

Message for Sunday, April 25, 2021
 The Rev. Michael Burke
 Preached at St. Mary's Episcopal Church
 Anchorage, Alaska

Little Children, Let Us Love One Another...

Yesterday, I was working at home, and had the window open to let in the Spring air. From outside in the street came the sounds of neighborhood kids, laughing and riding their bikes and longboards in front of my house. For a moment there I was swept up in memories of my own childhood, riding my emerald green bike with the sunshine gold banana seat through the puddles formed in the street by melting snow.



It was a melancholy, nostalgic feeling for a time that never really was, except in hindsight: but when all seemed right with the world to a seven-year-old kid. There were three major TV networks and the news only came on once a day for a twenty-two-minute broadcast. And when the news anchor Walter Cronkite signed off at 6:30pm and said, "and that's the way it is", it seemed that everybody trusted that it was so.

My iPhone on the desk dinged with a pop-up alert, bringing me back to 2021. News and fallout from the Chauvin trial continues, one small moment of justice amidst a sea of more troubling developments. But nobody wins. A man is going to prison for a very long time. A man, George Floyd is dead. His family will never again hold him, see him smile, hear his laughter fill the air and mingle with theirs. A conviction does not bring him back. And a single trial outcome will not, by itself, change or sweep away the momentum of hundreds of years of history of inequality, fear, poverty, and violence.

Within the same news cycle as the announcement of the Chauvin trial's verdict comes news of teenage girls wielding knives, police officers shooting teenagers, and more multiple shootings in places like Shreveport, Indianapolis, Columbus, and Kenosha. Has the world always been this crazy, or am I just waking up from own slumber?

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Today's liturgy and music is filled with images of shepherds and sheep, taken from today's Gospel. In the time of Jesus, shepherds were well known, and often depicted as fierce protectors who would lay down their very lives for the sheep, who know their voice and follow them to safety. It's a bit more problematic a metaphor in today's modern world, but we often feel like lambs in the midst of a world of wolves.



Into all this, comes the Epistle for today, taken from 1st John. This isn't the Gospel of John, but a shorter letter to a young Christian community, written around the year 100, likely in Ephesus, a city on the Greek coast. The author, dubbed "John the Evangelist" is believed by a number of scholars¹ to someone other than the Apostle John, but a member of the same "beloved community."

At the time of this writing, the John's community appears to be struggling with false teachers, the first century version of conspiracy theories, and "fake news." People were polarized, and these divisions were beginning to be felt within the community. Followers in the Way of Jesus were uncertain how they were to respond.

John addresses them, not with harsh scolding, but with a word of pastoral care and encouragement. He says that he is "writing these things so that our joy may be complete."²

Throughout this short message, John asks that we be honest with ourselves and with God, owning up to those places where we have fallen short,³ and reminds us of God's mercy, forgiveness, healing, and steadfast love.⁴ He defines sin as "lawlessness," and he defines the law as the commandment to "love one another"⁵



John says that, in one sense, we are all children, because "what we will be has not yet been revealed." He tells them, and us "Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action."⁶ And in the act of loving, we will know what is true and good and righteous and what is not.

There are those in the beloved community who are doing too little, getting by on vague promises, "thoughts, and prayers" alone. And although there is nothing wrong with "thoughts and prayers", John reminds us that loves transforms us *in*

¹ See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Epistle_of_John

² 1 John 1:4

³ 1 John 5-10

⁴ 1 John 2:1-6

⁵ 1 John 3:11-17.

⁶ 1 John 3:18

the doing of acts of love and service, not just in perfunctory sentiments from a place of complacency and privilege, or by just going through the motions. Get your game on, people, because that is how your heart really changes and abides in God. The work of justice and equity is the work of righteousness, which is the work of God to which we are all called.

And to those who are *already* doing so much, and yet whose hearts are burdened by the constant haunting thought that “they are not doing enough” or that they are not “good enough,” John’s first epistle reminds us⁷, “whenever our hearts condemn us... God is greater than our hearts,” and that we are deeply loved, just as we are.⁸

The act and movement of “believing in Christ” is simply the act of opening ourselves to the work of God in us and through us, that we might abide in God and God in us.⁹ The weight of the world, and current events, does not rest on our shoulders alone.

I’m reminded of Max Ehrmann’s poem “Desiderata”¹⁰,

*“Beyond a wholesome discipline, be gentle with yourself.
You are a child of the universe no less than the trees and the stars; you have a right to be here. And whether or not it is clear to you, no doubt the universe is unfolding as it should.
Therefore be at peace with God, whatever you conceive [God] to be.
And whatever your labors and aspirations, in the noisy confusion of life, keep peace in your soul.

With all its sham, drudgery, and broken dreams, it is still a beautiful world.
Be cheerful. Strive to be happy.”¹¹*

Or, in the words of the late Louie Crew, the late Bishop Barbara Harris, and our own Presiding Bishop Michael Currey, longtime leaders within The Episcopal Church,
“Love Anyway.”
“Alleluia Anyway,” and
“Resurrection Anyway.”

In closing, I leave you this:
(roll video of *The Work of the People*, from: <https://www.theworkofthepeople.com/visual-liturgy>)¹²

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⁷ 1 John 3:20

⁸ 1 John 3: 21-22

⁹ 1 John 3:22-24

¹⁰ See: <https://maxehrmann.com/>. The first known distribution of this poem was by

¹¹ Max Ehrmann, circa 1921, originally untitled, later titled “Desiderata,” copyright status in dispute. See: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Desiderata>

¹² <https://www.theworkofthepeople.com/visual-liturgy>

Scriptures, Poems, and Playlist:

The Collect

O God, whose Son Jesus is the good shepherd of your people: Grant that when we hear his voice we may know him who calls us each by name, and follow where he leads; who, with you and the Holy Spirit, lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Psalm 23

1 The Lord is my shepherd; *
I shall not be in want.

2 He makes me lie down in green pastures *
and leads me beside still waters.

3 He revives my soul *
and guides me along right pathways for his Name's sake.

4 Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I shall fear no evil; *
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

5 You spread a table before me in the presence of those who trouble me; *
you have anointed my head with oil,
and my cup is running over.

6 Surely your goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, *
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

The Epistle: 1 John 3:16-24

We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us-- and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?

Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him.



And this is God's commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. All who obey God's commandments abide in God, and God abides in them. And by this we know that God abides in us, by the Spirit that God has given us.

The Gospel: John 10:11-18

Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father."

DESIDERATA by Max Ehrmann

"Go placidly amid the noise and the haste, and remember what peace there may be in silence. As far as possible, without surrender, be on good terms with all persons.

Speak your truth quietly and clearly; and listen to others, even to the dull and the ignorant; they too have their story.

Avoid loud and aggressive persons; they are vexatious to the spirit. If you compare yourself with others, you may become vain or bitter, for always there will be greater and lesser persons than yourself.

Enjoy your achievements as well as your plans. Keep interested in your own career, however humble; it is a real possession in the changing fortunes of time.

Exercise caution in your business affairs, for the world is full of trickery. But let this not blind you to what virtue there is; many persons strive for high ideals, and everywhere life is full of heroism.

Be yourself. Especially do not feign affection. Neither be cynical about love, for in the face of all aridity and disenchantment, it is as perennial as the grass.

Take kindly the counsel of the years, gracefully surrendering the things of youth. Nurture strength of spirit to shield you in sudden misfortune. But do not distress yourself with dark imaginings. Many fears are born of fatigue and loneliness.



Beyond a wholesome discipline, be gentle with yourself. You are a child of the universe no less than the trees and the stars; you have a right to be here. And whether or not it is clear to you, no doubt the universe is unfolding as it should.

Therefore be at peace with God, whatever you conceive Him to be. And whatever your labors and aspirations, in the noisy confusion of life, keep peace in your soul.

*With all its sham, drudgery, and broken dreams, it is still a beautiful world. **Be cheerful. Strive to be happy.**"*

Max Ehrmann, 1948.

The End of the Innocence

Don Henley

Remember when the days were long
And rolled beneath a deep blue sky
Didn't have a care in the world
With mommy and daddy standing by
When "happily ever after" fails
And we've been poisoned by these fairy tales
The lawyers dwell on small details
Since daddy had to fly

Oh, but I know a place where we can go
Still untouched by man
We'll sit and watch the clouds roll by
And the tall grass waves in the wind
You can lay your head back on the ground
And let your hair fall all around me
Offer up your best defense
But this is the end
This is the end of the innocence

O' beautiful, for spacious skies
But now those skies are threatening
They're beating plowshares into swords
For this tired old man that we elected king
Armchair warriors often fail
And they've been poisoned by these fairy tales
The lawyers clean up all details

Since daddy had to lie

Oh, but I know a place where we can go
And wash away this sin
We'll sit and watch the clouds roll by
The tall grass waves in the wind
Just lay your head back on the ground
And let your hair spill all around me
Offer up your best defense
But this is the end
This is the end of the innocence

Who knows how long this will last
Now we've come so far, so fast
But somewhere back there in the dust
That same small town in each of us
I need to remember this
So baby, give me just one kiss
And let me take a long last look
Before we say good bye

Just lay your head back on the ground
And let your hair fall all around me
Offer up your best defense
But this is the end
This is the end of the innocence

Songwriters: Bruce Hornsby / Don Henley
The End of the Innocence Lyrics © Sony/ATV Music
Publishing LLC

Bill Mallonee,*from the album "Forest Full of Wolves"***In the New Dark Age****(The Best Thing You Can Do Is Fall in Love)**

Bring all the things....that you bought
 Bring all those things...that you lost
 Bring her that gold ring...bring her the dress

Chorus:

*In the new dark age when you're waiting for
 a light from above*

*In the new dark age....best thing you can do
 is fall in love*

Bring all of your poems
 bring all of your passion
 All those discarded notes
 and the melodies just not happening
 Bring everything you'd like to forget
 & those parts of you not even born yet

Bring all of those ghosts
 from your empty home
 Kill all of your fears;
 crash all of your drones
 Beat your swords into plowshares...
 and she'll take you for her own.

Chorus:

*In the new dark age when you're waiting for
 a light from above*

*In the new dark age.... best thing you can do
 is fall in love...*

Bill Mallonee, Love is Always Risky*from the album "Forest Full of Wolves"*

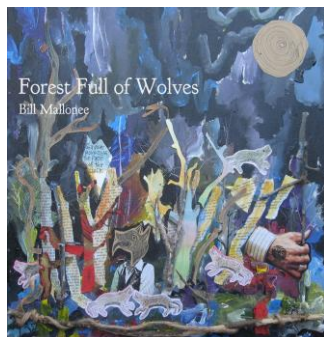
Baby, how'd we get this far?
 Not a snowball's chance in hell
 Love is always risky currency
 And hearts are always the hardest sell

Promises lay ribbons on the cutting room floor
 And as far as i can tell
 Bright & beautiful just fades to black
 And hearts are always the hardest sell

Could be the air; could be the drink
 And the prophets they see nothing,
 with even less to tell
 The undertaker, well,
 he hardly has time to think
 And hearts are always the hardest sell

Time to wake. Time to rise
 You can hear the foreman's bell
 Try to sing a psalm,
 but you're gonna hum the blues
 'cause hearts are always the hard sell

Baby, how'd we get this far?
 Not a snowball's chance in hell
 Love is always heavy currency
 And hearts are always the hard sell..



Jackson Browne For Everyman

Everybody I talk to is ready to leave
With the light of the morning
They've seen the end coming down long enough
to believe
That they've heard their last warning
Standing alone
Each has his own ticket in his hand
And as the evening descends
I sit thinking 'bout Everyman

Seems like I've always been looking for some
other place
To get it together
Where with a few of my friends I could give up
the race
And maybe find something better
But all my fine dreams
Well thought out schemes to gain the
motherland
Have all eventually come down to waiting for
Everyman

Waiting here for Everyman--
Make it on your own if you think you can
If you see somewhere to go I understand
Waiting here for Everyman--
Don't ask me if he'll show -- baby I don't know

Make it on your own if you think you can
Somewhere later on you'll have to take a stand
Then you're going to need a hand

Everybody's just waiting to hear from the one
Who can give them the answers
And lead them back to that place in the warmth
of the sun
Where sweet childhood still dances
Who'll come along
And hold out that strong and gentle father's
hand?

Long ago I heard someone say something 'bout
Everyman

Waiting here for Everyman--
Make it on your own if you think you can
If you see somewhere to go I understand

I'm not trying to tell you that I've seen the plan
Turn and walk away if you think I am--
But don't think too badly of one who's left
holding sand
He's just another dreamer,
dreaming 'bout Everyman.

Jackson Browne, 1973.

Browne wrote this in response to Crosby, Stills & Nash's "Wooden Ships," because in that song everyone leaves. David Crosby had recently spoken of his own boat, and that if the world fell apart in chaos and violence, he would just use it to sail away. Browne was left wondering about all those left behind who didn't own boats; what about those who stay? - MB



Bill Mallonee

Changing of the Guard *(written 2017)*

There's a mid-night cannonball outta Bakersfield
 Ther'll be some boxcars to slumber on
 The fire in soul ought to be enough to stare
 down the cold
 But, maybe not this changing of the guard

I guess it's been a few months now
 Since Goodness took it pretty hard
 Since greed & fear gained the upper hand
 What with all this changing of the guard

You fought for freedom under the flag
 Had some good friends die in your arms
 You came home and did yourself some thinking
 About all this changing of the guard...

Now the devil plays for your allegiance
 Hiding behind stars & stripes
 He speaks his piece through the lips of the elite
 Appears as an angel of light

Me? i grabbed a guitar & a notebook or two;
 There's was too much talk about Law & God
 And i became a phantom w/ some conjuring
 'neath the moon
 What with all this changing of the guard

There were voices on the streets last night
 Commotion out in the front yard
 There's fresh chalk lines on the pavement at
 dawn
 Comes with all this changing of the guard
 Changing of the guard
 What with all of this changing of the guard



A Litany for the Fourth Sunday of Easter

Loving Creator you care for all
 you gather up those who are lost
 you seek out the hurting wanderers
 and bring us all back to your home.

Good Shepherd, help us hear your voice today.

The world is full of false shepherds
 people who want to lead us away from you
 products that say they can solve our problems yet
 you are the source of all our healing.

Good Shepherd, help us hear your voice today.

Our world is full of noise and distraction
 we are overwhelmed by tugs in all directions
 you are the source of all light and love
 and put out feet back on your sacred ground.

Good Shepherd, help us hear your voice today.

When loss and pain overwhelm us, Lord
Guide our way and gather us home again.

When light seems to have faded from us
Bring your beacon to gather us in again.

In days of plenty and days of famine
Gather us all together and hold us close.

O Jesus Christ you laid down your life
that we might live with you forever.

Make us the sheep of your pasture
And the people of your loving fold. Amen.

From Bishop Carol Gallagher:

<http://mamabishop.blogspot.com/2021/04/>

**Annie Lennox,
Universal Child**

How many mountains must you face
before you learn to climb?
I'm gonna give you what it takes, my universal child

I'm gonna try to find a way
to keep you safe from harm
I'm gonna be a special place,
a shelter from the storm
And I can see you, you're everywhere,
your portrait fills the sky
I'm gonna wrap my arms around you,
my universal child

And when I look into your eyes,
so innocent and pure
I see the shadow of the things
that you've had to endure
I see the tracks of every tear
that ran right down your face
I see the hurt, I see the pain, I see the human race
And I can feel you, you're everywhere,
shining like the sun
I wished to god that kids like you could be like
everyone

How many tumbles must it take
before you learn to fly?
I'm going to help you spread your wings,
my universal child

I'm gonna try to find a way
to keep you safe from harm
We're gonna be a special place,
a shelter from the storm

I can feel you, you're everywhere,
shining like the sun
And I wished to god that kids like you
could be like everyone
And I wished to god that kids like you
could be like everyone

*Songwriters: Annie Lennox Universal Child lyrics ©
Universal Music Publishing Group*

**Maria McKee and Lone Justice
Shelter**

Well alright, you gave it all up for a dream
Fate proved unkind, to lock the door
and leave no key
You're unsure, well baby I'm scared too
When the world crushes you

Let me be your shelter, shelter
From a storm outside
Let me be your shelter, shelter
From the endless night

Disillusion has an edge so sharp
It tears at your soul and leaves a stain
upon your heart
I need you, to wash mine clean
You've felt it too, and you need me
Let me be your shelter, shelter
From a storm outside
Let me be your shelter, shelter
From the endless night

You're struggle with darkness has left you blind
I'll light the fire in your eyes
You're struggle with darkness has left you blind
I'll light the fire in your eyes

Let me be your shelter, shelter
From a storm outside
Let me be your shelter, shelter
From the endless night

Let me be your shelter, shelter
Let me be your shelter, shelter
Let me be your shelter, shelter...

*Songwriters: Steven Van Zandt / Maria Mckee
Shelter lyrics © Blue Midnight Music*

