

Those of you who have been following the news this week may have seen the photos of last Friday night’s “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville, Virginia. If so, you will have seen images of clean-cut young White men with tiki torches marching and chanting “blood and soil, blood and soil.”



I didn’t know until this week that “blood and soil” was a Nazi ideology, a Nazi belief. The idea here is that one’s ethnicity or race (one’s blood) and the land (home territory) that one’s people possess can restore a nation to greatness.

Hmmmm. That concept worked out really well for the Nazis, didn’t it? The concept of “blood and soil” is that “back to the land,” or rural living and closing ourselves off to outsiders will restore us to some romanticized view of the past. I say “romanticized” because “blood and soil” hides a few more things within the concept: racism, anti-Semitism, sexism, homophobia, religious intolerance, and ethnic cleansing, to name just a few.

Did you notice how very young the marchers were? AND the counter protesters? We clergy persons, we were the oldsters in attendance, with a mission to be a calm, rational, stabilizing, and prayerful presence. We were Jews, Muslim, Buddhists, and Christians of many denominations, who for the most part were greatly older than those we were there to serve. We marveled, because most of the many clergy present haven’t seen a 20-something-year-old in our places of worship, unless visiting “blood” on home “soil.” So here, I thought, was THEIR altar: on the cusp between “blood and soil” and the message proclaimed on a banner over our heads across the street: “our diversity makes us stronger.”

With this background, given the events of last weekend and this week unfolding around us, is there any wonder that everywhere I looked in today’s lessons I saw “blood and soil?”

Our Old Testament lesson, for example, continues the story of Joseph, the fourth generation of the patriarchs of our faith. Last week we heard that Joseph was sold by his older brothers—his “blood”—into slavery onto foreign “soil.” Why? Because their father loved his youngest child

the best, had even given Joseph a special coat, long-sleeved the lesson said, one that made clear that THIS SON wasn't expected to do any work.

Wasn't Joseph extra special? Just ask him! Tattling on his brothers to Dad. Dreaming about the future. Telling his older brothers that they would bow down to him. As if! So, when the chance arose, the brothers sold Joseph into slavery in Egypt and told their father that he had been killed by a wild animal.

In today's lesson, Joseph's dream had come to pass. Joseph had seen a famine coming and had helped the Egyptians store up enough grain to last until the famine was over. And now here were Joseph's brothers, bowing down to him and asking him for food.

Joseph's response was forgiveness and reconciliation. No blame. No recriminations. “You are my people, my blood,” he told them. “I forgive you and I will share my new soil with you. What I have is yours.”

In this way, we see God doing what God always seems to do: overturn the expected order of things. The younger will rule the older. The smaller will beat the giant. The blind will see better than the sighted. I could go on and on, but you get the idea.

We know that God actually DOES love some more than others. God loves the very ones we despise more than the people we love, more even than us. This shouldn't trouble us in the least, because God loves US INFINITELY, and others “more infinitely.” But we act as if God's love is in limited supply and we try to rid our soil, if not our planet, of the people we think are more favored than us. And if we can't get rid of the people, maybe we just try to hide them. You know, make them invisible again.

For example, did you notice last week that Joseph's coat is no longer described as “many colored?” No rainbow coat, no reminder of the covenant after the flood. THAT, we are told, was the translation of only the Septuagint. No, the coat was “long sleeved,” if translated properly. Really? Or are we trying to hide rainbow-colored things in the Bible because of the cultural connotations of rainbows in our time?

We try to erase God's love for all, to make God's understanding of “blood” match our own. If we make our soil small enough, we can become the big person in that world, again.

Why do we do this, over and over again? Here's my theory. There is something that exists (for lack of a better word) whose existence cannot be explained because its existence isn't

logical. This existence is “No-Thing,” as the German theologian Karl Barth said, the very chaos that God pushed aside at creation. The goal of No-Thing is to undo creation. And No-Thing is very good at finding the fault lines in our human operating system to pit us against each other.

One of our prominent fault lines is where we must choose between “blood and soil” and letting the stranger in. Our gospel lesson today tells of an incident when Jesus confronted his own urge to claim “blood and soil.” A foreign woman—a Palestinian woman we would call her today—dared to approach Jesus and ask him to heal her daughter. The woman knew full well who Jesus was, too, because she called him “Son of David,” his Messianic title.

Jesus responded, “Blood and soil, blood and soil, blood and soil,” and in a rather un-nice way. Jesus called the woman a “dog” and said he was here for only his own blood, thank you very much. In the end, though, the woman’s great faith won Jesus’ admiration and unleashed his love and compassion and healing.

“Blood and soil” lost round one that day. And “blood and soil” lost permanently on the day the Son of David rose from the dead. On THAT day Christ’s blood became the only blood that counts, and the “soil” of the Kingdom of God the only sure place to stand.



There’s a reason I’ve spent today talking about “blood and soil” [looking around at all the backpacks on the altar stuffed with school supplies ready to be blessed]. I know that you have already staked a claim to the blood of Christ and the soil of heaven. And I’m counting on you to continue to ACT, not politically but together across the “blood and soil” line to

witness to God’s greater love for “not us” than “us.” From our very first days in this Commonwealth of Virginia during massive resistance to integration, in an area of our City where immigrants are but can barely afford to live, Church of the Resurrection has always been a place that recognizes the Other as our true kin. Here we share the Blood of Christ, the Soil of Salvation. How shall we share THIS blood and THIS soil together to a world of young adults who may never enter our doors?