

Boston University Marsh Chapel

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Dear Friends,

In Buffalo New York, and in Uvalde Texas, over the last ten days, 31 people have been needlessly and heedlessly slaughtered. For some of us Buffalo and Uvalde are near home, but for all of us these tragic deaths hit home. Our sanctuary is open to you to come for silent prayer, day by day, 7am –10pm. Prayers and readings fit for our time of sorrow and loss are placed out for you: the prayers to be read silently, the readings to be carried home or memorized. Please come and sit in the quiet beauty of Marsh Chapel and be restored to rightful mind.

Our friends give us back our true selves.

For instance, Rev. Dr. Stephen Cady, in Rochester New York wrote:

Eighteen elementary-aged children—mostly Hispanic, mostly poor—and three adults are confirmed dead as of this writing, murdered by an eighteen-year-old whose motivations are yet to be revealed.

This, just days after the murder of ten Black people by an eighteen-year-old white supremacist. While one happened in Buffalo and the other in Texas, both hit close to home. Although, we are still awaiting details of this latest shooting, one thing we know for sure: enough is enough.

Our obsession with guns, our paucity of mental health resources, our tolerance of violence, and our unwillingness to address the systemic injustices and racism of our world have created a terrifying new reality that cannot be allowed to stand. As a people of faith, we will not stand for it.

For instance, our New England United Methodist leaders wrote:

We are reminded by the best data that guns are the leading cause of death for children and teenagers in this country since 2020 — that there were 26 school shootings in the US last year— that active shooter attacks in this country have doubled since the beginning of the coronavirus; and we witness our legislators battling over rights and control. The ancient words of suffering erupt from us: “How long, O Lord?”

For instance, for a recent sermon from the pulpit of Marsh Chapel, the Dean wrote:

By apocalypse, evil shows us a part of who we are. We are revealed, this week...as a people, to be other people than we pretend and other people than we intend. We pretend to protect the weak, but we do not. We intend to protect the innocent, but we do not. That is, our penchant for acquisition, our desire to acquire rather than to be a choir, makes some other things expendable. As in a mirror, and not so dimly, a dark inner part of our common life is illumined. Not just one deranged killer, but a culture of guns and a culture of violence and a culture of acquisition, and a culture of apathy, these are brought to light, in this unfathomably tragic, unspeakably awful, sinfully evil crime. We are reluctant to give up even a slim measure of our power to purchase, to acquire, in order to protect children. Foolish we are, with a foolishness that brings tragedy. I think of the years I spent in Canada and the months in England, and I think we have some things to learn from both sibling cultures. Here in the USA, there is a cheapening and coarsening of life happening all around us, all the time, and we, though sometimes we find the temper to resist, are the worse for it. A decade of warfare has numbed us, made us tolerant of violence in ways we never were before. Take a walk with me some day on a college campus.

Over forty years, as a culture, as a people, we have more and more given ourselves over to acquisition. We no longer preach to the choir, we preach to acquire. To acquire one turns sometimes to violence. Our culture is drenched in violence. We from New England need to remember the stern hope in the New England theological tradition from Edwards to Emerson. Edwards: “Resolved, never to do anything which I should be afraid to do if it were the last hour of my life.” Emerson: “Men are ‘convertible’ and this is the work of education, to awake the slumbering soul from its habitual sleep.” Last week Night came, but unattended by repose. After a holocaust, there is no faith so whole as a broken faith. We need models of living with a broken faith. We need to become, one by one, and as the faith community of Marsh Chapel, a model of living with a broken faith. How?

To begin, in faith, we leave behind who were, and take up our cross, and follow. Our cross, in our time, as has been steadily acclaimed from this pulpit, includes the hard heavy lifting of ridding this country of gun violence and of protection that does not protect. Granted that foolish and harmful things are done all the time, we need not participate in them. Our cross, in our time, as has been steadily acclaimed from this pulpit, includes the hard heavy lifting of

growing, improving attention to mental health. Our cross, in our time, as has been steadily acclaimed from this pulpit, includes the hard heavy lifting of setting aside some cyber-cultural influences. We shall not cease from mental fight, nor shall our sword sleep in our hand, til we have no guns, mental health and a clean culture, in this green and pleasant land. You have a voice, you have a wallet, and you have a vote. Do you know this? Do you? How else will we ever face slaughter news?

Actually, though, these thoughts were offered not in May of 2022...but in December of 2012. A recent, but not so immediately recent sermon, a sermon delivered under the shadowed grief of...Newtown, of...Sandy Hook. Ten years ago. Ten years ago. TEN YEARS AGO!

As our fine, faithful President Biden said yesterday, 'let us take this pain and turn it into action' (5/24/22).

Grace and peace,

Bob

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