

*"It is enough now, O Lord (1 Kings 19:4)." It is enough.*

Seven years ago, almost to the day, I preached my first sermon here at PCCH. It was on marriage equality, an inclusive defense of the beauty that is love irrespective of its anatomy, irrespective of its orientation.

Two days ago marked the first anniversary of the deadly shooting at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina.

One year ago, almost to the day, Austin stood before us in this pulpit, and in response to that attack she proclaimed: "I cannot keep quiet. And neither can you."

Seven years and two days later, here we are again. The cycle unbroken. The violence undeterred. Isn't it enough already? Isn't it enough, O Lord?

Jim Himes, the Democratic Representative from Connecticut, who walked out of Paul Ryan's 16-seconds of silence for the victims in Orlando, wrote: "Silence is complicit. All I know is that the regular moments of silence on the House floor do not honor the victims of violence. They are an affront. In the chamber where change is made, they are a tepid, self-satisfying emblem of impotence and willful negligence. It is action that will stop next week's mass shooting. I will not be silent." One commentator observed: "I absolutely agree. Anyone who thinks this is the best we can do has never looked outside this country, or has incredibly low standards for Americans."

It seems that when these unspeakable, unfathomable tragedies strike (and they do *strike*, and hard at that), the best of our efforts culminate in a well-meaning evening vigil; an organized moment of observed silence; a prayer offered for the victims of the atrocity. We might even go as far as to plant rainbow flags in our church lawn; to change our profile pictures so to match the emblematic colors of the bereaved; and perhaps, even attempt a paragraph or two on our Facebook walls, full of sincere and pretty words, about how love will always win in the end, for ultimately, love is love is love is love is love...

And all of that is great. It really is. But today, I feel I have to say something more than just that. I cannot keep quiet. I was unable to do so at Bible study and now that I've been afforded this pulpit, I certainly will not. Simply praying together (as powerful as that can be), or preaching that love conquers all (as inspiring as that could be), is not enough. Waiting, like Elijah, for God to appear in an earthquake, or a fire, or a gale of wind to fix our problems for us, is no longer enough. Indeed, faith without works is dead and it is time for us to speak up and do something. As Samantha Bee noted in the opening address on her show, Full Frontal, "Love does not win unless we start loving each other enough to fix our f---ing problems." "We pray after every mass shooting and yet they keep happening. Maybe we're not praying right. Can we check the instruction manual?"

But maybe that's part of the problem? The instruction manual. Three weeks ago, our instructional manual featured the major prophet Elijah openly mocking and then murdering his neighbors. They were foreigners. They were prophets following a different religion, a different God. They were his enemies. He did not love thy neighbor or thy enemy as thyself. Rather, he adhered to a section in Deuteronomy which advocated for death over life -- death to those that would lead people astray from the one, true God: the God of Israel.

Today, our instructional manual follows on the heels of that story as we witness Elijah fleeing from the revenge-minded King Ahab and the blood-thirsty Queen Jezebel, whose prophets Elijah had just butchered. Jezebel says that she will reap upon Elijah what he has sown, taking his own life in return.

The cycle unbroken. The violence undeterred.

This time though, Elijah is not so cocky and brazen in the face of an imminent threat. Is he? He doesn't mock or engage Jezebel in blood magic or attempt any militaristic maneuvers. He simply flees and wilts. After running into the wilderness following a day's journey, he crawls underneath a solitary broom tree, or more historically illustrative, a large desert bush. And there, in the little shade that bush provided, he whispers, "It is enough now, O Lord. Take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors."

In Bible study on Wednesday, we tried to piece together just who Elijah was referring to here. Which particular ancestors and in what respect? Truth be told, we didn't get very far besides offering guesses up to each other, the Holy Spirit, and the low hum of the air conditioner. The text, simply, is not clear enough and his ancestors too many. But if there is an ideal candidate, it seems, at least to me, that it was probably Moses who Elijah had in mind. After all, they share countless parallels throughout scripture. To name a few: both spent significant time in the wilderness; both are connected with Mt Sinai for 40 days and 40 nights (Elijah trekking towards; Moses remaining atop); both erected altars with 12 stones representing the tribes of Jacob/Israel; both hide their faces when first confronted by God; both associate God with fire; and of course, later in the New Testament, both will appear next to Jesus during the transfiguration.

Unfortunately however, it seems they also shared a darker connection. For you see, like Elijah, Moses was also responsible for the slaughtering of false witnesses: the Midianites in Numbers chapter 31. Through the foreign prophet Balaam, the Midianites corrupted the Jewish people such that they began worshipping Baal of Peor. Moses retaliates and goes as far as killing the women and children, only sparing the virgins. Lucky virgins. Moreover, the texts themselves, Numbers and Kings, share and perpetuate the explicit themes of sanctioned revenge and approved killing. Numbers 35, in our very own instruction manual, literally has a whole section dedicated to, and even so titled, Murder and Blood Revenge, outlining in grim detail just who was subject to be put to death and how it ought to be carried out. Yes, it really does. You should read it. Or, perhaps you shouldn't... And, lest we are quick to forget, this Numbers 35 is not some lone wolf, for it is not so dissimilar to what we find at the

end of our text this morning in 1 Kings 19:16-17, where God emerges from silence and commands Elijah to instruct his successors (Hazeel, Jehu, and Elisha) to continue to kill in his name.

Even in our own holy text, the cycle unbroken. The violence undeterred.

“It is enough now, O Lord. I am no better than my ancestors.” I really want to believe that when Elijah utters these words, his character is having a haunting moment of real, three-dimensional, self-reflection, just like any of us would, as he realizes that his actions are about to come full circle. *Just what have I done and what purpose did it serve, I imagine him wondering? Will the cycle finally end with an eye for an eye and my own death? No, for God will only then command Jehu and Elisha to take up the sword. Oh, just let me die rather than continue in this darkness. This storm must stop. This night must end. I've done enough. I've seen enough. It is enough.*

My friends, Elijah's moment of despair is very much like our own. Are we any better than our ancestors? Are we also going to be on the wrong side of history? And just when will it all be enough? When will it end? This cycle can't continue, we think. This has to be the tipping point, doesn't it? Even though Sandy Hook should have been, even though Charleston ought to have been, this now really has to be it. Aren't you tired of waiting for change? I know I'm tired of waiting. There is no great wind coming. There is no earthquake to shake us. There is no fire raining down from Heaven. None at least that I can see. It is now up to us to take up the mantle to incite this change, doing so through the advocacy of the Spirit which has been left to us. And true change at that: policy change.

So, if we are brave enough, let us rise and say this to those in power: No more blood-thirst. No more revenge. No more stereotyping, generalizing and fear-mongering. No more assault weapons and the enabling of cowardice, for make no mistake, if it is not illness, then it is sheer cowardice that wields a gun at a distance firing it at unarmed civilians.

So may our faith be married to our works. Let's actually do something. Let us access the link that Austin posted on her Facebook: contacting our representatives, even if you deem them crooked or disinterested. Let us sign petitions. Go on demonstrations. Sit down with our neighbors. Visit other services of worship. May we seek to understand before attempting to be understood. And, let us actually talk to our children, and our grandchildren for that matter, and put an end to the cycle of bigotry that's all too often inherited and passed on from generation to generation.

For we cannot afford to keep quiet. No, we can no longer hide in the shadows sitting on the sidelines. Nor can we afford to hunker down behind our nation's own instruction manual and the antiquated vagaries of the second amendment. For remember, the Constitution once also outlined how to import persons for the slave trade. It also once declared that certain persons were only to be considered at 3/5ths worth of representation. Like scripture, our Constitution was/is meant to be a living document. Reinterpreted and evolving with the times. The forefathers couldn't possibly imagine AR-15s in schools or clubs or even in the most well-regulated of militias, or even at all for that matter. They were worried about the prospect of faster and wider musket balls. And sharper bayonets. And cavalries riding to battle on Seabiscuit and Secretariat.

Just the same, the prophets and adherents to the letter of the Old Testament law couldn't possibly imagine a holy teaching that argued for an enemy to be loved rather than despised and killed. Nor could they fathom that the least in society could one day be considered the greatest in the kingdom. But Jesus broke that cycle of violence and corrosive thinking. Jesus released the demons and frees those afflicted by darkness and death, both down in the catacombs and the graves laced by calibrated bullets. Even in this storm; even in this endless night; even from the 49 slain, change can happen. But only if we are ourselves are willing to change. Only if we ourselves are willing to join Christ's revolution.

So, no, we can't become desensitized and we can't become apathetic. We can't crawl back under our shelters and say, O Lord, what we can we do, we are only one man and one woman. We must say: enough is enough. We must say, end this torment. And as Clayton reminded me in Bible study, we must always leave this place as an example of Christ's love to all people, no matter their skin color, no matter their religion, no matter their orientation. For in doing so we help rid our country of this demon called Legion, masquerading in the circles of the vocal minority, at whose center are the ugly vices of bigotry, phobia, and the most queer of all lusts: the fetish for guns and violence.

My friends, I have a dream this Father's day. It is naïve, but it's for my son Seth, and Greg's daughter Madeline, and all those children recently born or who are about to be. That one day our news outlets will lead and end, not with shootings and massacres or propaganda and lies, but with gentle stories of altruism and outward human decency, where the love found in the household of Christ is shared equitably and happily amongst all of God's children, indeed the entire creation.

At the great river we stand. And there, we've waited long enough.

Take us home, O Lord.

Let us go home.

Amen.