, and we celebrate that we are a people of an Easter Hope. Where we see tragedy and loss, we will also see resurrection and hope.

This is also our time to witness and learn of what God's great forgiveness and grace can be in a time that seems senseless and hopeless.

The deaths of 16 people are not the only tragedies that have occurred. There has also been the painful presence of despair and hope being tossed about in what seems like a senseless thing. While each of the families are deep in the grief that is theirs to carry for some time, there is also the dichotomy of love and loss that is being experienced by the two families who learned that their worlds were turned upside down twice.

By a mistake made with no malice or ill intent, one family was informed that their son had perished while another was given the hope that their son had survived. When the true identities of these two boys was revealed, one family was thrown into a new kind of despair having lost their son after all, and the other was given what must have seemed like the miracle of new life when they learned their son was still alive.

While it would be understandable if these two families felt anger and pain toward one another, that is not how they are choosing to grieve and to continue. They have chosen to support one another in both their loss and in their relief. Rather than allowing this tragedy to rip them apart, they are instead intentionally supporting one another through a time for which there can not really be any words.

While they have chosen to support one another privately, the world can only look on and wonder. Why are they supporting one another? How are they not turning instead to anger and

hate? How do they celebrate the gift of life retained while also mourning the loss of life taken so quickly?

The truth of our faith is that this is exactly what each and every one of us is called to as a Christian. We are not given an easy time of it. God does not single out believers to ensure that they get the best experiences and have special protections from the worst of life. God does not make life easy for us, but God does give us the gift of hope in Jesus Christ, the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the fellowship and support of community, which all shares with us the burden of carrying ourselves through the difficult times. As Christians we know we never walk alone. We know that there will always be a place to which we can come for solace; there will always be others – near and far, friend and stranger – who will pray for us not because we deserve or even ask for prayer but simply because that is what Christians do for one another. And we know, in that place in our hearts that knows, that God is always with us, the Holy Spirit is always comforting us, and Jesus Christ is always offering to us eternal life and the hope that comes with living as a Resurrection People. And in those times when we forget those truths, it will be the Christian community to which we belong, and even communities we have never met, who will hold that truth for us until we are ready and able to claim it once again.

Today we pray, and we celebrate the Eucharist – the gift that is the Body and Blood of Christ – that tides us over, so to speak, until we can be present before Christ in eternal life – and we do this in solidarity with each of the 29 members of the Humboldt Broncos Team. We do this in solidarity with the community of Humboldt, Saskatchewan and every community from which those young people came. We do this in solidarity with people across this Nation and around the world who have chosen to stand together to offer support and hope and peace.

Today the world remembers those who have died and those who are in mourning, but today we also stand side by side in the promise that there will come a day when there will be no mourning but only rejoicing.

As we are worshipping in the manner of the Book of Common Prayer this day, I think it fitting that we pray these words:

O heavenly Father, whose Blessed Son Jesus Christ did weep at the grave of Lazarus, his friend: Look, we beseech thee, with compassion upon those who are now in sorrow and affliction; comfort them, O Lord, with thy gracious consolations; make them to know that all things work together for good to them that love thee; and grant them evermore sure trust and confidence in thy fatherly care; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Almighty God, Father of all mercies and giver of all comfort: Deal graciously, we pray thee, with those who mourn, that casting every care of thee, they may know the consolation of thy love; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

O Almighty God, the God of the spirits of all flesh: Multiply, we beseech thee, to those who rest in Jesus, the manifold blessings of thy love, that the good work which thou didst begin in them may be perfected unto the day of Jesus Christ. And of thy mercy, O heavenly Father, grant that we,

who now serve thee here on earth, may at the last, together with them, be partakers of the inheritance of the Saints in light; for the sake of the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

I invite you to stop at the table at the Chancel steps, after you have received Communion, to take time and sign a card which will be sent to the Anglican Churches of the Parish of Humboldt, Saskatchewan. They will be one of many communities reaching out in prayer and support, and we, in turn, need to support them in their efforts as well.