

The Sound of Silence

August 31, 2025

Rather than the scripture reading that is listed in your bulletins today, my prayer has led me to offer you three distinct verses: John 11:35 — Jesus wept.

On Friday morning, I woke to the sound of our daughter dumping the entire contents of her toybox onto the floor. I lay there, startled into consciousness, and I wept. I wept, not because I had literally spent hours the day before meticulously organizing said toys. I wept, because even in those foggy pre-caFFEinated moments, all I could think about was the fact that there are two bedrooms in the Minneapolis suburbs that were silent. Two bedrooms that would never again emit the clatter of toy cars, two bedrooms that would never again hear the echo of the Bluey soundtrack on such a constant loop that the entire family suspects they will lose their ever-loving mind.

I was listening to NPR on the way to pick her up from daycare the day before. Ten minutes of “All Things Considered” is better than none, after all. I didn’t think to change the channel as I got out of the car, and so, when we got back in, the first words she heard were, “Two children are dead and another 17 are wounded.” She asked, “Why did they say two children are dead.” I lied to her. I told her I didn’t think he said that. I offered unfathomable prayers of gratitude that when I hastily changed the station to the Beatles channel, “Yellow Submarine” was playing. It’s her favorite. It should be every 5-year-old’s favorite. It distracted her, so I wouldn’t have to explain to her that even school – even church – isn’t safe.

Jesus wept.

Add to that Exodus 20:2-3 — I am the LORD your God, you shall not have false gods before me.

Have you ever looked back on a moment and realized in retrospect that all of the puzzle pieces were falling into place? My husband Scott’s and my first encounter was like that. We were both at the same pub watching the Badgers in the Sweet Sixteen, and the only free seat in the place was next to him. Despite the fact that the game was riveting, by the time it was over we had already sussed out where each other stood on LGBT rights and common-sense gun control. Heck, I was a 40-year-old woman who wanted a baby – I wasn’t going to waste a Friday night on someone who wasn’t a long-term prospect. Scott is a hunter. We have guns in our home. I have to admit that I would be less at ease if they weren’t secured in a gun safe that can only be opened with Scott’s fingerprint.

I hope this gives me some credibility on this issue.

Too many people in this country have made a god of guns and the second half of the Second Amendment. They bow to it. They worship it. Nothing else comes before it.

Remember the scripture passage we read earlier this month, “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”? What Jesus was really saying there is that we become what we worship. Isn’t

that really what we're trying to do here? We come together week after week, steeping ourselves in the Jesus story, in the hopes that we might soak it in and embody it. That's what we're doing in Communion, praying that God will become as much a part of us as the food we eat.

And hundreds of thousands of our fellow Americans, instead of worshipping peace and love and justice and joy incarnate, are bowing down to the golden calf of guns as created by the NRA and the gun lobby.

Do you remember the story of King Solomon and the two women who both claimed to be a baby's mother? Solomon's wisdom was to order that the baby be cut in two and each woman be given half. Of course, it was the baby's mother, the one who loved it, who refused to allow this to happen.

What you love you will protect.

And there are hundreds of thousands of our fellow Americans who love guns more than children, who would rather protect their guns than Fletcher and Harper. Those were their names. They had new school shoes and had gotten haircuts the week before.

Their parents had already purchased winter jackets on clearance last spring and had a few Christmas presents squirreled away. They're going to open the cupboard where they had been saving that new jar of Play-Doh for when their little darling needed a pick-me-up, and they will crumble under the weight of what will never be.

So tell me again how divinely inspired it is to have no gun control. Tell me again what you worship. Tell me again what you love.

James 2:17 — Faith without works is dead.

So, it goes without saying that we're heartbroken. I'm going to assume that the majority of us acknowledge that there's a problem.

So now what?

In the Friday email we sent to the congregation this week, Cheryl Meyers was reflecting on the faith implications of Labor Day. She quoted a recent poem by Amanda Gorman that ends with: "But only when everything hurts, may everything change."

Friends, we thought Columbine was an outlier. We thought Sandy Hook would change things.

Kwame Anthony Appiah writes The Ethicist column for the New York Times. He wrote a book about 15 years ago called "The Honor Code." In it, he studies how social transformation happens.

How did dueling stop being the way aristocratic British resolved disputes? How did footbinding come to an end in China?

He concludes that social transformation happens when our narrative of what is honorable changes. For too long, we have allowed our country's narrative to be "they'll have to pry this gun out of my cold, dead hands," and that has been at the expense of thousands of lives.

Friends, the false god of guns with absolutely no restrictions as the highest good has to be exposed for what it is: a boldface lie.

I also direct your attention to the work of organizations like Sandy Hook Promise, a nonprofit born out of tragedy, that now works to protect America's children from gun violence. Their initiatives include shaping school climate and safety which they do by building strong and resilient school communities, empowering students to embrace empathy and reject bullying and social isolation and violence prevention which includes teaching children to know the signs of violence and self-harm.

Friends, you know how rarely I speak in binaries, but the truth of the matter is, unless you're actively working for change on this issue, you're part of the problem. We need to be talking with everyone in our circles of influence, the moderates and even zealots, working to change the cultural narrative of what is honorable. We need to be advocating to our legislators for common sense gun reform. We need to be working with our school communities to help us raise empathetic human beings and minimize social isolation.

It is then, and only then, that things will change.

Last week at our interfaith prayer service in support of immigrants in St. James Park, I led a chant as the refrain to our prayers. It starts with inviting half of those gathered to chant, "It doesn't have to be like this," and the other half to chime in, "Today, another world is possible." Do you want to join with me in that chant again? Those of you who are so moved on this side of the sanctuary, let's start out "It doesn't have to be like this, it doesn't have to be like this." Now, those of you on this side, pick up, "Today, another world is possible."

Friends, another world is possible, but our God is relying on us to make it happen. Let's get to work.

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