

Reading

From poetry of May Sarton....

Return to the most human,
nothing less will nourish the torn spirit,
the bewildered heart,
the angry mind:
and from the ultimate duress,
pierced with the breath of anguish,
speak of love.

Return, return to the deep sources,
nothing less will teach the stiff hands a new way to serve,
to carve into our lives the forms of tenderness
and still that ancient necessary pain preserve.

Return to the most human,
nothing less will teach the angry spirit,
the bewildered heart;
the torn mind,
to accept the whole of its duress,
and pierced with anguish...
at last, act for love.

“Where’s the Love?”

*“In the midst of a world marked by tragedy and beauty
 There must be those who bear witness against destruction
 And for tenderness.
 Have compassion for everyone you meet,
 Even if they don’t want it.
 What seems like conceit, bad manners or cynicism
 Is always a sign things no ears have hear, no eyes have seen.
 You do not know what wars are going on down
 Where the spirit meets the bone.
 Forget your perfect offering.
 There is a crack in everything.
 That is how the light gets in.”*

Please join me in letting these words sink into us this morning and this year,
 These words from minister Rebecca Parker, poet Miller Williams, and
 Song-writer Leonard Cohen,
 Words that I will open my sermons with this year until we tire of them,
 Or the world improves so much we don’t need them anymore, or both.

So a question to start our sermon together,
 We of beyond damaged by presidential election cycle ears,
 And thirsty for some good word in the midst a summer
 That seemed to keep breaking our heart and maybe our hope,
 With terror in Orlando and Nice and Syria and Iraq, and black lives killed,
 And police lives killed,

And the debate about whether banners should say all lives matter
 Or black lives matter stealing our attention away, if we let it,
 From the problem we have with racism in our lives,
 Because remember: the definition of privilege is not having to think
 About your privilege,
 Which as a tall, white, straight guy I know something about.
 And I have some company.

All this news drying up my heart and your heart's stamina for
 Bearing witness, like Rebecca says, *against* destruction and *for* tenderness,
 Not unlike the drought that has turned my grasshopper green spring-planted
 fir trees
 Brown and brittle come August,
 Cracking in my hand when I tested them for life.
 Sigh. What a hard summer in our world.
 I'm not one of those ministers who believes God has a plan.
 But what if, as Mary Oliver says in our cover quote,
What if God's plan is that we would do better?

Which leads me to wonder here in the opening pages of our church year
 Together, my 14th with you, and this congregation's 331st (wow),
 This question:
Where's the Love?
 A question given me one this week when against my better judgement
 I kept NPR turned on,
 And after add-nauseam stories about Hillary's basket of deplorables and
 pneumonia,

And Trump revealing his body mass index, but not his taxes or what
 His actual plans for leadership are,
 And me about to turn it to Kiss 108, because even Justin Bieber is better
 than this (nearly),
 NPR switched gears and cued up its interview with will.i.am of Black Eyed
 Peas, who rewrote their chart topping song from 2003
 In response to this summer of heart ache and heart break,
 The interview on NPR, which is about the last place you'll hear someone
 rap, followed maybe by a Puritan-era church in Sherborn,
 starting with this – *play song "Where's the Love?"*

And whether or not this song is your kind of thing, because for some of us
 it is, and some of us it isn't (welcome to community,
 Where you sing my hymn and I sing yours),
 Did you hear with me the lines?:

*Yo what's going on with the world, mamma (Where's the love) Yo people living
 like they ain't got no mommas (Where's the love) I think they all distracted by
 the drama and Attracted to the trauma, mamma (Where's the love)*

That last line, in particular – *distracted by the drama, attracted to the trauma*
 – summing up nicely the spiritual price we pay for the 24 hours news feeds
 That reports to us only stories of the broken world,
 And we who then end up being at risk of reflecting back the brokenness we
 see,
 A shard of resentment there, a sliver of resignation here,
 A eye-roll of 'whatever' there, a draw the shades down and

And stay safe in the suburbs here....(not for nothing is our worship theme wholeness this month)

All leading to a form of brokenness I sometimes recognize in my life,
And in yours, that leads us to pull back rather than reach out,
That lures us into excluding and expelling the people we don't like (hello 2016 politics!),
That dulls us into playing it safe when it comes to speaking up and speaking out, forgetting that we were never meant to survive,
And that – maybe worst of all – a brokenness that regards a question
Like 'Where's the Love?' as a quant conceit communicated in a pop song
Or in the CVS greeting card isle,
Rather than a question that we are supposed to answer with how we
Practice our life – what we own, how we spend our time,
What we say and don't say, what we stand up for, whether
We choose to define ourselves *against* rather than *with*.

Where's the love?

Would someone get an answer by being with you?

Do you get an answer by being with someone else?

Do you get an answer by coming here to church?

Gosh, I hope so.

Because unless religion helps us act with love it's not doing its job.

During early July my family and I went on vacation to California,
Which in addition to highlights of fresh fish tacos and the quiet
Peace of parasailing hundreds of feet about the ocean and standing over
David Bowie's star on Hollywood Blvd,
Also included a week of turning off the news notifications on my phone.

Ahhhh.

But all too soon the week was up, the flight home beckoned,
 And the time came to turn the devices back on so we could order
 The Uber ride to the airport,
 Including the prompt at the end of the online order,
 in order to thwart hacking,

To quote *'please add 1+4 and put your answer here _____ to prove you are human.'*

And while proving I was human, in came the news notifications of the week
 – Trump raging about the Mexicans, facebook live video of Philando Castile
 being shot by the officer in MN, the 5 Dallas officers killed during the BLM
 protest.

Good grief, I say to Karyn.

What the hell is going on?

Distracted by the drama, attracted by the trauma.

Where's the love?

5 minutes later up rolls the black suburban,

The trunk pops open, and out strides a 5'2" Latino man

In his early 60's.

'Hola!' he says.

'Hola,' I say, just about extinguishing the extent of my Spanish,

Which is embarrassing.

Two teenagers in our house means more bags than ever,

So kids and Karyn our squashed in the middle row of seats,

And I get to ride in the passenger seat next to Antonio,

The name I read on the ID card clipped to the air conditioning vents blasting Air in our faces during this ever warm, ever-too-warm summer.

The airport is only 35 miles away, but in So. California traffic that means We're in for a ride.

The great blessing of technology means Antonio, via Uber, can take us cheaper than any taxi could, and Antonio can make some extra cash. And the great curse of technology means that the whole family, if so desired, Could plug in the headphones and drift off into the internet ether Without having to ever talk to strangers like Antonio, or for that matter, Without ever having to talk to each other.

Quick aside: maybe it's time we started judging just how much progress All this progress is supposedly giving us. Just saying.

But maybe because I can't bear to look at any more news just yet, And maybe because I want to do something more than math to prove I am human,

I drop the phone into the bag at my feet and turn to Antonio.

"So, how long have been driving for Uber?"

"2 years," he says, the profile of his eyes showing surprise

That one of his passengers actually asked him a question.

'2 years, Bueno, good. It's good. Got to put my kids through college.'

'Yeah, how many?'

"Three, but this is for the last one – UCLA!"

He beams.

"You do this all day?"

*“No, no. After my first job. Get off at 3 from the factory.
Then do this from 4-9, and every weekend. Bueno. It’s good.*

Wow. His schedule makes me feel impressed and humbled and sad,
All at that the same time. Because Antonio never gets any time off.
And he’s working like this for his child.
So his child can get a college degree that will mean, hopefully,
They don’t have to work like Antonio does.

And as he talks more about his life, easily and without any complaint,
Telling me how he came here across the border in the 80’s
Because there was nothing for him in Mexico,
And it was easy then, he was even welcomed,
So that got his first job, and then sent for his wife,
And she got a job, and they bought a house,
And then they had one child, a second, a third,
And took English classes,
And entered the citizenship process, *‘because this is an amazing country,’*
He says, I have everything I could ever dream – a family, a house, a car!
even though, he says, everything changed after 9/11
And everyone from everywhere else were thought of as a threat...

I’m thinking all kinds of things...

How I got more time off in a week in a year that Antonio has gotten in two
years,

And why is, or how is it, that I so rarely get opportunities to talk to someone
Like Antonio, my life a rather narrow set of circles that keeps my exposure

To different kinds of people so restricted, so constricted,
 Making it hard to prove I am human...?

And, this year, what must it be like for Antonio and his family this year,
 This season, when people like him have been so targeted and scapegoated
 In our politics, along with almost every other identity group except for white
 men.

So often I'm distracted by the drama and attracted to the trauma
 To have conversations like these.

Where's the love?

Funny, not as in ha-ha, but as in strange, that even as a religious professional
 Who learned in school that the kind of love we're supposed to strive for is
 much less eros, as in affection or desire,

And much more agape, as in unconditional and seeing each person with
 inherent worth,

That I tend NOT to speak of love in moments like the one with Antonio.

I mean, it would be weird, right?

Antonio, can I just say how driving your car for your child is act of love?

Antonio, I love how willing you are to share some of your life with me.

Antonio, I feel like a loving thing to say to you right now, now that we're

Here at the airport, is: I can't imagine how it must feel for you to hear

All this talk of walls and Mexicans being criminals. I'm sorry

This is happening.

I mean, it would be weird to say all that, wouldn't it?

Would it?

Would it?

Or maybe it is exactly the kind of thing our world needs
To prove that we are, indeed, human.

Truck rolls to the curb ¼ of a mile from the terminal.
You're going to have to walk from here, Antonio says.
*Uber isn't allowed to drop people off airport; taxi lobby,
And he rolls his eyes.*

Antonio, um, hey, thanks for the ride.

*Can I just say something that is going to maybe sound a little,
Um weird?*

Antonio, I love how willing you are to share some of your life with me.

Thank you.

You've got a lot of love for your family; you impress me.

*And Antonio, now that we're were at the airport, is: I can't imagine how it
must feel for you to hear all that has been said in the news this year.*

I'm sorry. I hate it. I speak against it. I want you to know.

'Yes. Si. Thank you,' he says, pressing his hand into mine.

Where's the love?

Back in that suburban.

Where's the love?

Back in that conversation we had.

Where's the love?

In that brief moment of risk when I shared with Antonio what I was feeling.

Where is the love?

In conversations, moments, exchanges, messages, rides,

protests, letters, smiles, hands pressing hands...

hardly any of it getting headlines,

none of it making the news feed,

but promising to make us stronger, as Hemingway says, in our broken places.

Where's the love?

When we're not distracted by the drama and attracted to the trauma.

Where's the love?

Just waiting for you and me to practice.

Just waiting for us to prove we are human once again.

It is good to practice with you, friends. Welcome back to church,

Where we get to practice becoming the people we say we want to be.

Amen.