



Now is the Hour to Help Someone Fly
March 21, 2021: The Sunday of Passion – Palm Sunday
The Rev. Nick Morris-Kliment
Christ Episcopal Church, Needham, MA

Oh Lord: Take our minds and think through them; take our mouths and speak through them; take our hearts, and set them on. Amen.

Some time ago, I saw a wonderful movie called *Fly Away Home*. Based on a true story, a teenaged girl stumbles upon a nest of abandoned goose eggs. Since the first thing a newly hatched goose sees is imprinted on its brain as the mother figure, the girl becomes the mother figure to these geese. The geese come to live with her and her father. They even sleep and shower with her.

But they can't fly. And when a local conservation officer threatens to confiscate the geese, she needs to figure out what to do.

Amy and her father running around flapping their hands doesn't work to get them to fly.

Patching together a motorized hang glider, the father flies past them. That doesn't work, either.

The next step becomes clear. The hour has come.

Amy's father teaches her to fly a motorized hang glider, painted to look like a large goose.

Sure enough, the birds follow her into the air. She and her father then lead the birds along their traditional migratory path to North Carolina. When the father crashes, Amy leads the last stretch, successfully, by herself.

It is a crazy, life threatening adventure, an amazing story. There is a lot of narrative tension. But when the moment comes – it is clear. The time has come. Those birds need to fly. Only one person can teach them, and she risks her life to do it.

In the Gospel today, Jesus announces that the hour has come to glorify God. In John's Gospel, this means his death and resurrection, which bring life, which free people to fly away from hate, toward love. He will be lifted up and draw all people to him.

Up to this point, the Gospel writer makes it clear that despite the fact that people wanted either to kill Jesus or to crown him king, no one laid hands on him –because his time, his hour had not come.

The tipping point is the arrival of Greeks—that is to say, Passover pilgrims from far away, signifying that Jesus' message has spread beyond Judea. They want to see Jesus. His mission to lift the world out of hate into love has gone out into the world. God so loved the world; the time has come, for him to die, and, to be lifted up.



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Most of us have probably had moments like this. Fish or cut bait moments. We can stay grounded, tethered to our past, or we can be free to fly into life. We can let others around us remain small and powerless, or we use our power to help them rise.

I remember when my wife and I were courting. We came to a point in our relationship where she said to me, “How much more information do you need?” The hour had come to fly.

A more momentous example is the moment Rosa Parks decided that she simply was not going get to up from her seat in that bus. The risk she, and others, took, the sacrifices they made, allowed her people and others to fly, to be lifted up.

The hour comes, and we have to make a decision. Jesus says today that he will be lifted up, and he will draw all people to himself, released from our bondage. Do we trust that?

For most of us, these decisions are not going to make history. They are decisions that are made quietly, without fanfare, day by day. That involve sacrifice.

The key word is sacrifice but sacrifice properly understood. Thomas Merton wrote that, “True sacrifice is not measured primarily by the pain suffered or inflicted, but by the barriers that are broken down and unity that is achieved.”

What Jesus’ life tells us, is that this kind of decision to die, is actually a decision to live, and to help others live.

I can’t believe I am about to speak from the pulpit again about a mass shooting, but four young women from Needham High School made sure that I did.

Yesterday, I attended a vigil at the Town Hall in support of East Asian, South Asian, and Pacific Islander Americans in the wake of the horrific shootings in Atlanta earlier this week. The Common was as packed as Covid protocols would allow. We heard from, among others, Asian Americans at the high school, long time Asian American members of the Needham community, and an elderly Asian American couple from North Hill, all describing both their experiences, and ways they were working to fight anti-Asian racism. They were asking us to do the same, to be allies.

No matter how one interprets the murders in Atlanta their fears and vulnerabilities have a basis in fact and experience. In truth, we in the United States have a long, deep, and under-reported tradition of legal bias, hostility, and violence toward people of Asian descent, reaching back to the 1850s.

A cameraman from Channel 7 asked me, “Why are you here? You’re not Asian.” Fortunately, most of my mumblings remain on the cutting room floor. If I’d had my wits about me, I would have said, “I’m here to be an ally, to show up for our neighbors who are scared and angry. I’m here to learn how to love my



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neighbor, to learn what little pieces of me need to die, what risks I need to take, in order for my neighbors to have new life, to feel safe and free to fly. I want them to see Jesus.”

This is not a political statement. It’s a human statement. It’s a Baptismal Covenant statement. We listen to those who are in pain, as Jesus did, who tell us they are scared, who have experienced hateful speech and actions, and ask what we can do to help them feel free to fly.

The hour is now. For most of us, all that has to die, to begin with, all that we risk to free others in this hour, is just the bit time needed to start reading, to start listening, and then decide that the hour has come to act. Because we want new life for ourselves, and our neighbors; we want all of us to fly, to be lifted up with Jesus.

Amen.