

Isaiah 1:1, 10-20  
Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16  
Luke 12:32-40

On December 3, 1976, two days before Bob Marley was set to perform in a free concert in his native Jamaica, he was wounded in an assault by unknown gunmen. The concert was the idea of the Jamaican prime minister and was designed to ease tensions between two warring political groups. The attempt on Marley's life was probably politically motivated. Nevertheless, he performed as planned, despite his injuries. When asked why he would appear in public as an easy target and while still weak from gunshot wounds he said, "The people who are trying to make this world worse aren't taking a day off. How can I?"

That was in 1976, more than 40 years ago. It appears the people who are trying to make the world worse are still around. They showed up last weekend: one in El Paso, Texas; one in Dayton, Ohio; another in Chicago. Early last week the Washington Post reported:

"It was a ghastly weekend in America, with more than two dozen people killed in the two shooting rampages in El Paso and Dayton. An additional seven people were wounded early Sunday during a shooting in Chicago."<sup>1</sup>

*If anything, the people who are trying to make this world worse appear to be working over-time.*

Bob Marley could have stepped onto that stage more than 40 years ago straight from the pages of our second reading this morning, from the book of Hebrews. Today's passage talks about faith. Faith is confidence in a reality we cannot see at present, but which is promised to us by God.

Hebrews Eleven mentions more champions of faith than are included in today's passage. We do get to hear about Abraham who we are told "obeyed" God. The Latin root of the word "obey" means "to hear" or "to listen."<sup>2</sup> Abraham heard a message that a better life awaited but only if he were willing to risk. Risk going to an unknown land; risk leaving his family; risk losing all that he had. And his risk paid off! To this day he inspires us from a time at least 3-1/2 millennia ago. At least 3500 years ago.

We don't get to hear today about Moses. The text says by faith, he was hidden by his parents for three months after his birth. By faith he left Egypt. By faith he kept the Passover. We don't get to hear in today's shortened passage about the faith of Rahab, David, Solomon, and the prophets. All of whom had confidence in a reality they could not see but was promised by God.

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<sup>1</sup> "Officials call El Paso shooting a domestic terrorism case, weigh hate crime charges," by Robert Moore, Mark Berman of The Washington Post, August 5, 2019, <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/breakingnews/investigators-search-for-answers-after-mass-shootings-in-el-paso-dayton/ar-AAFk9e6>

<sup>2</sup> from Latin *obedire*, *oboedire* "obey, be subject, serve; pay attention to, give ear," literally "listen to," from *ob* "to" (see *ob-*) + *audire* "listen, hear." See: <https://www.etymonline.com/word/obey>

God continues to promise a better reality. Every Sunday, in the Lord's Prayer, we say (out loud!): "Thy kingdom come." That kingdom is God's promise that a better *world order* exists than the one we currently inhabit. The Bible provides glimpses, here and there, of what that *world order* is like:

- "Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore." (Isaiah 2:4)
- "They shall beat their swords into plowshares." A plowshare is the blade or sharp portion of a plow. (Isaiah 2:4)
- "There shall be a sowing of peace; the vine shall yield its fruit, the ground shall give its produce, and the skies shall give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things." Zechariah 8:12

"Thy kingdom come". When we pray this, it is something we do "by faith," like those champions of faith extolled in the book of Hebrews. Interestingly enough, right after Hebrews comes the book of James that says, "Faith without works is dead." James 2:17

The Lord's Prayer confirms this. The very next phrase after "Thy kingdom come," is "Thy will be done on earth." That's our part. We have work to do.

The Church of the Brethren, one of three historic peace churches along with the Mennonites and Quakers, re-issued a challenge to its members this week following the shootings in El Paso and Dayton. We would do well to heed their words. Their statement said:

"We have fallen short of discipleship in the way of Jesus, lost sight of Christ's reconciling work, grown weary in doing good, become numb to shootings, and tolerant of widespread violence in our nation. We call ourselves into greater and more energetic care for all people through direct service, bold peacemaking, and the work of challenging [those] policies that do not lead to well-being and God's shalom."<sup>3</sup>

We have work to do.

National leaders from every point on the religious compass support measures to reduce gun violence. In our church, "Bishops United" is a network of Episcopal bishops who are pushing for new gun laws. They support House Bill 8 that will establish new background checks for firearm transfers between private parties.

But we have work to do.

The month of August is "summer break" for members of Congress. It is the longest recess in the legislative cycle. All of our elected representatives – from the House and the Senate – are in their home districts, working for re-election, fundraising and most importantly, listening to constituents. And they do listen.

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<sup>3</sup> "In Response to the Shootings in El Paso and Dayton," Church of the Brethren Newline, August 5, 2019, <http://www.brethren.org/news/2019/response-to-the-shootings.html?fromRSS=true>

I learned in a national conference call on gun violence this week that members of Congress pay more attention to the local papers in their home states than they do to the big dailies, like the New York Times or Wall Street Journal. In particular, they read the letters to the editor.

If you want to reduce gun violence, then write a letter to the editor expressing your views. Our work – now – is to speak up and take action. Can we:

- Teach peace and pursue it? That means turn off violent TV shows, movies and video games.
- Can we challenge our youth to turn away from the culture of violence represented in films and video games and promoted by social media? That's a tall order. We are a violence-soaked society.
- Can we approach the school board to establish curriculum for all youngsters to learn conflict resolution, toleration of others, and anger control?
- Can we donate to causes that work for effective gun control legislation? Can we join those causes? Can we continue writing letters to the editor and continue contacting our elected officials?

A delegation from Episcopal Bishops United was on Capitol Hill in February lobbying for HB-8, saying it was time for Congress to do more than offer “thoughts and prayers” to the victims of gun violence. One of those bishops, the Rt. Rev. Ian Douglas of Connecticut said, “Silence on this is complicity. If we're silent, other people can frame the discourse.”

And Bob Marley said, "The people who are trying to make this world worse aren't taking a day off." How can we?