

St Nicholas Church, Sighthill Sunday, 20 March 2022

'This brutal planet'
Fear of violence

**Martin Luther King's final speech:
'I've been to the mountaintop'**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e49VEpWq61M&t=60s>

Call to Worship

O God who makes all things new, speak to us as whole people today. May Your truth touch not just our intellects, but also our deeper yearnings of heart and soul. We bring with us our daily concerns, as well as our more eternal questions. May Your new creation in us shed light upon our everyday walk.

Praise my soul, the King of Heaven

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GyRIVbdsi4c&t=16s>

1. Praise my soul the King of heaven
To His feet thy tribute bring
Ransomed healed restored forgiven
Who like thee His praise should sing
Praise Him Praise Him
Praise Him Praise Him
Praise the everlasting King
2. Praise Him for His grace and favour
To our fathers in distress
Praise Him still the same forever
Slow to chide and swift to bless
Praise Him Praise Him
Praise Him Praise Him
Glorious in His faithfulness
3. Father-like He tends and spares us
Well our feeble frame He knows
In His hands He gently bears us
Rescues us from all our foes
Praise Him Praise Him
Praise Him Praise Him
Widely as His mercy flows
4. Angels in the height adore Him
Ye behold Him face to face
Sun and moon bow down before Him
Dwellers all in time and space
Praise Him Praise Him
Praise Him Praise Him
Praise with us the God of grace

CCLI Song # 800443, Henry Francis Lyte | John Goss
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Opening Prayer

Gentle - yet powerful. Lowly - yet Almighty. Shepherd - yet King. In Your gentleness, guide us. In Your power, strengthen us. In Your lowliness, strip from us our selfish pride which only destroys us. In Your greatness, lift us up that we might aspire to greater things. As a shepherd, call us to be Your servants. As a King, call us to be Your royal priesthood. O God, who is our shepherd and our King; O Christ, who was crucified and is now risen from the



There is no reason to live in fear of crime and violence. There is however reason to take reasonable precautions. And in doing so, you will have deterred most criminals from choosing you as their victim.

— Marc MacYoung —

AZ QUOTES

dead; O Spirit, who comforts and empowers; O great One in Three, Holy Trinity, this hour, set us free to worship.

Gentle Shepherd ... King of Love, we come to You as we are, not as we pretend to be. The truth is, God, that when we lift our heads above our path, we all too often discover ourselves lost in a maze of choices. We confess from the very beginning of this worship that we are lost... Were it not for You, O great seeker of our souls, patient parent to our childhood, joyful host to our homecoming; Were it not for You, O Lord, we would be lost forever. But, because of You, there is room for us at the great Love Feast. Gentle Shepherd ... King of Love, seek and find us as we are, not as we pretend. Be patient with us, and teach us how to wait. May the echoes of Your celebration reverberate in our midst this hour, transforming our worship from a mournful plea to a joyful song. Gentle Shepherd ... King of Love, lead us. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Bible Reading; Matthew 8:28-34

When he arrived at the other side in the region of the Gadarenes, two demon-possessed men coming from the tombs met him. They were so violent that no one could pass that way. "What do you want with us, h Son of God?" they shouted. "Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?"

Some distance from them a large herd of pigs was feeding. The demons begged Jesus, "If you drive us out, send us into the herd of pigs." He said to them, "Go!" So they came out and went into the pigs, and the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and died in the water. Those tending the pigs ran off, went into the town and reported all this, including what had happened to the demon-possessed men. Then the whole town went out to meet Jesus. And when they saw him, they pleaded with him to leave their region.

Reflection

Christians are not insulated from torture. Open Doors figures that in 2021 alone, 360 million Christians suffered significant persecution because of the faith in Christ. Roughly 5,600 Christians were murdered, more than 6,000 were detained or imprisoned, and another 4,000-plus were kidnapped. In addition, more than 5,000 churches and other religious facilities were destroyed. Last year, Afghanistan took over the top spot from North Korea. It is now impossible to live openly as a Christian in Afghanistan. Christian persecution is extreme in all spheres of public and private life. The risk of discovery has only increased, since the Taliban controls every aspect of government"

The power to torture and to take life has, it seems, been placed in the hands of people who are happy to do so. Contrary to what we'd hope, good people aren't exempt from violence. Max writes 'murderers don't give the godly a pass. Terrorists don't vet out victims according to spiritual resumes. The bloodthirsty and wicked don't skip over the heaven-bound. We aren't insulated. But neither are we intimidated. Jesus has a word or two about this brutal world. "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul" (Matthew 10:28). His disciples needed this affirmation. Jesus had just told them to expect scourging, trials, death, hatred, and persecution (Matthew 17-23). Not the kind of locker room pep talk that rallies the team. To their credit none defected. Perhaps they didn't because of the fresh memory of Jesus' flexed muscles in the graveyard.

Jesus had taken his disciples to the "the other side into the country of the Gadarenes, [where] two men who were demon-possessed met Him as they were coming out of the tombs; they were so exceedingly violent that no one could pass by that road. And behold, they cried out, saying, 'What do we have to do with You, Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?'" (Matthew 8:28-29 NASB).

These two men were demon-possessed and, consequently, "exceedingly violent." People walked wide detours around the cemetery to avoid them. Not Jesus. He marched in like he owned the place. The demons and Jesus needed no introduction. They had battled it out somewhere else, and the demons had no interest in a rematch. They didn't even put up a fight. "Have you come to punish us before our time?" (Matt.8: 29), they asked. "Please send us into those pigs" (Matthew 8: 31) – they pleaded. Jesus did so. "Move," he exorcised. No shout, scream, incantation, dance, incense, or demand, just one small word.

We Christians trace the source of violence back to the devil. We place the fault of bloodshed at the feet of the one whose days are numbered; Satan. We find our hope in the sure victory of Jesus. 16th century Reformer Martin Luther wrote,

1. A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing; Our helper He, amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing: For still our ancient foe doth seek to work us woe; His craft and pow'r are great, and, armed with cruel hate, On earth is not his equal.
- 2.
3. And though this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us, we will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us; The Prince of Darkness grim, we tremble not for him; his rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure, one little word shall fell him.
4. That word above all earthly pow'rs, no thanks to them, abideth; the Spirit and the gifts are ours through Him Who with us sideth; let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also; the body they may kill: God's truth abideth still, His kingdom is forever.

This is the balance on which Jesus writes the check of courage "Do not fear those who kill the body and cannot kill the soul" (Matthew 10:28). Courage emerges, not from increased police security, but from enhanced spiritual maturity. These days of violence call for people of faith. People of fear make poor decisions. They overreact, lash out or retreat. People of courage, on the other hand, keep a cool head. They are not blind to nor bewildered by the evil in the world.

Martin Luther King exemplified this courage. He chose not to fear those who meant him harm. On April 3, 1968, he spent hours in a plane waiting on the tarmac due to bomb threats. When he arrived in Memphis later that day, he was tired and hungry, but not afraid. He said,

"We've got some difficult days ahead," he told the crowd. "But it doesn't matter to me now. Because I've been to the mountaintop. And I don't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land. And I'm happy tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord."

He would be dead in less than twenty-four hours. But the people who meant him harm fell short in their goal. They took his breath, but they never took his soul.

Evildoers have less a chance of hurting you, if you aren't already a victim. "Fearing people is a dangerous trap, but to trust the LORD means safety (Proverbs 29:25). Real courage embraces the twin realities of current difficulty and ultimate victory. "Though a host encamps against me, my heart shall not fear; though war arise against me, yet I will be confident" (Psalm 27:3 RSV) – why because we are not alone. We are never alone. We are covered by the presence, by the blood and by the person of Jesus Christ. That is why he says, 'Don't worry about the evil people who prosper or fret about their wicked schemes' (Psalm 37:7 NLT). Like fear, courage is a choice. Choose courage – not fear. Courage is a choice. Let it be yours. Amen.

Dear Mr Jesus: A child's prayer

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jBQiECCOIy0&t=5s>

A prayer to end violence

(from the Archdiocese of New Orleans)

God of Goodness, You know that the violence in our community is out of control. It is taking our helpless and innocent ones, it is taking our children. And, we confess that beyond the violence in our streets, is the violence in our own hearts. We contribute to a culture of violence whenever we give in to hatred, fear, indifference, and our own self-satisfaction.

It seems that we are growing numb to the suffering, the loss, the indignity done to our sisters and brothers and to our Earth. But in our hearts, and in the heart of the community, help us to value life and beauty over instant satisfaction, and to value sharing over greed. Empower us to acknowledge and affirm our children, our spouses, our neighbours, and seek respectful solutions to our conflicts. Create through us a world where it will be easier to be good.

Your Spirit, given to us, is not timid. Therefore, each of us can do something, person by person, family by family, community by community, to realize that we are one—one body, one people, one earth. By Your design, we thrive or we perish together.

Holy One, give us the grace of hope. Give us the dedication to goodness and truth as we seek to restore our community to wholeness and life. Enable us in this way, to take back our city from the violence and crippling fear we find in our midst. Trusting that Your desire for us is peace, not disaster, we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Closing Hymn: He Leadeth Me

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5DI9C4HB4_k

Benediction

When the noise and haste surround us and threaten to take us hostage, may God's gentle voice soothe us and guide us to a place of quiet strength.

When the days seem cold and dark, and the nights unbelievably long, may God's smile illumine and warm us from within. When we feel alone and dismal, may God send someone to us with a daisy. May we truly go forth in joy and be led back in peace.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, our saviour and friend. May the love of God, binding us together and building us up. May the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, knitting us together as a church family; Be with us until we meet again. Amen.