



These letters are written in a style called "uncial", a script commonly used from the 4th to 8th centuries AD by Latin and Greek scribes. Eugenio Hansen, Alpha and Omega. 2010

May 29, 2022

Easter 7, Memorial Day weekend

Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20-21

A Testament of Invitation

Prayer: God of boundless grace, you call us to drink freely of the well of life and to share the love of your holy being. May the glory of your love, made known in the victory of Jesus Christ, our Savior, transform our lives and the world he lived and died to save...

"We're a small community and we're going to need your prayers to get through this...my heart is broken today" said Hal Harrell, the school district superintendent in Uvalde, Texas. And of course, we are praying. How can we not? I've been praying since I heard the news – I expect you have too. For people of faith, to hear this sad news is to drop into prayer. A response that for many in this part of Connecticut was learned in the aftermath of the Sandy Hook elementary school shooting in Newtown nearly ten years ago. So many things have gone wrong leading up to an event like this – wrong for a long time. One of the best things you can do is to pray.

Mass shootings of unarmed civilians is a spiritual problem... for all of us. To feel it is to be wounded again, to look away from the pain is to ignore suffering, the burden to make change seems to be on the families of the victims themselves, instead of where it belongs – on the community coming together to support them. Those of us who pray regularly know that prayer often leads us to change. Often it is change we do not necessarily welcome or even consciously want... but prayer opens us up. We may change ourselves, our words, our actions, we may look for solutions that are not immediately obvious. Jesus teaches that the person who prays and is not willing to change... is hypocritical. Christians support those who grieve – with

prayer and action. It's what we do. So, it's a spiritual problem for all of us, offering our prayers, again, the horror – because prayer invites change. And nothing seems to change...

I shared this message in the e-connector and I am repeating it now, on purpose, in your hearing, on this Memorial Day weekend. One of the things we tell ourselves on Memorial Day is that the sacrifices of those who have served in war, the sacrifices of the previous generations have made our lives better. This is the sentiment behind the tomb of the unknown soldier, the flags in the cemeteries. And we say that knowing of course that there are lots of war dead whose sacrifices were less than noble, those who died of preventable causes, including accidents and friendly fire. A statistic which stands out is that in the Civil War more than twice as many died of disease than were killed in battle. These are old wounds now, and we can recognize retrospectively that all the losses were for the same cause. And there is comfort in wrapping it all up, the parts that fit well into that narrative of victory and valor, and the other stories too, that do not fit that well but are part of it, the same time, the same wars, the same sacrifice.

This week many of us have been searching for words. Words to say something new about another school shooting. Of course, this has nothing to do with Memorial Day...but because of its proximity to the holiday it does. It gets mixed up together.

I found a poem by Yehuda Amichai which begins:

Memorial day for the war dead. Add now
the grief of all your losses to their grief,
even of a woman that has left you. Mix
sorrow with sorrow, like time-saving history,
which stacks holiday and sacrifice and mourning
on one day for easy, convenient memory.

That's just the beginning of the poem, but you see the poet is getting at this human reality that any loss reminds us of all other losses. And how our grief for the war dead gets mixed up with even a failed relationship – and we sit with all our grief when we sit with any part of it. One of the undervalued things about memorial services and giving yourself time and space to grieve a loss is that it allows you to move on from future losses. Marking a loss well, allowing time for honest conversations and appropriate time off, has a way of healing the future. I see this in families who make an effort, costly and inconvenient, to invite each other to a memorial service for a loved one. It does not lessen the loss, but it increases the capacity for future resilience. To bring the loss into some kind of arc of understanding, held in the community and in love.

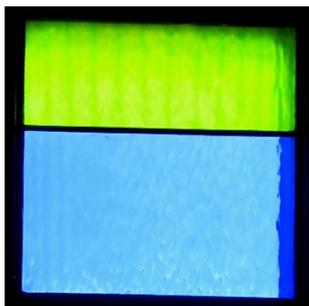
In Interim ministry we also talk about this with congregations in transition. The loss of a Pastor often brings up feelings about other pastors who have left, and it's easy to find that we're all processing multiple losses when you thought you were just talking about one.

Memorial day for the war dead. Add now the grief of all your losses to their grief, even of a woman that has left you. Mix sorrow with sorrow, like time-saving history, which stacks holiday and sacrifice and mourning on one day for easy, convenient memory.

And this matter of wrapping up the story is what brings me to our text today from The Revelation of John. The image you have on the bulletin is an image of an ancient script, used from the 4th to the 8th centuries, the letters form the alpha and the omega, the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, a symbol of wrapping the whole story of the 66 books of the Bible into one glorious story which begins and starts over again, which makes sense of it all, and affirms the lives (our lives and those of our children) that will come afterwards.

Alpha and Omega means to encompass all the words written, all the words to come. You may remember the prologue to the gospel of John: "In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God." In Genesis God creates by speech. The creative word brings forth the creation itself.

And the 66th book of the Bible, in its last chapter includes a hymn of invitation, inviting anyone who wishes, take the water of life as a gift. Come! In the end we have this poetry which is a testament of invitation: the Spirit and the bride of Christ, everyone who hears, everyone who is thirsty (in your vulnerability), let anyone who wishes take the water of life...



This simple stained-glass image from: Table View Methodist Church in Cape Town, South Africa, celebrates a theological and symbolic journey through the Bible through simple stained glass. This is the last one, called Revelation. The Kingdom has come, the home of God is with mortals, the world is turned upside down. The image is green over blue, the world was created with blue over green. It's an image of reversal – of what is hoped for.

In the final coming together of all things the alpha and the omega meet.

- Suffering is ended
- We are reunited with those we love but have been lost to us in this life
- Climate change is redeemed.

- Illness is redeemed, and restored with full healing; pandemics cease, cancer stops, diseases reverse their progression.
- Children are not gunned down at school, their shooter even finds forgiveness and renewal,
- The circumstances of suffering resolve
- The war dead are animated again, returned to their families.

I do not understand how this will happen, where, when. I do understand that God promises in the Testament, to invite us as we are, to hope beyond our suffering, and to stay the course. These are not easy days. We have each other, we have faith. Some of you may wonder if that is enough to carry us through, others of you know that having faith, and each other is all we need.

Question for reflection and conversation:

- On this Memorial Day weekend when we remember the sacrifices that others have made on our behalf, what legacy would you like to share with future generations?

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