

“How Long?: Renouncing Evil”

Our Lenten Worship Celebration Series is inspired by the prophet, Amos, whose message is that **God calls us to let ‘justice roll down like waters.’ Justice is central to the Christian Life.** Jesus was part of that Prophetic approach, as was demonstrated, by his clashes with the Legalists. The Prophetic Tradition and, especially, Jesus revealed the Love of God is for everyone – for all are God’s Children. **The Prophetic Approach also demonstrated the Divine Parent’s call for the Children of God to work for Justice for everyone.**

Among the responses of the victims of injustice are laments found in the Book of Psalms in the Old Testament. People, today, can often empathize with those experiences of injustice because similar ones are being lived in the present. Therefore, before we consider a current injustice, it is helpful for us to look closely at the Psalm of lament, which we are using as our Scripture today.

Like many psalms of lament, our Reading repeatedly asks the same basic question, “How long do I have to continue suffering this injustice?” Specifically, among the laments asked in today’s psalm were,

“How much longer – How long” –

“must I endure trouble?”

“will sorrow fill my heart day and night?”

“will my enemies triumph over me?”

After his list of “how longs”, the psalmist begged the Divine Parent, **“Restore my strength; don’t let me die.”** There is one current injustice, which has frequently been in the news as of late. The victims of that injustice during the last week and a half have asked the same “How long?” and they have also cried out “don’t let me die!” I assume everyone knows I am referring to the injustice of gun violence, especially the mass murder of high school students and teachers in Florida. There have been a multitude of powerful testimonies by the surviving students. **Do we empathize with their suffering?**

One of those compelling statements was shared by a student at the recent meeting in the White House. He said, **“Hi, my name is Sam Zeif. I’m a student from Marjory Stoneman Douglas in Parkland.”** He thanked his hosts for holding the meeting and went on to say, “I was on the second floor in that building, texting my mom, texting my dad, texting three of my brothers that I was never going to see them again.” **“And then it occurred to me that my 14-year-old brother was directly above me in that classroom where Scott Beigel was murdered.”** Scott Beigel was a teacher, who died trying save and shield students.

Sam continued, “Scott Beigel got my brother in the class. He was the last kid to get back into that class. And I’m sure a lot of you have read my texts on the Internet with my brother. I didn’t plan for them to go viral.” **“I just wanted to share with the world, because no brothers, or sisters, or family members, or anyone should ever have to share those texts with anyone.”**

Sam explained, “And that’s why I’m here. I lost a best friend, who’s practically a brother. And I’m here to use my voice because I know he can’t. And I know he’s with me, cheering me on, to be strong. But it’s hard.” **“And to feel like this — it doesn’t even feel like a week. Time has stood still.”** That sounds like the psalmist’s plea, “How long?” Sam shared, “To feel like this, ever, I can’t feel comfortable in my country knowing that people have, will have, are ever going to feel like this. And I want to feel safe at school.” Those were some of Sam’s words of lament and I honor them.

The hopeful words of another Sam, Sam Cooke, an African American songwriter and singer, were eluded to in the Chancel Voices’ Featured Song and those words help us gain insight into how we can hope and work for justice. The following video includes much of this other Sam’s prophetic view. [The video was shown.]

Another hopeful message is found in the concluding verses of our Reading from Psalms:

“I rely on Your Constant Love;

I will be glad, because You will rescue me.

I will sing to You, O Lord,

because You have been good to me.”

Like the message of the psalm, we are able to end our lament of an injustice with praise for **“God is good, all the time.”** We remember that even and especially in times of despair, such as those examples of mass murders and gun violence, that through our baptism – our belonging to God and Jesus Christ, we are given the “freedom and power to resist evil in all its forms” as we “put our whole trust in God.” How will we put these words into action to show hope to the world? How

will we renounce evil, especially injustice, such as, the injustice of innocent children, teens, and adults dying through the mass murder episodes in the recent past?

Sam Zeif did a good job of renouncing evil and of confidently demanding justice as he went on to tell President Trump and those gathered in the White House, “And now, I don’t know how I’m ever going to step foot on that place again, or go to a public park after school, or be walking anywhere. Me and my friends, we get scared when a car drives by — anywhere.” Did you know some parents kept their children home from school a week ago last Thursday because they feared for their children’s lives? Did you know there were incidents in some metroplex schools where someone brought weapon to school?

In the White House meeting, Sam move forward and said, “And I think I agree with Hunter and Huck, and how we need to let ideas flow and get the problem solved. I don’t understand. I turned 18 the day after. Woke up to the news that my best friend was gone.” **“And I don’t understand why I could still go in a store and buy a weapon of war — an AR. I was reading today that a person, 20 years old, walked into a store and bought an AR-15 in five minutes with an expired ID. How is it that easy to buy this type of weapon? How did we not stop this after Columbine, after Sandy Hook? I’m sitting with a mother that lost her son, and it’s still happening.”**

Sam was sitting next to a mother, whose very young child had been killed in the Sandy Hook Elementary School. It is very important to note, the AR-15 assault rifle used in those school shootings is a high velocity weapon, with bullets, which travel much faster, with greater frequency, and are much more destructive and deadly than the bullets from handguns. While the students and teachers were being slaughtered, the shooter was protected by a bullet proof vest. When the law enforcement members arrived to capture or stop him, he simply dropped his weapon and pretended to be among the surviving students. It was later, after he had gone shopping that he was captured. So, contrary to the thinking of those, who believe merely giving pistols and some training to teachers will stop such an attack, only someone protected with a bulletproof vest and armed with an assault weapon would have had any real chance of surviving and, perhaps, stopping the shooter. The armed sheriff’s deputy posted at the school, as well as three other deputies knew that and did not even go into the building where the shooter was. Nevertheless, teachers were able to save the lives of many of their students. Unfortunately, such heroism cost some teachers their lives!

Many other students from the Florida High School have made very articulate statements and arguments about greatly reducing gun violence and mass murders by banning the sale of assault rifles. They have been attacked by supporters of total gun freedom, who have stooped to lowly and deceitful actions, such as retweeting the false conspiracy theory that the Florida High School student, David Hogg, who spoke very powerfully, was not a student from that high school but an actor. The NRA sees this as an opportunity to encourage people to buy more weapons. The NRA is doing advertising and public relations for the arms dealers and they have a multitude of politicians bending to their will for political and financial support. The President of the United States says we should not worry because the solution to this injustice of innocent school children dying from assault weapon violence will be OK’d by the NRA!

It is important to remember what the prophet said to the powerful in **Amos 5:7**, ***“You are doomed, you that twist justice and cheat people out of their rights!”*** Amos also said in **Amos 5:10, 12b**, ***“You people hate anyone who challenges injustice and speaks the whole truth in court. ... You persecute good people, take bribes, and prevent the poor from getting justice in the courts.”***

As the psalmist wrote, “How long?” How long do we allow children, teens, and adults to be killed in mass murders by people with assault rifles? **Now is the time to renounce this injustice!** Now is the time to support the students, whose very lives, are endangered by the availability of semi-automatic assault weapons! Now is the time to tell our elected officials to approve of Universal Background Checks for all arms sales, the banning of the sale of assault weapons, the banning of large magazine or clips for weapons, the banning of bumpstocks and other addons, which essentially turn semi-automatic weapons into automatic weapons, and to ban the sale of bulletproof vests to civilians. Now is the time, to trust God will be with us to ultimately bring Justice. **Turn to someone near you, and share this message of assurance, “God is good, all the time and all the time, God is good.” Trusting God, now is the time, to put our words, actions, and money to use for justice, especially for those threatened by gun violence! Let Justice Roll Down Like Waters through you.** Amen.