

Sermon 1

What does the Beloved Community look like as it sits between the twin pandemics of COVID-19 and systematic racism? Do we need to redraw the boundaries of Beloved Community to include more people awakening today to the moral injury they have caused or victimized them? At the center of it all, the aim is still to bring people together through this century's pandemics and into liberation's light. She has not dimmed. I want us to be in Beloved Community. And I want us to move towards freedom together. And I want us to know that freedom is not "over there," but instead, freedom is at hand, in hand, and as close as your heart is to you. Freedom is at the center of it all, and at every step in this journey, we must recalibrate as often as the news brings us worse and worsening news.

I want you to know Beloved that this moment is the only one you get, so you must use your gifts now and not delay them. You must understand that if in whatever moment you find yourself in, if it doesn't feel like you have a praise report today, a stockholder's meeting with God, to share today the dividends with God on God's investment, if you can't say to those new on the road to freedom, the coordinates of your freedom road, then you are not present in this moment. But all is not lost. What is pleasing to God in the middle of twin pandemics is that you experience God's peace today, experience God's love today, and experience God's justice today. This is pleasing to God. You must be the peace, the love, and the justice, and you must inspire other people to peace, love, and justice, for this is pleasing to God.

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it. For you shall go out in joy and be led back in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress;

instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle; and it shall be to the LORD for a memorial, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off. Isaiah 55:10-13

At the center of it all, like everyone else, I just want to bring people together in Beloved Community. My job is to help people to interpret this moment through both trauma-informed and joy informed lenses. We miss out on the promise if we unearth trauma and not unearth the joy that sits directly beneath it, ready to be excavated. And at the center of it all, your flight, or your fright response, God is walking with you through whatever moment whispers to you in the quiet hours.

For you shall go out in joy and be led back in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

Did you leave the sanctuary in joy? Has that joy carried you through these four months of the pandemic? At the center of it all, like everyone else, I just want to bring people together. And make sure that we are grounded in this moment. Make sure we are not romanticizing the past but being present and shaping a future. A New York Times article came out three days ago with the headline: **Churches Were Eager to Reopen. Now They Are Confronting Coronavirus Cases.** It said, “More than 650 coronavirus cases have been linked to nearly 40 churches and religious events across the United States since the beginning of the pandemic, with many of them erupting over the last month as Americans got back to normal.

I have known that the architecture of our church’s sanctuary, and the rituals we perform on Sundays, are the optimal conditions for the virus to spread. I’ve known that I have been grieving the loss of the congregation as I knew it, the pulpit as I knew it, the podium as I knew it, the microphone as I knew, the choir as I knew it and the band as I knew it. I have known that it will be hard to bring people to think that Facebook Live is what “bringing people together” means. I have known that “online” had to take on new meaning. I have known that I had to take on a new meaning. I have had to shapeshift before. I have had to call myself something else when I was called worthless and lucky that I could get any kind of love, let alone the one I desired. Then I realized that the charge has not changed. And that this moment was

not wrong, church was not wrong for moving from unsafe to safe, and our rituals were not suddenly wrong or weakened because we are online. Being asked to believe in a God that “will punish us if don’t go back to worshipping as normal” or believing that a “God will protect us if we go back to worshipping as normal” is wrong.

God says, “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater” and that means that you should not wait, water the earth beneath where you stand. Be the praise, and do not wait for the praise. Give the seed, which replicates your joy, to the one who is joyless and gives the bread of your efforts to a hungry world. And now, every time I hear someone say, “Let’s get back to normal.” I hear, “Let’s Make America Great Again.” I hear, “Who I am only fits who I was.” And I ask, “Who benefits from ‘normal’ and who benefits from that ‘greatness’?” You are not normal if you come to GLIDE.

The article said that the outbreak, *“happened in churches that reopened cautiously with face masks and social distancing in the pews, as well as some that defied lockdowns and refused to heed new limits on numbers of worshipers.”* One pastor said, “in his own church, congregants were social distancing and mostly wearing masks. And he had live-streamed services initially on Facebook, but some congregants begged to return to church, and others did not have reliable internet access.” Another pastor whose church was a virus ground zero, said, “...we had people who were away from fellowship for so long and in isolation. They were hurting. We just got to a point where we thought, we need to have normal church services.” They acquiesced, they gave-in, they broke, and the virus swept through their churches. There is a truth in begging.

People fear for their spiritual lives more than their physical lives, no matter how many times I tell them that, “to be absent from the body, is to be present with the lord.” No matter how many times I say, “For we walk by faith, not by sight.” But the questions, “How do we learn to live with COVID?” And “How do we adapt?” But the questions, “How can we live in fear of the virus?” and “Is the virus bigger than God?” are interesting to me, because we are not saying “Under no condition, will I stop shining

my light because of COVID.” I am a black man, which meant that my mother lived concerned, because of the expectations. I have always been aware that the dreams often end prematurely. These experiences make me feel deeply about the new national worry that COVID surfaces. I worry about your cancer. I worry about your AIDS. I worry about your age. I worry about your lack of sleep. I worry about you being alone. I worry about your financial state. I worry about COVID and how it could be a devastating last straw. What I realize at this moment is that church is a microcosm of the global conversation in these twin pandemics of COVID and Racism: The disparities in treatment between rich white churches and GLIDE.

The church’s COVID 19 conversation is about safety and what equity looks like. It is definitely and always a spiritual conversation because it is a conversation about culture and community care and the diminishing spirit and spirituality of our people. And it is about reimagining this moment. Yes, it is about the economy restarting, and it is so much more. It is about getting the hope going- that a spiritual economy restarted inspires. It is getting the cultural economy restarted. It is about getting our community’s community pride economy restarted. It is about the economy of black children’s dreams restarted. It is about getting the inspiration that comes uniquely through the creative economy restarted.

We need what religion and spirituality is offering in this moment. We need to point to our sacred text and lift the stories to let the world know how to persist, and how to get off the grind and have some leisure time, how to rally courage, and how to find the deepest wells of power (even when the well has run dry). We Need that! We Need the church! The news is getting worse, how do we reimagine what we need for these times? What negative messages do you think our families are receiving today? When everything we do and invite people to do has to be reimaged...

1. Connection
2. Handholding
3. Hugging
4. Singing and Shouting
5. Moving

6. Dancing
7. Sweating
8. Passing and sharing food, and printed matter

And now we know that “closed spaces are the virus’ favorite space to be.” 650 cases. So, “No, not yet. No in-person service.” I hear you begging for normalcy, and I know the hurt from being separated from the community you love, and that loves you. But no, not yet. One day. Okay, what is the center of my joy and my belief? Okay. Love. And do I believe that I still preach joy and love without a physical church? Okay. Yes. And is love bigger than our building? Yes. At the center of it all, I just want to bring people together. I just want to remind you that you are the *Word of God*, and that should animate you exactly where you stand, and you should kiss it up to God. God is expecting you to open your gifts. This completes God. *So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.* Our love of what we do is exhibited in the church and arena, but the church and the arena do not generate the love. Our congregation and visitors bring it, and it is just more visible because of the numerosity, the number of folks that are gathered.

So, we are in our 5th month of our “Sunday Celebration Online.” We stream live twice every Sunday from the eight different remote locations of our participants, and we mix it together with historical clips of the choir singing. Love in the time of Corona says we have to be like the entrepreneurs in tech, because this is a season for reimagining. This is the part in the story where your multi-million-dollar start-up tanked, and you aren’t defeated, because the idea is still good, and how you do it, how you remember the lessons, and how you start again, just has to be imagined differently. God is still good. Your dreams are still valid. You are not off course, off base, too late, or too early. You are not behind on your payments. At the center of the church experience is the self’s transformation through an encounter with the spirit of love that gets exhibited when two or two hundred or more are gathered. And lastly, I know that we have to have a plan. We cannot just “open back up.” But I also know that we cannot allow ourselves to be “shut down,” creatively, emotionally, or spiritually either.

Amen

Sermon 2

The Scripture: John 14:15

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask God, and God will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees God nor knows God. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you. I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.”

The Word

As churches fight to reopen, to be recognized as eligible as phase 2 reentry candidates, as churches create reopening plans, they are saying, trying to convince the public that they are a safe space, “Those who are sick, elderly and vulnerable, should stay at home and not come to the opened church.”

How could the people of God, even bang their lips together to say such a thing?

The only interpretation of “Those who are sick, elderly and vulnerable, should stay at home and not come to the opened church,” is that only the healthy looking, young and invincible should return. Here is the thing...Last time I looked, the young and the healthy are staying at home.

The Pew Research Center on Religion and Public Life has found that “the data shows a wide gap between older Americans (Baby Boomers and members of the Silent

Generation) and Millennials in their levels of religious affiliation and attendance. More than eight-in-ten members of the Silent Generation (those born between 1928 and 1945) describe themselves as Christians (84%), as do three-quarters of Baby Boomers (76%). In stark contrast, only half of Millennials (49%) describe themselves as Christians; four-in-ten are religious “nones,” and one-in-ten Millennials identify with non-Christian faiths.

Only about one-in-three Millennials say they attend religious services at least once or twice a month. Roughly two-thirds of Millennials (64%) attend worship services a few times a year or less often, including about four-in-ten who say they seldom or never go. Indeed, there are as many Millennials who say they “never” attend religious services (22%) as there are who say they go at least once a week (22%).”

Who will fill the church, will not be the Invincible Ones, because they know that the church that is rushing to reopen, is potentially exposing them to bad theology.

God is not unattractive to millennials, Church is.

And since Bad Theology does not the curve to flatten. Sheltering-In-Place is not anti-god, it is anti-spread of the virulence of ageism, emetophobia-the fear of sick people, homophobia, and aporophobia-the fear of poor people. Never attending spiritual services is not anti-god, it is the way to avoid hate spewed respiratory droplets. Coming back to church in the middle of a pandemic, means coming back to a church of distance, and barriers, and shields, and a church wiped clean of diversity.

Because...

“Those who are sick, elderly and vulnerable, should stay at home and not come to the opened church.”

Believers, and non-believers can see through the rouse of jump-starting the church that hides the restarting of the church economic engine agenda.

“Those who are sick, elderly and vulnerable, should stay at home and not come to the opened church,”

The chronically ill, will stay chronically ill. And won't give. The vulnerable will only become more vulnerable. And won't give. And the elderly are only getting older. And won't give. And the church knows, that those who are isolated will feel more isolated. Those who are quarantined will feel as if who they are is too unclean for the church.

But the new church...

And the good news...

And the blessing in the storm...

“For you have the poor with you always, but Me you do not have always.”

Physical distancing should not have been the trick used get people to leave the church, so the church could be gentrified. A church emptied of the ones in whom the Christ found the most favor, is not the “new church”. This rouse misses the mark in dazzling stupidity. It runs in the complete opposite direction of the Christ. It is not heroic. It is not constitutional. It is not the proving ground of faith. It is not the church. It is not a church I want to return to.

I believe the fresh encounter with Jesus is happening over tea and meds. The anointing oil is bacon grease. The Christ Light is an L.E.D. screen. The new church meets people where they are. The new church is an app. The new church operates in the gig economy. The new church gets delivered to your door. The new church sees

the delivery people as evangelists, and angels, and saints. The new church does not abandon its people in the middle of a pandemic.

People are sick alone. People are healing alone. People are dying alone. No Christ of mine can ignore suffering. Christ loves a good open house:

The Spirit then entered me and made me stand on my feet, and He spoke with me and said to me, “Go, shut yourself up in your house.

And...

“When Jesus came into Peter’s home, He saw his mother-in-law lying sick in bed with a fever.”

And...

“Now one of the Pharisees was requesting Him to dine with him, and He entered the Pharisee’s house and reclined at the table.”

And...

“When he had left the crowd and entered the house, His disciples questioned Him about the parable.”

And...

“Jesus got up and went away from there to the region of Tyre. And when He had entered a house, He wanted no one to know of it; yet He could not escape notice.”

And...

“And He said to them, “Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave town.”

And...

“Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace be to this house.’”

And...

The New Congregate Setting—is intimacy. The church that is not intergenerational, multi-racial, cross-class, mixed-ability, multi-sexual and multi-gendered, will not have a Christ in it. Christ goes into houses. Christ goes into encampments. Christ goes into nursing homes.

Christ goes into hospitals. The Church that is not accepting the invitation into intimate relationship with its people, is not The Church. The Church that is not telling its members, who are willingly or by force, staying home, that they are worth The Christ visiting them, coming to them, calling on them, is not the church. The Sanitized Church is not where The Christ is.

The New Church is “Meeting People Where They Are.” The New Church is online visitations, homecomings and home comings, and reunifications. The New Church is not burying its head in the sands of the bible and ignoring this new reality. The New Church embraces it. The New Church is helping people to find the sacred in cyberspace, in a digital world without borders or walls. A new world with the wisdom of the ages at our finger. And that is shaking the Old Church to its core. Because its undoing is at hand.

The New Church is bidirectional. Is Cyber and In-Person Space. The New Church doesn't require you to prove yourself. The New Church invites you to go within and not without. The New Church invites you into relationship and not religion. The New

Church is not trying to jumpstart the economy. The new Church wants to explore your spiritual economy.

“In a little while the church world will say that you can no longer see me, because you are not in a building, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live.

On that Day of Pandemic, you will know that I am in my God, and you in me, and I in you.

They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my God, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.”

That is the promise beloved.

In the middle of a lock down, irrespective of firewalls and plexiglass barriers,

“Abide in Me,” the scripture says, “and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine,” scripture says, “you are the branches. They who abide in Me, and I in them, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. And I am is telling you, ‘Those who are sick, elderly and vulnerable, should stay at home and not come to the opened church,’ Because I won’t be there. For If anyone does not abide in Me, they are cast out as a branch and is withered. But If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My God is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so, you, from wherever you are, will be My disciples.”

Amen

Sermon 3

Psalm 23 says,

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff—they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long.

And I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long.

The word of the lord for the radically inclusive, unconditionally loving, extravagantly welcoming, open and affirming people of God.

Amen.

I thought that this scripture, that appeared in the lectionary this week, spoke into this moment.

“Marvin, where are you reading, performing, speaking, dancing, being this week?” is the question I remember being asked often in my 20's, 30's and 40's. I had no clear path because I had no clear future, so I was ALL OVER THE PLACE.

I was called flakey, uncommitted, wishy-washy and flighty because I was looking for my future in poetry readings, in theater, in dance and in writing.

I was all over the place. I was all over creation. I was on everybody's set. It made sense to me, the instability, the detachment, the ability to get up and go to the next

thing, to have a taste satisfied and not stay for the whole meal, to have a new taste for something unnamed and then go and spend years finding it.

All over the place. See, the thing about being all over the place, is that you actually want to be still. And when you finally tire out. You have to practice being still.

At 54, I am in place. I am findable. You can locate me. I have an address. You can plan a visit with me. You can pop in on me. You can send me a card, flowers, candy. One day I realized, that I want to be in place.

I want to be installed. I want to shoot down deep roots. I want to be a respectable chandelier in my old age, mid-century modern ensconced, a Tiffany lamp appreciated in value.

And while my life may not have been lived efficiently, so close to burning out, now, because I am in place, I am working on being a beacon and a landing strip.

I am a lighthouse, a siren, a traffic signal, and you can triangulate your journey by where I stand, work, pray, preach and organize.

You see, that's why "Sheltering-In-Place" is a spiritual principle. It says that it's time to stop sounding the whir and being the blur.

It's time to be sought out and found. It's time to say to God, to spirit, to opportunity, to love, "Here I am and I ain't going nowhere. I am "Sheltering-In-Place." You can find me here, not waiting on you by the door, but comfortable in my skin, being my own best company, consoling myself, cooking for one.

But if you looking for me Oh Great God, I now know that all that chasing and pursuing of dreams was made for me to know that this moment, this physical

distancing, is about feeling like I want you to know that you can come home to me
God.

That opportunity can come home to me.

That love can come home to me.

I am finally still. I am no longer in the “Lean-to of Displace,” I am
“Sheltering-In-This-Place.”

This Corona Virus and COVID-19 moment is bringing up all kinds of latent, hidden,
passive, raw, unattended, sublimated and subconscious thoughts that I have held about
myself. You see, I was shaped by a pandemic, and if you have ever had to recover
from an accident, if you served in the military, if you are a spouse of a police officer,
if you believe in miracles, if you believe in science, if you believe in both, if you
believe in humanity, and nothing you believed in has made you worry less, then you,
like me, you have been shaped too, and have some questions.

Right now, everybody has a hair pin.

Everybody is a missile in a silo.

Everybody got everybody else’s launch code.

Everybody’s firing.

Everybody ready to come to blows.

Everything coming up now.

Even our homes for some of us, the very homes that we are paying for, have paid for, put the welcome mat out on, our “be it ever so humble, there’s no place like home” home, feel like prisons and not castles. For some of us what’s coming up is that we never felt at home.

And that makes Sheltering-In-Place hard.

What this moment is revealing to us, and be encouraged, things are becoming clearer and not muddier right now,

What this moment is revealing is our proximity to the mother who collapses after news of her son being shot is on the evening news, you see she was in her house minding her business, just like we are right now.

Clearly, there’s no difference between us.

We are closer to the father taking back to the bottle after being laid off, and now everybody on edge because a rage is coming to their house, which is a house just like ours.

Clearly, there’s no difference between us.

Or...

You see, “Sheltering-In-Place” says that we are present flesh. Because this place is all we got.

Can’t go back to that place and we ain’t got to the next place, we “Sheltered-In-Place.”

We have to turn “Sheltering-In-Place” into a practice.

We have talked about it, and now we are really in “The Era of Self-Care.”

We are finally meditating, whether we wanted to or not.

The world is meditating.

We are finally at our “Still Point.”

Not sitting ducks. But caged birds singing.

Take a knee, and don't sing, “Make America Normal Again.”

Don't go back to routine, hitting alarm clocks, punching time clocks, being measured by how much blood, sweat and tears we produce alongside our work.

Don't go back to homelessness, and violence, and sex trafficking, and poverty, and addiction being just abstraction and conceptual thoughts.

Don't go back to being the prettiest in the room, the boss of everybody, the A-Student, the Closer, the whip-into-shaper and the unsatisfied.

I thought not knowing whether I was coming or going was normal.

Didn't know that the gap between my realities was so spacious.

And now I know that there is a time set aside for me, that allows me to be with and be myself.

And that time is now. That ain't never been my normal.

This moment, this Corona Virus and COVID-19 moment is my gap year. Before I join back in, I am going to look at all of my latent, hidden, passive, raw, unattended, sublimated and subconscious trauma. I am going to look at why I, at 54, let things go untreated, unpaid and unchecked.

And how despite my privileges, I'm like everybody else who don't have access to medical care.

Even got me thinking about if I isolate and quarantine and shelter-in-place, will anybody come looking for me.

And how now I'm like everybody else who lives invisible lives in tent encampments, knowing that no one is coming to check on them.

Even got me thinking about how much time I have to stand in line to buy food.

Now I'm just like everybody else hungry enough to wait in line for a free meal.

Even got me thinking about how suspiciously people look at me in my mask.

And now I'm just like everybody else who is racially profiled wearing the exact same mask.

Even got me thinking that if I cry for help, it might be met with a physical, systemic, professional, emotional or intimate violence, but you will call them my "feels," and tell me to be in them is a sign of weakness.

Questions come to you when you practice, "Sheltering-In-Place."

The years of believing I am the reason for what happened to me and the reason who happened to us and now I know why that never felt right or made sense.

Because you know if black people didn't have diabetes or hypertension or heart disease, and if old people weren't old, and Prime Ministers weren't Prime Ministers, and young people weren't young people and the rich weren't rich, and the loved weren't loved and the fathers weren't fathers and the mothers weren't mothers, and the nurses weren't nurses and the doctors weren't doctors, then they wouldn't be dead from the virus right now.

This is not your "Still, small voice talking," it's your anxiety, and "Sheltering-In-Place" shows you that sound like love, but it's not.

But there is in this a hope and a promise.

Psalm 23 says,

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and

your staff—they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long.

And I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long.

God is a shelter-in-place my whole life long.

We have come to address in this pandemic the condition: the historical, the systemic, the dysfunctional family systems, the enabling, generational trauma, the shame, blame and secrecy, that every person who shows up needing healing gets healed of.

You can find us in our inseparable and indivisible lives intertwined in this COVID-19 moment, absolving those with COVID-19 of a crime that they did not commit and we begin to consider the mitigating circumstances; the impact of the amount of love or lovelessness in the world.

Our divine coordinates, with the one who removed our restraints and shackles to capitalism, to bring us into a knowing that we are all caught in a cycle of incarceration. And liberation is a universal right.

Our resolve is a fixed location of hope in the face of people who tell us to give up on the lives of those who are bottoming out, homeless and untested for the virus; when they tell you people are dead to you, hold on to hope.

We are finally in the zone, our locations grouped together, even in isolation, the zone of loving ourselves enough to know that our own health, mental, physical and spiritual, is important and it's time to unlearn that you have to push through your pain or live with it, hold on to hope.

The count is rising.

The flood is rising.

The death is tolling.

The timebomb is ticking.

But hold on to hope.

Keep “Sheltering-In-Love.”

Keep, “Sheltering-In-Place.”

Your home is the open house that God has come to see. Wants to know how yawl gon’ get along when it’s time for your “dwell with him forever.”

So, Keep “Sheltering-In-Joy.”

Keep, “Sheltering-In-Place.”

Because you shall dwell in the house of the LORD your whole life long.

The Middle Passage was not your lifelong...

The Enslavement was not your lifelong...

Reconstruction, and Jim Crow and dashed Civil Rights dreams was not your lifelong...

Fighting for Women’s Rights and Suffrage was not your lifelong...

Holding on for LGBTQ protections, rights, equity and inclusion was not your lifelong...

Waiting for your stimulus check was not your lifelong...

Waiting for a cure, a balm, a test or a vaccine was not your lifelong...

And the Corona Virus and COVID-19, can only endureth for a moment, but Joy is coming in the morning.

And these two months might feel like you dwelling in the house your whole life long...Hold on!

You have done the hard part, you lived.

“Sheltering-In-Place” says you want to live so you can see the day when it’s safe to come out.

Don’t live in a house divided against itself. It won’t stand for you. Don’t stand for it.

In this moment, let love come to mind, make yours a house of prayer for all people.

Make yours a house of god. A god house.

And Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. My refuge and my fortress, is my God, in whom I trust.

“Shelter-In-Place” and rest, beloved.

Amen.

Sermon 4

You know, months before the pandemic hit.

Pandemics, “hit” right?

This is going to leave a bruise, right?

Months ago, during a routine doctor's visit,

My doctor asked, "Does diabetes run in your family?"

Remembering my mama and my grand mama's high and low sugar,

I answered, "Yes."

My doctor asked, "Does hypertension run in your family?"

Remembering all the times my mama accused me of getting her "Pressure Up,"

I answered, "Yes."

My doctor asked, finally, "Does Heart Disease run in your family?"

Remembering the little "Water Pills" in the generational pill drawer, I answered, "Yes."

My doctor said, quite calmly, "You must begin taking these medicines."

Being all about better living through pharmaceuticals, I asked, "How long do I have to take them?"

He said, "Forever."

That word went on...well...forever.

I'm now my mama Margaret, I thought.

I'm now my grandmother Bessie.

Pretty sure I'm now my great-grandmother Dorcas.

I know I'm my uncle Leroy.

I know I'm aunt Lavada.

I know I'm my dad Joe.

Pretty sure I'm my brother Michael.

“Does diabetes, hypertension and heart disease run in your family?”

Something about, “Predisposed, forever, preventative, forever, higher rates, forever, African-Americans, forever.”

Pandemics, “Hit” and diseases “Run.”

Bruised and out of breath, I prayed over the pills,

“God, who is all of the elements, compound yourself into pill form for the good of my condition. Make yourself elemental. Crush the probabilities, and make it all easy to swallow. Amen.”

And I started taking them.

Damn. Black folks always got to run, or be ran.

Damn. Women always got to run, or be ran.

Damn, Poor people always got to run, or be ran.

Damn, Gay people always got to run, or be ran

Guess this my leg of the race.

Guess I'll run on.

I know what you're thinking...In this race...

“Death is the finish line.

Death is the tape to break through.

Death is the pedestal.

Death is the bent neck.

Death is the weight of gold ribboned around your neck.”

But death does not win.

The finish line was the institution of the health insurance.

The finish line was the institution of the medicine for my condition.

The finish line was the institution of the Eucharist,

That I do in remembrance of my ancestors:

And all my relations, took the pill bottle, broke the seal, opened it, took out the cotton, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to me, and saved it for me, saying, "This is our body given to you, you are what became of us, everybody is what became of them; do this in remembrance of us."

Likewise all of relations, after the fish fry, also took the Tupperware cup, filled it with faucet water, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in our blood, which runs to you and through you."

Take your medicines Marvin.

Be immunocompromised in a pandemic.

Keep your ass at home.

Pray over your pill box.

Pray not, a pill against,

But for, a begging Corona Virus.

Viruses beg.

Look like tantrum.

But it's begging for attention.

Pray in a pandemic.

Pray that you experience love as deeply as your ancestors.

Pray that you get a chance to be open and broken,

Pray that you get a chance to take it to heart.

Pray that you experience sweetness as deeply as your ancestors,

Pray that your body knows it so intimately that it shudders and shakes,

Both from the drop and rise of it.

Pray that the continuous physical force exerted on or against your body,

That you finally take all this world has done to you,

And all that you have taken from this world,

Pounds like talking drums in your chest, neck, or ears

Telling you, you can't take no more.

There is a communion happening now beloved,

A pandemic is a communion.

Brings us all to the fellowship table.

Makes everything feel like a last supper.

“Do this in remembrance of me,”

Feels like “We had this coming.”

Feels like, “We asked for it” from

Dancing like that,

Eating like that,

Loving like that,

Living like that,

Feels like pandemics is what is passed down,

In this here Passover.

Feels like the epigenetics of trauma,

So let me geek out for a second,

Epigenetics is the study of changes in organisms caused by modification of gene expression rather than alteration of the genetic code itself.

It posits that certain fears can be inherited through the generations, over many generations. “There are a lot of anecdotes to suggest that there’s intergenerational transfer of risk, and that it’s hard to break that cycle,” he says.

We’re talking about heritable traits

Scientists Ressler and Dias studied epigenetic inheritance in laboratory mice trained to fear the smell of assa-dough-fa-known (acetophenone), a chemical the scent of which has been compared to those of cherries and almonds. He and Dias wafted the scent around a small chamber, while giving small electric shocks to male mice. The animals eventually learned to associate the scent with pain, shuddering in the presence of acetophenone even without a shock.

This reaction was passed on to their pups, Despite never having encountered acetophenone in their lives, the offspring exhibited increased sensitivity when introduced to its smell, shuddering more markedly in its presence compared with the descendants of mice that had been conditioned to be startled by a different smell or that had gone through no such conditioning.

A third generation of mice — the ‘grandchildren’ — also inherited this reaction, as did mice conceived through in vitro fertilization with sperm from males sensitized to acetophenone. Similar experiments showed that the response can also be transmitted down from the mother.

We have to understand what spiritual, what Christian epigenetics are at work in our construction of faith and god,

So we can finally stop thinking

That we gotta die to prove something to god.

We gotta know our reactions to pandemics is in our DNA.

We gotta know that something else gets passed down,

That there is another ticking time bomb,

The flowering of which threatens to destroy everything,

That we worked for.

The Epigenetics of Joy.

The Epigenetics of Joy,

Says that my grandmother, in the premature birth of my aunts daughter,

Looked at that child,

Scrunched her face,

Laughed and said,

“You can always tell when a baby got a old daddy,

The baby come out looking old.”

The Epigenetics of Joy,

Says my grandmother laughed and said,

“Imma take pride in this one collard tree,

In this square foot of dirt.”

The Epigenetics of Joy,

Says that my mama laughed and said,

“All my children got jokes,

But that Marvin is funny acting.”

The Epigenetics of Joy,

Is your wryness,

And your twinkle,

And your finding humor,

Different from making fun of,

The Epigenetics of Joy,

Is making light of a thing.

The Epigenetics of Joy,

Is making light of a thing.

The Epigenetics of Joy,

Is making light of a thing,

And all my relations,

Took the diabetes, hypertensed, and heart diseased body,

To the mortuary to be embalmed,

They opened the casket,

“Sharp as a rat’s turd” my grandmother said,

“Casket ready,” my aunt said,

“Oooh he look just like his self,” my mama said,

Gave thanks and broke out laughing,

Saying,

“This is the world,

With all of the air taken out of the seriousness of the day,

Given to you,

So that you can take a deep breath,

So that you can make light of this pandemic,

Again, different from making fun of,

Do this in remembrance of us

Because we didn't just pass down trauma to you

And joy is resistance.”

Likewise all of relations, after the funeral,

Went to my grandmother's house,

Ate and drank everything they wasn't supposed to,

My grandmother took the jelly jar glass,

Filled it with Crown Royal and milk, saying,

“Funny how we always seem to make it through.

Funny how the loving cup of us is the new covenant in our blood,

Funny how they try to get you to forget,

Where you come from,

And what we taught you,

That was taught to us,

That joy,

And good times,

And memories,

And tall tales

And funny acting,

Is how we survive a plague.”

Amen.