

## **These Lives Are Precious**

A sermon preached at Niles Discovery Church, Fremont, California,  
on Epiphany Sunday, January 3, 2021, by the Rev. Jeffrey Spencer.

Scripture: [Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14](#)

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*During the weeks between Epiphany Sunday and the beginning of Lent, our sermons are being offered in four parts. First, we are sharing a video reflection and song by Richard Bruxvoort Colligan inspired by the scripture reading (a Psalm during this time), a reflection/sermon by one of the congregation's spiritual leaders, a testimony by a member of the church, and a time of quiet reflection while a simple video loops. All of these are knit together into one video that is posted on the Niles Discovery Church [website](#) and [YouTube channel](#).*

Because this Psalm was most likely written for and used at the coronation of a king, it's easy to distance myself from it. It is a prayer for a national leader, a plea to God to guide the leader in the ways of justice, compassion, and peace. And I am not a national leader, so the Psalm doesn't seem to be about me.

Because I live in largely privileged life – I'm white, middle-class, middle-aged, cisgender man with an advanced degree – the prayer doesn't seem to be about me, either. I'm not one of the oppressed who needs this leader's protection. I'm not one of the poor crying out who need rescue. Since society has already decided that I am privileged, I do not need my blood, my life to be viewed as precious.

Or so I think.

The fact of the matter is that all people (and that includes me) are yearning for protection, nurture, compassion, even rescue for some reason or other. All of us are vulnerable. While we may be vulnerable to different forces and dangers, that doesn't change the fact that we're all vulnerable. And because the things to which we are vulnerable change throughout our lives, our need for protection and tender care change with them.

Did you catch the line in Richard's Psalm Song, "Help the one whose neck is being stepped on"? I immediately thought of George Floyd. And then I started thinking about more metaphoric ways that necks are stepped on. People who live in violent and abusive households and communities. People for whom a \$600 stimulus check may be the difference between eating and not at the end of the month. People who are marginalized by all the "isms" from which our society suffers. The fact of the matter is that the social order, the status quo, the political system is responsible – just as it was when the Psalm was written, and just as it was in Jesus' day – for the oppression the Psalm calls us to end.

Diana Butler Bass, in her forthcoming book *Freeing Jesus*, writes that when people chose to follow Jesus two-thousand years ago, their lives changed. They had to leave "their jobs and surrender their social standing to eat with him. Children, slaves, soldiers, peasants, fishermen, farmers, prisoners, the sick, the blind, the lame – when they encountered Jesus, they found salvation, the wholeness, the healing, the oneness with God that had only been the stuff of longing. Every miracle, every act of hospitality, all the bread

broken and wine served, everything that Jesus did saved people long before Rome arrested and murdered him.

“It was all this loving and healing and saving that got him in trouble with authorities. He was not killed so his death could save people; he was killed because he was already saving them. He threatened a world based in fear, one held in the grip of Roman imperialism, by proving that a community could gather in love, set a table of plenty, and live in peace with a compassionate God. Jesus did at-one-ment long before being nailed to a cross. At-one-ment was the reason the authorities did away with him. No empire can stand if the people it oppresses figure out that reconciliation, love, liberation, and oneness hold more power than the sword. So Rome lynched Jesus: tortured him and hung him on a tree.”<sup>1</sup>

Viewing all lives as precious is countercultural. It is revolutionary. Just imagine what our country would be like if caring and compassion were the organizing principles of our society.

I caught the very end of a radio program yesterday. I don't know what it was, and I don't think it matters. It's the tagline at the end of the show that caught me, that stays with me: “Take care of yourself. And if you can, take care of someone else, too.” This seems to be to be good advice and very much in keeping with our Psalm, for it recognizes that each of our lives is precious.

As you do this work of taking care of yourself, and of someone else, if you're able, I encourage you to remember that God is holding your life.

Would you sing with me?

*God is holding your life. God is holding your life.*

*God is holding your life, we believe.*

*God is holding your life. God is holding your life.*

*God is holding your life, we believe.*

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<sup>1</sup> Diana Butler Bass, in her forthcoming book *Freeing Jesus*, posted on Twitter, <https://twitter.com/dianabutlerbass/status/1345499256304656384> (posted and accessed 2 January 2021).