SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Nu’uanu Congregational Church

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*“People, Get Ready”* John 17:20-26

Are your hearts broken now? It seems to be the national condition, and unfortunately, heartbrokenness is entirely appropriate for what we have experienced.

This past week, our hearts were rent once again by the sight of weeping parents. *Their* faces were then mirrored in the faces of their children, in the photos the news reporters have been able to scrounge-up and show us. Children and their teachers—people who are no more because of the violence that found them this week.

One hardest parts of this heartbreak—and *only* one part of it because there are so *many* parts of our national story that are heartbreaking this month—*one* of the hardest parts of this story is that it was *not* the first time in this month alone that we have come face-to-face with this kind of carnage. It was not the first time this month that we have encountered the kind of violence—*gun* violence—that is in the streets of our cities.

This week, it was in Texas and directed toward children. A couple of weeks ago, it was across the country in Buffalo, New York and directed toward Black people. Next week, who knows?

Different sources differ on the definition of mass shooting, but the [Gun Violence Archive](https://www.gunviolencearchive.org/methodology) (a non-profit organization that tracks these things), and the [Congressional Research Service](https://crim.sas.upenn.edu/fact-check/what-mass-shooting-what-can-be-done) define “mass shooting” as an incident where four or more people are shot, excluding the shooter from being counted as a victim.

According to these two trackers, 214 mass shootings have occurred in this country since the year began. Let that sink in: *214 mass shootings since the year began*, and we are not yet even half-way through the year.

 In Buffalo, the Black Christians there were not surprised about the violence that struck around the corner in their community, even though they felt the horror of it personally and specifically.

A Pew Research Center [survey](https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2022/05/20/safety-concerns-were-top-of-mind-for-many-black-americans-before-buffalo-shooting/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) from just last month showed that 32 percent of Black adults worried every day or almost every day that they might be threatened or attacked because of their race or ethnicity. That compares to 21 percent of Asian Americans, 14 percent of Hispanics, and 4 percent of white adults.

The one refrain that victims’ families from Columbine, Colorado in 1999, to Buffalo, New York and Uvalde, Texas in 2022, have prayed is that all of these deaths should not be in vain. That is the prayer of all of the families: Let their deaths not be in vain.

That is what [Doreen Tomlin prayed](http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/1999/october4/columbine-shooting-do-you-believe-in-god.html%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) when her 16-year-old was killed at Columbine, and that is what family members at the Buffalo funerals have been praying over and over.

It is what was prayed at 77-year-old Pearl Young’s funeral.

“Don’t let her dying be in vain,” said Bishop Glenwood Young Sr. According to *Christianity Today,* Bishop Young leads the Church of God in Christ in Western New York. Bishop Young’s sister-in-law was Pearl Young, and she was one of the victims at Tops Friendly Market.

At Pearl’s funeral, Bishop Young exhorted people in the church packed with hundreds to put their faith in Jesus. However, he earlier also brought up gun laws: “We’re tired,” he said. “Something’s got to happen.”

Emily Belz, writing for *Christianity Today*, reports that even after funeral services people were pulling out their Bibles, but it was not only to find comfort for grieving.

“The is evil among us, but God is alive,” said Dane Alexander whose stepbrother, Aaron Salter, was the security guard on duty at the store that day. Both men had both served on the Buffalo police force for all of their adult life, before retirement.

Salter gave his life protecting the store. He was able to shoot the killer, who was wearing body armor, and was able to turn on Salter and kill him.

After Salter’s funeral, Alexander, who also used to work security at the store, said “Christians, we have to speak up. The time of denial is over.”

Andre Clark, after burying his aunt Pearl, pulled out his Bible to read Proverbs 31:8–9: *“Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.”*

“If you say you’re a Christian,” says Clark, “what you’re going to say is, ‘I’m speaking up for those that cannot speak—at the watercooler, at the football game, at our churches, at our PTA meetings … not just saying a prayer on Sunday morning. Otherwise, we’ll be right back to ‘everything is OK,’ until there’s another Pearl Young lying dead in front of a Tops supermarket. It cannot be for a season. … Someone has to continue to speak.”

*That* right there is where this morning’s Scripture must (and *does*) confront us. It is in these words of Jesus that we are informed, but also *convicted* when we are told that we are not left alone to face these things. If we were, we would have something of an excuse for why these tragedies keep happening in our communities.

What Jesus tells us is that we are not only *not* alone, but he has also given us everything we need to live in this world, and to conduct our earthly lives in ways that honor and glorify him.

*“22The glory that you have given me* I have given them*,*[he says] *so that they may be one, as we are one, 23I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one…”*

Through our baptism, we are united to him, to our God, our Father/Mother, and to the Spirit. We are united with them. Which means we have been equipped to face…*everything*. We can face *down* every problem and *find* a solution that *honors*, that *glorifies* God.

Dead children do *not* glorify God.

Dead people with their groceries scattered around them does *not* glorify God.

Enshrining the 2nd Amendment to the point where year-after-year nothing is accomplished to make us all more safe—this does *not* glorify God.

In the Bible lesson we heard just a little while ago, Jesus was preparing his first disciples for life without him with them in the flesh. He was preparing them because the days that were immediately ahead of them were going to be very dark days.

They were going to see him arrested and humiliated. They were going to see him in agony. They were going to see him die on a sinner’s cross.

All of this is a sure recipe for utter despair; for the loss of all hope. It is, indeed, a recipe for inertia—for inactivity, for giving up and doing nothing.

However, instead of this being the end of things, God ordained that it was only the beginning of a new way of life in the world. In Christ’s resurrection, the disciples—and we—are meant to remember what Jesus said in this passage, and instead of locking ourselves away in fear, and hopelessness…we are called to *get ready.*

What Jesus was telling the disciples was that he has given them more than words, more than amazing stories and lessons. He has even given them more than miracles of healing and plenty.

What Jesus was telling them was that from that point on, his Spirit was going to live *within* them—and within all who came to faith. More than this, instead of coming along side us, we are going to receive the *indwelling* of God. And this would be for all people—then and long after.

Jesus was also preparing them to receive and minister to those who would *not* know him in the flesh, as they had. In the passage we heard, Christ was anticipating the discipleship of many who would come later—like us.

Just as the love of Christ made its home in the lives of Peter, Mary Magdalene, John, Matthew, and all of the others in the Gospels, this love, this Trinity was also going to live within all of those who will came after them. Christ, God, and the Spirit have made their home in all our lives.

“Someone has to continue to speak,” said the late Pearl Young’s nephew.

The dictionary defines the word “someone” as a person of unknown identity.

Our denomination, the United Church of Christ, likes to say that “God is still speaking.”

What Jesus said to the disciples who were with him two thousand years ago, *and* to the ones here in this gathering and throughout the world, is that *we* are that someone because *we* have been given the power to speak, to reason, to pray, and to work for the reconciliation and healing of God’s beloved people.

What Jesus said in the passage we heard this morning was: *people, O people, get ready.*

Get ready, because our unity is built upon the solid rock of Jesus’ love.

Get ready, because we are not alone, we are united with Christ, God, and the Spirit which also binds us in relationship with all of God’s people—we are in community. We are a Holy Community.

Get ready, because this Holy Community, created through our unity with Christ, God, and the Holy Spirit is also our testimony and our mission to the world—to draw more and more people into loving relationship so that we may do the work of healing, and together, be healed.

Get ready, because where a community so founded on God’s love exists, violence, hatred, and death will inevitably be themselves destroyed because the light of Divine love, the power of a community brought into relationship through Christ will not forget, will not keep silent, will not rest.

Friends, the funerals in Buffalo will continue until all of the saints’ earthly remains have been laid to rest. During the next few days, the funerals in Texas will commence. In the midst of all of this sorrow, what God is imploring us to hear are the words of hope we heard this morning in Jesus’ words to the disciples. Jesus’ words to them—to *us*—means that we have been made ready. We have Christ and we have each other. Therefore, we have been made ready to love, to hope and to work.

Let us do so with courage and resolve. Amen.