

**Easter 7**

**Sunday after Robb Elementary School Massacre, Uvalde, TX**

**Memorial Day Weekend**

Acts 16:16-34

Psalm 97

Revelation 22:12-14,16-17, 20-21

John 17:20-26

Title

I begin by taking a moment to acknowledge the hurt in the world. The hurt that sits with those of you joining us online. The hurt carried by those of us in this room.

I want to take a moment to acknowledge what I imagine is true for many of us here: that we gather together today feeling tired, sad, angry, and scared.

Wherever we are, whatever we are feeling, let's bless that. Let us bless our *real* selves and our *real* feelings and the *real* moments of this world as we come hurtling into another week. Another day. Another hour.

Let us bless our *reality* without pretense or performance.

I invite you to join me in closing your eyes, taking a slow, deep breath, and feeling yourself drop into your body. Taking another deep breath, feel yourself sit deeper into God's embrace.

Let us lament with all those who are touched by gun violence  
Let us lament the shooter's choice for violence  
Let us lament laws that allow violent men easy access to guns  
Let us lament this nation's politicians' cowardice and complicity that  
    stymie the effort of those who work for change  
Let us lament with the hearts broken by loss —  
    today, yesterday, or years ago  
Let us lament all the lives cut short by gun violence, poverty, and  
    oppression  
Let us lament, O God,  
    and then let us rise from our knees to work for change  
In the name of Christ, the prince of peace.<sup>1</sup>

The world *is on fire*, literally and figuratively. And for many of us, our water buckets are low or empty. Our fuse boxes are overloaded and there simply is not enough room or power to plug in another thing. And yet, there is no stemming the flow of that which needs our attention, our prayers, and our righteous anger.

Breathe in the gift of God's grace that it is okay to tend only what is yours to tend. To say what is yours to say. To care about what is yours to care about. Let it fill you. Let it flow through you, a blessing to those you meet.

---

<sup>1</sup> adapted from The Rev. Dr. Ellen Clark-King, Executive Pastor and Canon for Social Justice (former), Grace Cathedral, San Francisco, CA.

We are living a vortex of swirling confusion. What was unthinkable has become expected. What had previously been understood as the moral high ground is now called out as unconscionable.

We, as a country — and even some of us as individuals — have been here before.

President Johnson's institution of the "Great Society."

Rogers and Hammerstein's *Cinderella* on living room televisions.

The New York World's Fair.

"The British Invasion" of The Beatles.

Space exploration.

Sandy Koufax's "Perfect Game."

The debut of Charles Schultz's "A Charlie Brown Christmas."

Bob Dylan.

The Voting Act of 1965.

The National Foundation of the Arts and Humanities Act.

The Water Quality Act.

Hurricane Betsy.

The death of Winston Churchill.

The over-boil of American involvement in Vietnam.

Draft card protests across college campuses.

Bloody Sunday.

Selma.

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

The assassination of Malcolm X.

A great optimism for a new dawning of American culture burdened by the weight of fear, hatred, and upheaval.<sup>2</sup>

We have been here before. We have stumbled and wrestled and fought and risked and risen to the occasion. And we have made it to the next shore.

1965 was nearly 60 years ago. Even so, we do not have to look long through news headlines to make connections — fortunate and unfortunate — with the social, political, and artistic culture of today.

Social, economic, racial, and gender inequalities and disparities ashamedly still exist in our culture. Activists voices — experienced and newly emerged — are being raised in protest. Leaders in political and social spheres occasionally pierce through the din with promises of change and pleas for hope.

Before we allow ourselves to fall backwards into deceptively comfortable partisan positions, let us be clear that the acts of social, political, and cultural resistance come to us directly out of The Bible; today's story from Acts as one example.

As Paul and Silas are making their way through the Roman colony of Philippi in Macedonia, we are introduced to a girl who is enslaved on

---

<sup>2</sup> Eric Christopher Perry and Brian Church. "Five Clippings from 1965," Renaissance Men. 1965, Eric Christopher Perry, 2015.

account of the economic gain her gift of fortune telling, provides her enslaver.

Paul, calls the spirit out of the girl, putting an end to her enslaver's revenue stream. Paul and Silas quickly find themselves thrown in jail, in the "innermost cell", feet fastened in stocks, on trumped up charges of, essentially, disturbing the peace — a crime most often reserved in prosecuting when it involves those who are different from those in positions of power.

Paul and Silas are dragged, attacked, stripped, beaten, flogged, and left to die.

And what do they do? They pray and sing hymns to God.

This Sunday's readings tell us of resistance to the *status quo* as a form of Christian discipleship. In the story from Acts, Paul and Silas resist the socioeconomic norm which would have us believe that economy is more important than humanity. Psalm 97 calls us to rejoice — always and everywhere no matter how grim things may seem, thereby resisting the "gods" of fatalism and despair.

We do not know what songs or hymns Silas and Paul sang that day and late into the night, but many of us do know something of the songs that were at the heart and soul of the Civil Rights Movement in this country.

As a someone with a past life as a Board Certified Music Therapist, I will attest that song — when music and words are paired together — has powers to communicate and infiltrate that far exceed either music or words alone. And so it comes to me as no surprise that the same power that gave strength to those who fought for their own and others rights and freedoms in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and '60s, would also bring liberation and healing to Paul, Silas, and their jailor and his family. Moving them closer to unity with one another, resisting the evils of isolation and segregation, calling them into communion with one another, as Christ and God are one.

On this day, as we mourn and remember those whose lives have been ended by the violence of guns and war, may we too find ways to join with others in song, praising God, trusting that the vortex of swirling confusion is not ours alone to stay; that with God's help, Christ's love, and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit we will come to that place unified in love of God, of neighbor, and of self.

Let us pray.

Living God, long ago, faithful women and men proclaimed the good news of Jesus' resurrection, and the world was changed forever: Teach us to keep faith with them, that our witness may be as bold, our love as deep, and our faith as true.

May poets and prophets and policy makers arise in holy courage and conviction.

May psalmists and pragmatists and pastors cry out for justice.

May we hold the powerful wicked ones accountable and turn AR-15s into garden tools.

May we gather around the grieving in strong love that protects.

May we not give in to despair. May we contend for the vulnerable. May we be a thorn in the side of the enemy that seeks to kill, steal, and destroy.

It doesn't have to be this way.<sup>3</sup>

Humanity has built the systems, we can take them down.

We **can take** them **down**.

We can and we must.

Amen.

The Rev. Lauren Sayre Lukason

May 29, 2022

*Christ Episcopal Church, Needham, MA (with Livestream)*

---

<sup>3</sup> Sarah Bessey, "For Uvalde and the borderless chorus", *Sarah Bessey's Field Notes*. May 26, 2022.