

How inspiring it is to be here this morning with you in this beautiful hall, now arranged for worship! I am proud to be part of a community that is willing to play and experiment with ways of connecting to God and to each other. It will be fun to hear about your experience in this space. What does it feel like to you? What helps you to listen and to pray and what would help you do that better? What helps you let God love you and what do you need more of? Some people have already expressed feeling thankful, since because of asthma, they would not have been able to come to church over the summer if we were still in the sanctuary.

For three weeks we have been practicing with a new worship bulletin that we can re-use each week. You've had time to get a feel for it, and have probably wondered at some of the new language. It comes from the approved liturgical resource called *Enriching our Worship*. It is intended to help us by letting familiar prayers hit us from a different angle. For example, in the Lord's Prayer, instead of praying, "lead us not into temptation," (as if God would deliberately lead us there), we pray, "save us from the time of trial." And instead of alluding to it in "trespasses," we call it like it is, "sin." What does it feel like to be praying a version of this prayer that has been in our prayer book for 37 years but in which we are not practiced? It is the ecumenically approved version, intended to be prayed by all the liturgical denominations, but it's unfamiliar.

Since we're in such a light and airy space, how about a little levity? This story is about Marsha, and it has nothing to do with the Lord's Prayer. Everyone loved Marsha's cookies and kept asking her for her recipe. She finally tired of being polite, saying, "You'll get my recipe over my dead body." Well, looking for a way to remember their mother, her children had her tombstone inscribed with the recipe.

Our idiomatic way of speaking contains all kinds of death and dying language. When we're really thirsty, we say, "I'd die for an ice-cold drink!" We're either dead right or dead wrong. When we get all dressed up for a party, we're dressed to kill. When we're in trouble with someone, we're dead meat. When we've done something that will cause our downfall, it's the kiss of death or

the nail in the coffin, and if you can't take it anymore, you're sick to death. When we make a lot of money, we make a killing, and when laughing hysterically at someone's humor, we tell them, "You're killing me!"

Maybe the language of death gets into our expressions because the idea of dying is frightening, and it is our way of light-heartedly including that gravitas in our daily lives. But, there is death and there is violent death. They affect us very differently. People dying of natural causes is distressing enough, but people dying violently at the hands of another, like last week in Orlando, is highly distressing.

We live in an increasingly divided and polarized society. We tend to put ourselves into likeminded groups and put others out. It is a short distance from division to demonization. In the Orlando massacre, we witnessed the tragic consequences of this. The shooter was shaped by a culture of division, distrust, and fear-inspiring rhetoric.¹

But, it doesn't have to be this way. God has already invited us into his reconciling work with and through his son Jesus Christ. St. Paul wrote in 2nd Corinthians, "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new. All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ." (II Corinthians 5:17-20). As he writes to the Galatians, in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

All we have to do is claim our identity as children of God and deliberately treat those who are different from us with kindness, respect, and honor.

¹ ELCA presiding bishop's letter in response to Orlando

“Our work begins now. We must stand with people who have been “othered”. We must speak peace and reconciliation into the cacophony of hatred and division. We must live the truth that all people are created in God’s image”² and that we are all one in Christ Jesus.

Today we are thankful to be counted among those called to pray—and then, called to act: We pray for those killed in Orlando. We pray for the family of the shooter, for our LGBTQ brothers and sisters and for our Muslim brothers and sisters who now face the threat of retaliation. And we pray that the Prince of Peace will bring us to the day when we stop killing ourselves.³

The demoniac from Geneseret was killing himself, in fact, he knew he was already dead, for he was relegated to live in the graveyard among the tombs of the dead and was deprived of friends and companions. He was either incapable of living in civilization or forced to live among the tombs because of his intolerable otherness. I suspect it was a combination of both. No one could restrain him. When trying to control his violence with force, it was met with more force and more violence. But, violence cannot defeat violence. As Albert Einstein said, “We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them. [So,] Peace cannot be kept by force; it can only be achieved by understanding.”⁴

Jesus offered the demoniac the kind of understanding that utterly transformed him. First, he asked him his name. Then, he took him seriously and listened. Even though he began by speaking with legion, (a Roman legion is about 5,500 men), he ended up hanging out with the man’s true self. The man lost his craziness and strength, and found a different kind of power in the truth about himself and who he really was. Jesus had set him free. He was literally undone. His shackles were gone and so were the pigs. There is nothing left of his living nightmare. He died to his former self. It’s no wonder then, that when he asks Jesus to come with him, Jesus sends him back to his people—

² ELCA presiding bishop’s letter in response to Orlando

³ ELCA presiding bishop’s letter in response to Orlando

⁴ http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/a/albert_einstein.html

back to the very thing of which he had been deprived: companionship with his fellow citizens and true life in relationship.

Who do we know that needs companionship that we could invite into a conversation? Who do we know that could be set free by our listening? Who do we know that we could include by widening our circle? Who do we know that we could talk with this week? Let's get out there and do it!