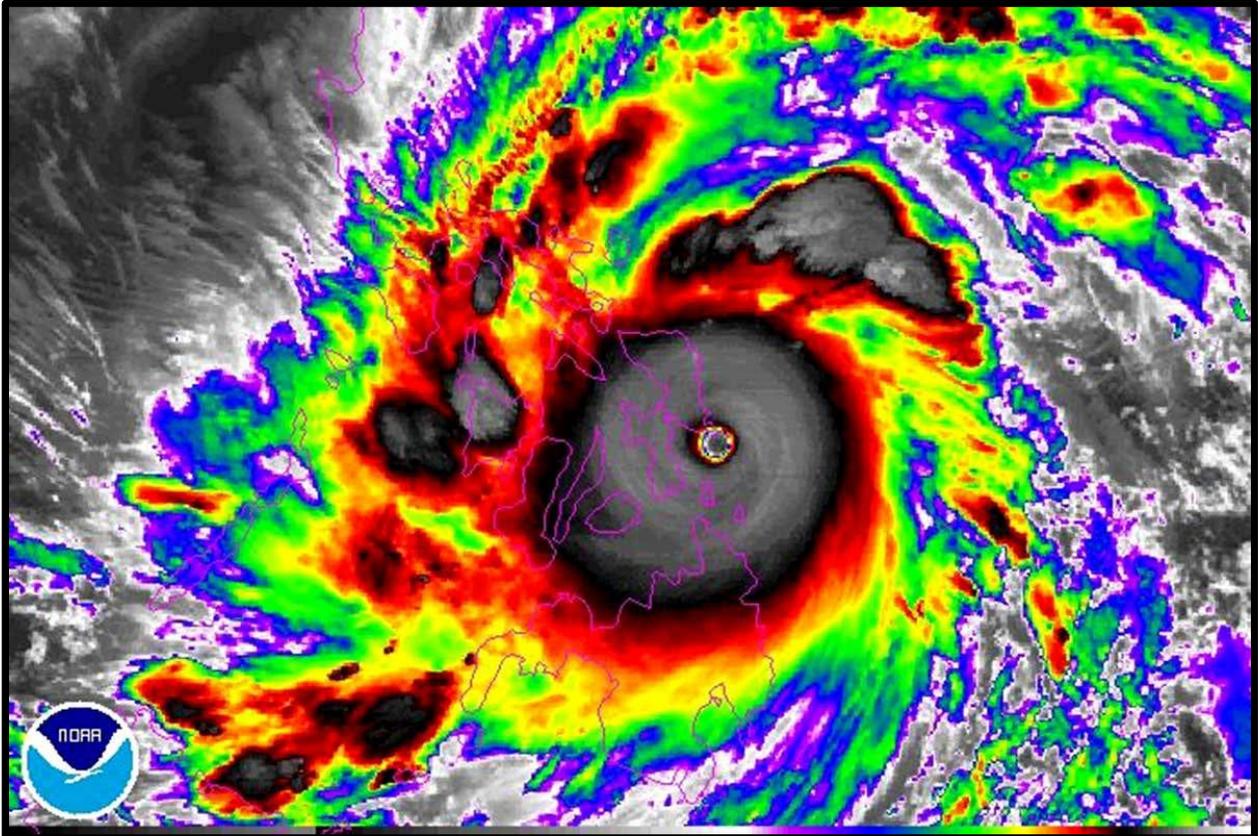


The Eye of the Storm



What a week this has been in our world.

Watching the news these past weeks has almost been unbearable.

We have seen hurricanes, and images of devastation. Hurricane Laura alone has caused an estimated 4 to 12 billion dollars of damage in just the two states of Texas and Louisiana, with the loss of life just now being tabulated.

We've seen two political conventions, two dueling narratives about the world we are living in. They are two starkly different ways of making sense of the world, so divergent that I have been left wondering if they share the same world at all.

We have witnessed yet more provocative and deeply troubling interactions between police and citizens. A 29 year old Black man, Jacob Blake in Kenosha Wisconsin lies paralyzed in the hospital after being shot multiple times in the back by an officer. Trayford Pellerin in Lafayette, Louisiana, was also shot by police while entering a convenience store with a knife.

From Kenosha to Portland, we've seen businesses burned, livelihoods of families and neighborhoods destroyed in the rage that has erupted on our streets. Kyle Rittenhouse, a 17 year old white man armed with an assault styled rifle has been charged with shooting three protestors in the street. Two of them have died.



And we've seen *peaceful* protests in cities around the country, with tens of thousands descending on Washington DC, marking the 57th anniversary of The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech. Comparing the speeches of August 1963 with those of this past weekend is startling. So much has changed and yet so little has changed. King's 12 year old granddaughter, Yolanda read the words of her grandfather as though they were written for us just yesterday.

Meanwhile, a pandemic rages in our midst: with COVID-19 deaths in the United States alone approaching the 190,000 mark. To give you some perspective on a number like that, it is four times the total number of U.S. battlefields deaths during the entire eleven years of the Vietnam war¹. Let that sink in for a moment.



Worldwide, over 880,000 thousand lives have been died of COVID-19, and just this past week I saw signs outside our Anchorage Assembly chambers that said "[The] Virus [is a] Hoax".²

Can we just start 2020 all over again?

¹ Source: https://www.va.gov/opa/publications/factsheets/fs_americas_wars.pdf

² <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/us/coronavirus-us-cases.html>

But how are we, as followers of Jesus, to respond to these changes in our world?

We, who are in the eye of the storm, how then shall we live?

Turning to the Scripture readings for today, we find both a grounding and a direction. Remember, it's not as if we simply choose readings that speak to the issues of our times. In the Episcopal Church, we follow a three year cycle of readings that we seldom deviate from; today's readings are those regularly appointed for this Sunday.

The first reading was the iconic passage from the third chapter of the Book of Exodus. It introduces the great theme of God as a God of liberation, a God who hears the struggles and pain of God's people, especially the pain of oppression under the rule and power of the Pharaohs of Egypt. Moses, at this point in the story, is not some king or big prophet. He is a herdsman, living simply in Midian, minding his own business and tending to his father-in-law Jethro's flocks.



And Moses sees a bush ablaze, but one not consumed by the fire. And God reveals God's own self and own Holy Name to Moses, "I Am Who I Am." Or I Will Be Who I Will Be." It is the verb "to be"; the ground of being, existence itself. Never before has God revealed God's name and God's identity to human beings in this way.

And then God gives Moses a call, even as the Lord God has heard the cry of those in distress, so God shall send Moses as an instrument of freedom and deliverance. Inseparable from God's identity is God's righteousness. God is a God of justice and redemption, who wills not the bondage of God's people. In the passage that follows what we read today, Moses argues strongly with God... ..who is *he*, Moses, to undertake such an endeavor? And yet we learn that God works through the willing, as unprepared as they might believe themselves to be.

Turning quickly to the second reading from Romans: In a passage in the ninth chapter, just before what was read today, Paul teaches that God's love for the Israelite people extends not just to one tribe or race, but to *all* people: Quoting the Hebrew Scriptures, Paul tells us:

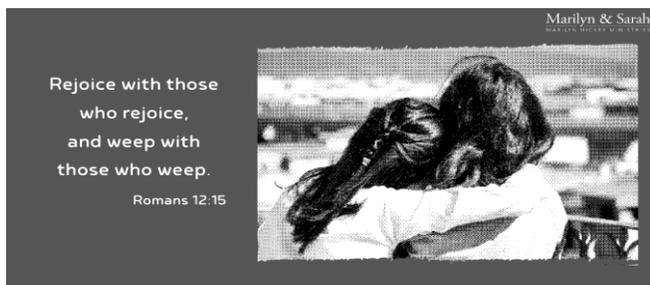
"As indeed God says in [in the Book of] Hosea,
'Those who were not my people I will call "my people",
and [she] who was not beloved I will call "beloved". "'

By the grace and power of God, Paul tells us, *all* who call on the name of the Lord shall be saved (Romans 10:13).

So then, with God in our hearts, how then shall we live?

"Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. ¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. (Romans 9-15).

There is a time and season for all things.



Today, friends, we weep with those who weep in this world of ours:

We weep with those whose lives have been destroyed by violent winds, by systemic injustice, by anger and by rage, by callousness and disregard, by a ravaging virus that has swept the

world.

As followers of Jesus, we stand alongside those who are on the "outside," striving to walk faithfully through this threatening storm.

There is, tragically, a version of religion in this world, popular in many quarters today, that casts its lot with the powers of this world, with the powers of brutality and fear, with empires and brute force, but I do not believe this is the way of Jesus. Neither is violence and destruction the way of our Lord.

Our task is most difficult: to stand against evil without emulating it.

To fight against oppression without ourselves becoming oppressive.

To hate what is evil, but not to repay evil with evil.

This seems impractical, foolishness, naive, weak.

In his sermon he gave sixty three years ago, Martin Luther King preached: "Why should we love our enemies? The first reason is fairly obvious. Returning hate for hate multiplies hate, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that. Hate multiplies hate, violence multiplies violence, and toughness multiplies toughness in a descending spiral of destruction."³

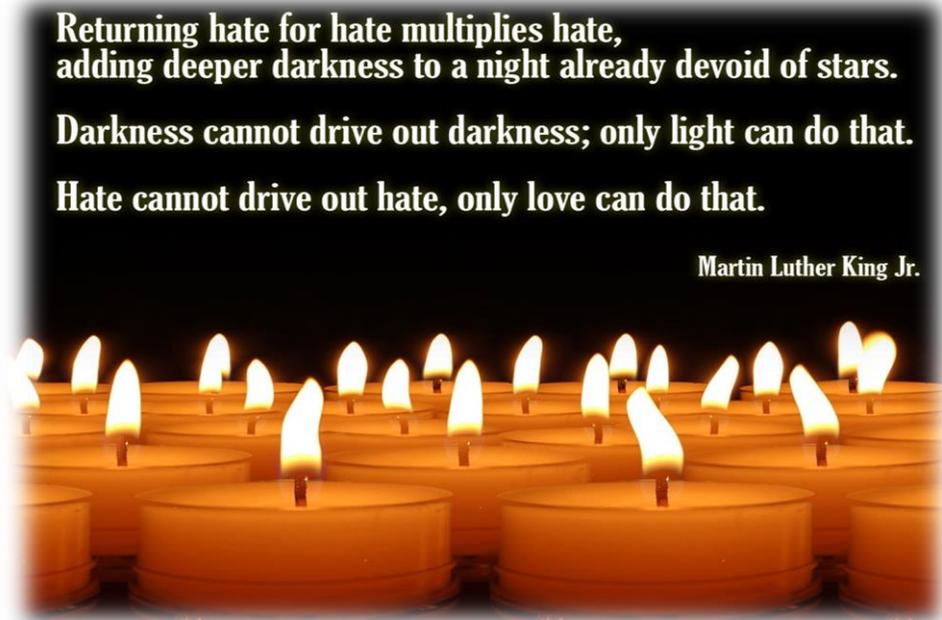


In the Gospel today, the disciple Peter is shocked at Jesus's foretelling that he will walk the difficult road of suffering and redemption. Peter has in his mind, no doubt, a more triumphal vision of crushing his enemies under his feet. But God ways are not those ways, and Jesus rebukes Peter, saying "Get behind me, Satan."

Friends, we are in the eye of the storm. Let our zeal not diminish. Let our Hope not be lost. Pray always. Act Boldly. Seek justice with peace.

For the Love of the Lord is actual, real, and transformative. Be that Love.

Amen.



³ <https://www.sitemason.com/files/dd815C/Selections%20from%20MLK%20Jr%20on%20Forgiveness.pdf>

Playlist:

Mark Heard: The Eye of the Storm

When it's dark outside you've got to carry a light
 Or you'll stumble and fall like tumbling dice
 It takes a steady step, it takes God-given sight
 Just to tell what is the truth, what is wrong, what is right

*[Chorus] In this world thunder throbs in the darkness
 Out in the eye of the storm
 The friends of God suffer no permanent harm*

When the night sky glows with the red fires of war
 And the threat of annihilation pounds at your door
 You don't have to pretend that you got no nerves of steel
 To believe that the love of the Lord is actual and real

When the daybreak comes with a trumpet blast
 And the true fruit of faith is tasted at long-last
 When the darkness dies and death is undone
 And teardrops are dried in the noonday sun

Copyright, 1983, [Home Sweet Home Records](#)

Words and Music by Mark Heard.

To Listen: https://video.search.yahoo.com/yhs/search?fr=yhs-symantec-ext_onb&hsimp=yhs-ext_onb&hspart=symantec&p=mark+heard+eye+of+the+storm#id=1&vid=4c8728f85517f9bd36d49eca4cb3b428&action=view



The Collect (Prayer) of the Day

Lord of all power and might, the author and giver of all good things: Graft in our hearts the love of your Name; increase in us true religion; nourish us with all goodness; and bring forth in us the fruit of good works; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Losin' It

climb the tower with me tonight
 speak long with the wind
 let your laughter drown my sorrow
 let an age of hope begin

loyalty is not a word
 heard 'round these parts these days
 love gets drowned in a pool of tears
 i'm drunk on anyway

hold me tight
 God i'm losing it
 hold me tight
 i'm confusing it

job lost all his daughters
 job lost all his sons
 lost all his crops and his animals
 each and every one

still i know whom i believe in
 and persuaded He is able
 to keep track of all the cards
 laid out on my table

oh please don't get upset
 you know these means of grace
 have never failed me yet

see the harvest getting ripe
 there's a wine press almost full
 michael swing your sickle wide
 and take off both your shoes

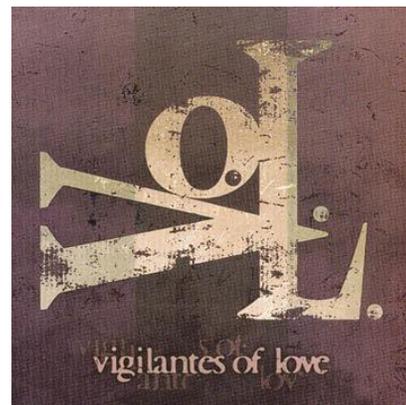
sold me a wealth of pleasure
 it was a dime store full of pain
 the stuff i thought was jewelry
 it turns out to be chains

hold me tight
 i'm abusing it
 hold me tight
 i'm losing it

Written by Bill Mallonee for Irving Music, Inc., Allegiance Music, Russachugama Music and CyBrenJoJosh (BMI)
 ©1990, 1992; from [V.O.L./Vigilantes of Love \(greatest hits, good intentions & near misses 1992-1996\)](#),
 released September 10, 1996. All rights reserved

To listen:

<https://billmalloneemusic.bandcamp.com/track/losin-it>



Old Testament: Exodus 3:1-15

Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

Then the LORD said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt."

But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" He said, "I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain." But Moses said to God, "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" God also said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'The LORD, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you':

This is my name forever,
and this my title for all generations.

The Epistle: Romans 12:9-21

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the

lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." No, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

The Gospel: Matthew 16:21-28

Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you." But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?"

"For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

