

Minister's Musings – June, 2022

In the Eco-Grief workshops that I facilitate, we use poetry to enter into naming our pain so that we might move through it. One of the poems is Maggie Smith's *Good Bones*:

Life is short, though I keep this from my children.
Life is short, and I've shortened mine
in a thousand delicious, ill-advised ways,
a thousand deliciously ill-advised ways
I'll keep from my children. The world is at least
fifty percent terrible, and that's a conservative
estimate, though I keep this from my children.
For every bird there is a stone thrown at a bird.
For every loved child, a child broken, bagged,
sunk in a lake. Life is short and the world
is at least half terrible, and for every kind
stranger, there is one who would break you,
though I keep this from my children. I am trying
to sell them the world. Any decent realtor,
walking you through a real shithole, chirps on
about good bones: This place could be beautiful,
right? You could make this place beautiful.

As we leave the Soul Matters month of Awakening to Beauty, and come into the month of Celebrating Blessings, it is painful and poignant and pitiful to find ourselves here, with yesterday's news of yet another mass shooting, this time (not the first, not the last) at a school. It is painful and poignant and pitiful to find ourselves with yet more evidence that our nation prays to the gods of gun-profiteers.

It is a struggle to find the blessings, much less celebrate them. It is difficult to answer yes to the poet's question. When we feel so helpless, how do we affirm our power to make this place beautiful?

My colleague and friend, Rev. Kim Wildszewski, who serves here in New Jersey at Washington Crossing, wrote the words below just after the Buffalo mass shooting on May 14,. She shared them as that congregation celebrated the blessing of their youth who were bridging into young adulthood. She references how when we dedicate babies and young children, we remove the thorns from the roses as a gesture of sheltering them from harm; and when we bridge our Coming of Agers or High School Seniors, we keep the thorns on, recognizing our role as protector changes as they age.

Our children
know the names of politicians,

trade them out for supervillains.
Have been told to look for the helpers so many times
they know we are running out of ideas.
I would do anything to give them the thorns of roses.

The second from last line just slays me: *they know we are running out of ideas*. I feel that way, writing to you just now. How do we move beyond poetry and vigils? How do we move out of our exhaustion and numbness that take the shape of cynicism or hopelessness?

I think we come together. We keep coming together. And we find purpose and connection with each other in writing emails or postcards or making visits or phone calls to those who will help us topple the gods of the gun-profiteers. In the midst of my feeling helpless, I found on a friend's Facebook page a post that encouraged writing to the board of the convention center in Houston where the NRA is meeting this coming weekend. The post included the emails and even the text of the letter my friend had already sent. I posted the instructions on my Facebook page, hoping that others might follow suit. All of the sudden, some of that weight of hopelessness and helplessness lifted. It was a small thing, but it was a timely thing.

I share with you these words I wrote several years ago, at one of the far too many other mass shootings that had just taken place. Sadly, the words are still appropriate much too often.

It is hard to look at the news; yet it is just as hard to turn away. I see these lost lives and I know that even without having met them that I love them...the universe sang in each and every one of their heads, hearts, and hands.

Even if they find a reason or a motivation for this horrible act of violence, it will never make sense. Our hearts will go on aching.

Some of us want to cry. Some of us want to lash out. Some of us want to hide.

I am sad. I am mad. I am afraid.

Yes, but not only those things:

I am still here.

I am still alive.

Yes, I might be tired.

But I will also be brave—brave enough to meet violence with peace; to meet hate with love; to meet shadow with light.

I will try to be brave. If you are not feeling brave, you can have some of mine. If I am not feeling brave, I will borrow some of yours. We will add our brave together, add it all up, so that our brave-together light will outshine the shadow.

Awakening beauty with you, celebrating blessings with you.

~ Rev. Karen