20th Sunday after Pentecost

Friday afternoon I took a tour. Down St. Clair to E. 55th, by the Hofbrau House on to St. Paul Lutheran Hunger Center. After a quick tour of the Center, the thirty of us hopped back on the Lolly the Trolley bus that transported us and proceeded down E. 55. Past Hough, and Chester, and Carnegie we went. We drove past the corner where Kevin Mack was arrested for buying crack. When we came to Woodlawn we turned left, traveled a few blocks until we came to the Denise McNair New Life Center, across the street from the King, Kennedy Public Housing Project.

Inside the New Life Center, we heard how things had been in the projects. We heard how vacant rooms had been taken over by crack dealers, how children had to step over addicts shooting up in the hallways, smoking crack, the bodies of those killed in gun battles. We heard about the elderly who regularly had their doors kicked in by thieves who would beat and rob. They told us of the school across the way where for twelve years no children had been allowed outside for recess. Too dangerous.

It is not hard to imagine the words of the prophet Habakkuk which we read a few moments ago, still 2500 years later racing their way to the throne of God. "O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and thou wilt not hear? Or cry to thee, Violence! and thou wilt not save? Why dost thou make me see wrongs and look upon trouble? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. And the law is slackened and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous and justice goes forth perverted.

These words were first written 2500 years ago. Wickedness ruled, the weak were being crushed. And crying out to God. And there was no answer.

The prophet did this. He stationed himself in a tower, searching for what God would say, and this is the answer he received:

"Behold he whose soul is not upright in him shall fall, but the righteous shall live by his faith." In the midst of the violence and the suffering and the injustice, the Lord called the righteous to faith.
Written at the top of the blackboard in the Denise McNair New Life Center was just that word, Faith. This was the name of the drug treatment program taught there. For everyone who wanted to escape the slavery of crack, the vision granted to Habakkuk still rules today, the righteous shall live by his faith.

For everyone who cries out to him, the Almighty God calls to faith. The wicked will fail, the violent who feed upon the weak and the powerless, they will not have the last word. This Jesus Christ is our guarantee, our promise of that. When every violence had been done to him, when he took all injustice upon himself, God raised him from the dead as a sign for all time that the Lord will have his way. If it seem slow, wait for it, the prophet was told, it will surely come, it will not delay. For the prophet it was the vision of what was to come, it hastens to the end, the Lord told him, it will not lie. For us it, the vision, has become he, our Lord who is coming again. Jesus Christ who forgives sinners and gathers the poor, Jesus Christ is coming again. Every child in the projects and sufferer lying in hospital bed, and griever tearfully letting go of a loved on claimed by death, is called by God to faith in Jesus who is coming.

Martin Luther, for who the beginning was this very verse, the Righteous shall live by faith, Martin Luther taught this about dealing with violence. When I am struck by another, I turn the other cheek. But when I see my neighbor being struck, I take up the sword for his protection.

Each of us is called to faith, the Lord our sole defense. But God may raise you up as the defense of the defenceless. And whether or not you know it that is just what he has done.

Lutheran Metropolitan Ministries began a program across the street from
the King Kennedy Project. The program was to provide jobs for men getting out of jail. A new beginning, new life. Friday they bussed us down there not so that we could hear about how awful things were, but to hear how we were supporting the work of defending the poor.

Today, the elderly do not have their doors broken down in the project because men in red coats walk the halls. And cars are not regularly attacked there on Woodland Boulevard because men in Red coats scare away the thieves. And in the project empty rooms are now boarded up so that drugs can no longer be dealt in them because men in red coats do the boarding and see they stay that way. And the elementary school that for years had no recess outside now holds recess each day, protected by the men in the red coats.

Dick Seering, head of Lutheran Metropolitan Ministries along with Hallel Jones, a former prison inmate put that program together. God has begun to answer the cries of the people. ExOffenders

Last year 200 ex prisoners entered the Community Reentry Program. Three of the 200 went back to jail.

Through our contributions to Laos we support this program and many others. We fight for our neighbors in need, God answers their cry through us. Thanks be to God.

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Until our Lord comes again there will be injustice. And Violence, and people crying out to God for help. Until our Lord Comes again he sends us to be that help, to call people to faith, to fight injustice, May God grant us faith to do just that. Amen.