

In the Aftermath of the Boston Marathon Bombing

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Rev. Liz Miller

It's been a hard week. And I'm really tired of hard weeks. We have them too often. The first hard week in our country that I remember started April 19, 1995, Oklahoma City. I was in 6th grade, and my grandparents lived a half hour away from Oklahoma City. This week it was Boston and Texas, but there have been plenty of others. We've had a lot of hard weeks in our lifetimes, too many to list.

At the end of this hard week, I believe that there are a few things that we all need to hear, so I have three things for you today—three things that I suspect we all need, and I hope you will carry with you into a new, more peaceful week. I believe that today we need to be loved, we need to pray, and we need the opportunity to look at things in a totally different way.

The need to feel loved is one of those basic human needs that we have from the time we are born. It's so important that later this morning when we baptize two little babies we will tell them, “We love you.” And we tell their parents and their Godparents, “We love you, too.” When we see horrible things happening nearby, it feels personal. It can feel like we are being attacked or hurt, like what is happening there is also happening, here, to ourselves. So we look for love. We look for our families and friends to offer up hugs and kind words. We need them. We need to be reminded that what defines our lives is love, not fear, not anger, not violence, but unconditional, all encompassing, radical, feel good, ewy gooey, love.

A blessing of this past week was that there was love in abundance. Every day I have heard more and more stories of people doing courageous acts, people offering up their homes to strangers, people reaching out with kindness, with support, doing anything they can to care for anyone who needs care. I kept hearing people repeat the famous Mister Rogers quote: “When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, 'Look for the helpers. You will always find people who

are helping.” That was certainly true this week—it was even true here in Glastonbury as people checked in on one another to make sure we were doing okay. This morning I am thankful for all the helpers from this week—they are the the living demonstration that it is love that defines our world. It is love that holds us together.

Old South Church, a sister congregation in the United Church of Christ, is known as the Church of the Finish Line because of their location in Copley Square. Their community has been rocked by the marathon events this week. They have had to be closed because they are a part of the investigation area, but that hasn't slowed down their ministry to their community. Their pastor, Rev. Nancy Taylor, wrote a letter to their church that lifts up the ways in which their ministry has continued. When I read it for the first time, it became apparent to me that everywhere she said, “we are ministering” what she was really saying is, “We are loving.” I'd like to read part of it to you.

Dear Old South Church, The Church of the Open Door is still ministering ... despite the fact that our door is locked and we remain a crime scene. We are ministering in New Orleans where our mission team is building a home. We are ministering as our members reach out in countless ways to strangers. We are ministering to the city, nation and world as our beautiful Tower and banners appear on television screens. And we are ministering as the blessings with which we blessed runners and families and volunteers on Sunday are still super-charging persons shaken so by violence....Not even a crime scene, yellow tape and police barricades can stop us. Hope is too elemental. Amen?

Led by Old South and many other faith communities and individuals, Boston is full of love today. So are we.

Today, we also need to pray. Perhaps more than anything else, prayer will lift us out of darkness and into light. Prayer is powerful because in prayer, we empty ourselves of our worries, our fears, our insecurities, and our challenges. We empty ourselves out to God. We ask God to hold onto to them, and in doing so, we realize that we are not alone in this. God is present, God is listening, and God is beside us for the entire journey.

I am so thankful that the Psalm for this morning is Psalm 23. There are few prayers that are more familiar, or more comforting than Psalm 23. We probably most often associate it with funerals, but that is because it is so assuring of God's embrace and presence in our lives, in this moment. *The Lord is my shepherd. He Maketh me. He leadeth me. He restores my soul...* When I can't find the words on my own, or when I can't make sense out of the world, Psalm 23 speaks for me. My favorite line is "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life..." When I feel tired and broken, I hear this and I am reminded that mercy is my guide. Mercy will always be present. I'm reminded that even though we've had a hard week, there is more goodness in the world. And in the goodness, we will find God.

Psalm 23 speaks so powerfully to the heart of our faith that for many years, churches and parents would have children memorize it. Maybe you did as a child. We don't really do that anymore, but that doesn't make Psalm 23 any less important. In fact, today we have placed copies of it in your pews, so that we might return to that old tradition and say the psalm in unison. Go ahead and pick it up. The version you will read is King James, the same one taught and memorized for generations. For some, it might feel old fashioned, but for many of us, this version will feel like home. It is that comfort and tradition of prayer that we are honoring today. Please join with me in Psalm 23, memorized or read, let us say..

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me;
thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my
cup runneth over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the
LORD for ever.

You are welcome to take home this copy of the Psalm with you today. When you need assurance, or when you need a prayer, return to it.

The third and final thing I promised to give you today is an opportunity to look at things in an entirely different way. In order to do that, I need you to know about the mantis shrimp. I bet no one came to worship this morning expecting to hear about the mantis shrimp, so already we are doing something different. The mantis shrimp is small, it doesn't usually grow longer than twelve inches. What makes the mantis shrimp special is the way it looks at the world.

You see, the reason we see different colors is because our eyes have millions of light sensitive cells, some that see light and motion, and some that see color. The ones that see color are called cones, and we humans have three kinds: blue, green, and red. Dogs only have two, blue and green, which is why we often say they are color blind. Those blue, green, and red cones in our eyes allow us to see all the different color combinations in our world. And, from my view, what we can see from just those three combinations is pretty spectacular.

But the mantis shrimp, this small little creature, has sixteen different color cones. Sixteen different colors that makes up all of the different color combinations they see in the world. Can you imagine? When we look at a rainbow, everything we see stems from the three colors—we see red, blue, and green, and then we see all the combinations from them—yellow, purple, orange, pink. When the mantis shrimp looks at a rainbow, the colors stem from SIXTEEN different colors. The mantis shrimp sees colors that don't even exist for us! We can't imagine them, because we have no frame of reference for what they might be! The amount of beauty that they must be able to see in the world completely overwhelms and amazes me. The mantis shrimp can see more colors than almost any other animal in the entire world.

The mantis shrimp is small. And often times, when things are small, we discredit them, or we assume they don't have anything to offer that we can't provide for ourselves. Sometimes, when huge

events in happen in the world, I feel small. I feel helpless or like I don't have any say in what is going on or how to process it. The mantis shrimp is our reminder that small things have something powerful to offer. In the case of the mantis shrimp, it's a fresh perspective. What may seem small and insignificant might actually have something really special to give to the rest of the world. So, even when the world feels too big, each of us still has something to offer. Each of us matters. Not a single one of us sees the world in the same way that someone else does, and that perspective is important.

The mantis shrimp is my hero at the end of a hard week. Because sometimes, we need to know that what we see in the world isn't all there is to it. We are reminded that there are many perspectives and that we might be next to someone who sees things completely differently than us. These different perspectives are what makes the world so beautiful, it is what makes it so colorful. In the color and in the differences, we are united by our love for our neighbors, our love for our communities, and our love for this crazy, crazy world. We see in God's creation that there is more color, more beauty, and more light than we can fathom. We need the mantis shrimp like we need prayer. It helps us see the world in a completely different way and it reminds us, that no matter what, we're going to be okay. Amen.