

Tenebrae
St. John's Episcopal Church, Ithaca NY
27 March 2024 Year B
7:00 PM

The name Tenebrae (the Latin word for “darkness” or “shadow”) has for centuries been applied to the ancient monastic night and early morning services (Matins and Lauds) of the last three days of Holy Week, which in medieval times came to be celebrated on the preceding evenings. Apart from the chant of the Lamentations (in which each verse is introduced by a letter of the Hebrew alphabet), the most conspicuous feature of the service is the gradual extinguishing of candles and other lights in the church until only a single candle, considered a symbol of our Lord, remains. Towards the end of the service this candle is hidden, typifying the apparent victory of the forces of evil. At the very end, a loud noise is made, symbolizing the earthquake at the time of the resurrection (Matthew 28:2), the hidden candle is restored to its place, and by its light all depart in silence.

Please stand

Silent Processional

Officiant: As we prepare to recall the last days of our Lord’s life on earth, let us remember before God this night this world for which our Lord Jesus Christ suffered and died. Let us call to mind all those who suffer, all those who are oppressed and all those who are forgotten, and most of all, let us remember what God calls us to do, as people of faith.

Please be seated

Lamentations 1:12; 2:11–15

Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by?
Look and see
if there is any sorrow like my sorrow,
 which was brought upon me,
which the Lord inflicted
 on the day of his fierce anger.

My eyes are spent with weeping;
 my stomach churns;
my bile is poured out on the ground
 because of the destruction of my people,
because infants and babes faint
 in the streets of the city.

They cry to their mothers,
 “Where is bread and wine?”
as they faint like the wounded
 in the streets of the city,

as their life is poured out
on their mothers' bosom.

What can I say for you, to what compare you,
O daughter Jerusalem?
To what can I liken you, that I may comfort you,
O virgin daughter Zion?
For vast as the sea is your ruin;
who can heal you?

Your prophets have seen for you
false and deceptive visions;
they have not exposed your iniquity
to restore your fortunes,
but have seen oracles for you
that are false and misleading.

All who pass along the way
clap their hands at you;
they hiss and wag their heads at
daughter Jerusalem;
"Is this the city that was called
the perfection of beauty,
the joy of all the earth?"

Officiant: Let us pray,
Oh God, it is your will to hold both heaven and earth in a single peace. Let the design of your great love shine on the waste of our wraths and sorrows, that we may be strengthened to follow where you would have us go, so that may we have peace in your Church, peace among nations, peace in our homes, and peace in our hearts. *Amen*

First candle is extinguished

A reading from the *New York Times*.

After the shooting in Kansas City this week at a parade to celebrate the Super Bowl victory of the hometown Chiefs, children who had been struck by gunfire flooded into Children's Mercy Hospital, less than a mile from Union Station, where the shooting occurred.

"Fear," the hospital's chief nursing officer, Stephanie Meyer, told reporters. "The one word I would use to describe what we saw and how they felt when they came to us was fear."

On the other side of the guns were young people, too, according to the authorities who said on Friday that two teenagers detained in the aftermath of the shooting had been charged with "gun-related" offenses and with resisting arrest.

What had seemed like an attack on the parade itself turned out to be a far more common act of American violence: a dispute that ended in gunfire, and in this case, left one person dead and 22 people injured, about half of them younger than 16.

The shooting was news around the world because of when and where it unfolded. But in many respects, the circumstances were all too familiar in a country where guns and gun violence are pervasive

“If this exact same thing happened in a gas station or in a neighborhood or in another community, no one would be talking about it,” said James Densley, a professor of criminal justice at Metro State University in Minnesota who studies youth violence.

Kansas City has been enduring a lot of that bloodshed. The city has one of the highest murder rates in the nation, and last year 182 people were killed, surpassing a high mark set in 2020. City officials say many of the killings were attributed to arguments, the same cause that investigators cited in the shooting at the Super Bowl parade.

That kids were both victims and, according to authorities, perpetrators underscores what experts and data suggest is the disturbing ease with which young people can end up shooting someone, or being shot.

“Pushing and shoving escalate very quickly into shooting whenever guns are present,” Mr. Densley said. “And so there’s a lot of conflict resolution, shall we say, or dispute resolution, that is done down the barrel of a gun with these young people.”

A person younger than 18 shot and killed another child somewhere in the United States once per day on average last year, according to incident reports compiled by the Gun Violence Archive, a nonprofit that tracks shootings throughout the nation. The frequency has risen steadily over time, though it is difficult to say by exactly how much since the demographic details on suspects and victims in cases is sometimes incomplete.

Yet the trend is generally consistent with other data on children and gun violence. Gun violence in 2020 became the leading cause of death for children and teenagers, surpassing car accidents, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

After peaking in 2021, gun homicides among adults fell by more than 7 percent in 2022. But for children ages 12 to 17, the total increased by 8 percent, according to cause-of-death data published by the C.D.C.

While the C.D.C. has not yet released figures for 2023, data from the Gun Violence Archive suggest a similar pattern continued: an overall decrease in gun deaths, but no decline in juvenile gun victims. And often, children are among both the victims and suspects.

In survey after survey of young people, researchers have found that the vast majority of teenagers who acquire and carry guns do so because they feel unsafe in their neighborhoods. They believe — often correctly — that many other people are carrying guns.

“It’s almost always that they’re afraid,” said David Hemenway, a professor of health policy at Harvard who studies young people and gun violence. “And why are they afraid? Because other kids have guns.”

And then he has often asked a follow-up question.

“We say, what kind of world do you want to live in — where it’s easy to get guns, hard to get guns or impossible to get guns? And an overwhelming majority want to live in a world where it’s impossible for teens like them to get guns. Even the ones who illegally carry, the majority of them usually say we’d like to live in a world where it’s impossible for teens like us to get guns.”

A Reading from Isaiah 65:17–25

For I am about to create new heavens
and a new earth;
the former things shall not be remembered
or come to mind.
But be glad and rejoice for ever
in what I am creating;
for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy,
and its people as a delight.
I will rejoice in Jerusalem,
and delight in my people;
no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it,
or the cry of distress.
No more shall there be in it
an infant that lives but a few days,
or an old person who does not live out a lifetime;
for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth,
and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed.
They shall build houses and inhabit them;
they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.
They shall not build and another inhabit;
they shall not plant and another eat;
for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be,
and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.
They shall not labour in vain,
or bear children for calamity;
for they shall be offspring blessed by the Lord—
and their descendants as well.
Before they call I will answer,
while they are yet speaking I will hear.
The wolf and the lamb shall feed together,
the lion shall eat straw like the ox;
but the serpent—its food shall be dust!
They shall not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain,
says the Lord.

Second Candle Extinguished

Officiant: Let us pray:

Gracious God, in whose perfect kingdom no sword is drawn but the sword of peace, and no power known but the power of love; turn the hearts of the people of this land, that the false promises of idols may ring hollow, and we may build a safe world for all your children, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

A reading from NPR News:

Just putting three meals a day on the table was a struggle for millions of people in the U.S. last year. That's the sobering conclusion of a 2023 report from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which found hunger in the U.S. rose sharply in 2022.

The report found that 44.2 million people lived in households that had difficulty getting enough food to feed everyone in 2022, up from 33.8 million people the year prior. Those families include more than 13 million children experiencing food insecurity, a jump of nearly 45 percent from 2021.

The findings reverse a decade-long decline in hunger and food insecurity in the U.S. And they reflect the loss of several pandemic-era measures designed to strengthen the social safety net, says Elaine Waxman, a senior fellow at the Urban Institute who studies food insecurity and federal nutrition programs.

"A lot of the programs that had buffered people's experience during the pandemic were retired or rolled back in some way," Waxman says.

At the same time, food prices and housing costs have shot up, says Kelly Horton, chief program officer at the Food Research and Action Center. She points out an increasing number of Americans are working in unstable gig-economy jobs, like delivering groceries, driving for ride-share services or completing tasks on demand.

"So all of these things converging...we have a lot of people who are living on the edge," Horton says.

In its report, the USDA found that nearly 7 million households were so financially squeezed last year that they had to skip meals at times because there wasn't enough food to go around. Almost all of these households said they couldn't afford to eat balanced meals. In some 381,000 households with children, kids also experienced the pangs of hunger – skipping meals or going the whole day without eating. Waxman notes this could have significant health consequences, especially for kids.

"In particular, we worry about that for children because their trajectory now influences what happens to them later," says Waxman. She notes research has found children who experience food insecurity are more likely to experience worse health outcomes down the road, including cognitive or developmental delays and higher rates of hospitalization.

Overall, households with children and those of color experienced food insecurity at significantly higher rates than the national average. The rates of hunger for Black and Latino households were both more than double the rates for white households.

A Reading from Deuteronomy 24:14–15, 17–22

You shall not withhold the wages of poor and needy laborers, whether Israelites or aliens who reside in your land in one of your towns. You shall pay them their wages daily before sunset, because they are poor and their livelihood depends on them; otherwise they might cry out to the LORD against you, and you would incur guilt. You shall not deprive a resident alien or an orphan of justice; you shall not take a widow's garment in pledge. Remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and the Lord your God redeemed you from there; therefore I command you to do this. When you reap your harvest in your field, and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be left for

the alien, the orphan, and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all your undertakings. When you beat your olive trees, do not strip what is left; it shall be for the alien, the orphan, and the widow. When you gather the grapes of the vineyard, do not glean what is left; it shall be for the alien, the orphan, and the widow. Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I am commanding you to do this.

Third Candle is extinguished

Officiant: Let us pray:

Look with pity, O heavenly Father, upon those who live with injustice, terror, disease and death as their constant companions. Have mercy upon us, and help us to eliminate cruelty and injustice wherever it is found. Strengthen those who seek equality for all. Grant that every one of us may enjoy a fair portion of the abundance of this land; through your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Two Crises in the World

The crisis in Gaza continues with faltering attempts by the UN and the US to meet with governmental officials from Israel.

Israel's defense minister, Yoav Gallant, and the U.S. defense secretary, Lloyd J. Austin III, met at the Pentagon on Tuesday to discuss the rapidly deteriorating humanitarian conditions in Gaza and Israel's plan to invade the southern city of Rafah, where U.S. officials have warned that a major military action could lead to catastrophe.

The meeting came amid growing friction between the two allies a day after the U.S. decision to allow the passage of a U.N. resolution calling for an immediate cease-fire in Gaza. Afterward, Israel's prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, declared he was scrapping a plan to dispatch a delegation to Washington to discuss the potential offensive in Rafah.

While Gaza suffers in the Middle East, the people of Ukraine are continuing to battle unsubstantiated allegations from Russia's government and state media.

Officials and ordinary citizens say Russia is blaming Ukraine in order to shore up support for its war in Ukraine and escalate the fighting there.

Ukrainians have reacted with a mixture of concern and mockery to the narrative pushed by the Kremlin and Russian state media that Ukraine was behind the terrorist attack Friday on a Moscow concert hall, a claim made despite the Islamic State's claim of responsibility.

For some Ukrainians — officials and citizens alike — the accusations were typical of a Kremlin playbook, blaming Ukraine to justify Moscow's violence against their country. That includes the false claim that President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia used to begin the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, stating that the country was run by neo-Nazi leaders and that the aim of the war was to denazify Ukraine.

"It's typical for Russia," Iryna Blakyta, 24, a resident of Kyiv, said on Monday, adding that she expected Mr. Putin to use the attack on the concert hall to rally Russians after more than two years of war. "He needs to mobilize people," Ms. Blakyta said; "he needs to show who the enemy is."

A Reading from Leviticus 19:33–37

When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt; I am the Lord your God. You shall not cheat in measuring length, weight or quantity. You shall have honest balances, honest weights; an honest ephah and an honest hin; I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt. You shall keep all my statutes and all my ordinances, and observe them: I am the Lord.

Fourth candle is extinguished

Officiant: Let us pray:

Loving God, in Jesus you became a stranger in your own land, and a refugee who fled your own home; may we always recognize your face in the foreigner and the immigrant, and may we welcome them as we would your Son. Through him, who with you and the Holy Spirit, lives and reigns, now and forever, *Amen*

A reading from the *Washington Post*

In the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia two weeks ago, a group of adults running a public meeting created a blueprint for how to belittle, betray and dismiss kids.

“I’m honestly terrified,” one of the teens in Lynchburg admitted as she gathered the courage to address the school board that did this. The kids spoke in quavering voices, some wiping away tears at the Lynchburg City School Board meeting on Nov. 14 as they faced down the adults. Others deployed righteously incandescent teen rage.

The students of E.C. Glass High School were defending the \$10,000 nonprofit grant they won — through research, hard work and a rigorous application process — to create a safe space for all kids in their school. The school board said it didn’t want to accept the grant. The kids are part of the Gender and Sexuality Alliance, and the organization that gave them the grant helps uplift those in the LGBTQ+ community who are struggling. You can guess which part of this triggered the adults.

Chester Lobb, 17, is the co-president of the Gender Sexuality Alliance club at E.C. Glass High School in Lynchburg, Va. The club applied for a grant from the It Gets Better Project, but the school board refused to accept the \$10,000 they were awarded to create a calming room for all students at their school. (Brooke Carson/Chester Lobb)

The space they envisioned would have comfortable chairs, blankets and low light. It would be a place to go after a panic attack, bullying, or after being in yet another lockdown drill, imagining their own massacres and texting goodbye notes to their parents as my kid did just a few weeks ago in the America he has inherited.

Thanks to this new normal and the growing awareness among educators of mental health issues among kids, “chill” rooms or “calm down” spaces are becoming common in American schools. But this high school — in the hometown of Liberty University, Jerry Falwell’s evangelical indoctrination camp recently deemed unsafe by an Education Department investigation — didn’t have one.

The applicants made it clear the space wouldn’t be just for LGBTQ+ students. It would be for anyone who needs to “just breathe for a second,” said one of the students who confronted the adults Nov. 14.

“Their application was so earnest,” said Justin Tindall, a senior director with the It Gets Better Project, a nonprofit created after LGBTQ+ teen suicides in 2010. The group is known for its videos offering testimonies from adults, both famous and everyday, who endured bullying, hatred and self-doubt — and survived. One of the group’s programs, 50 States, 50 Grants, awards grants for student projects that remind struggling teens of the hope and promise that life will get better.

The Gay Student Alliance in Homewood, Ala., won a grant from the It Gets Better Project. The alliance created a mural and funded art studio time. (It Gets Better Project)

“Theirs was a simple one,” Tindall said, unlike the murals, field trips or conferences pitched in other places. “This was a proposal for a safe space for all students.”

Seems like some of the adults — terrified of such a notion — may need a safe space of their own.

Animated by a conservative movement linking parental fears and grievances to anything related to being LGBTQ+, they reach for their favorite buzzwords — “indoctrination” and “groomers.” They call drag queens dangerous while ignoring the fact that some of the most notorious predators are coaches and priests.

“Let me be very clear,” said Greg Barry, a grandparent and guardian of a student at the high school, when he spoke to the board and quoted scripture. “The LGBTQ agenda in schools is about indoctrination and grooming our children into an evil and wicked lifestyle,” he said, amid boos from the audience.

Comfy chairs and blankets aren’t dangerous. You know that, right, Greg?

“It definitely broke our spirits,” said Brittany Harris, 17, a junior and the co-president of the club, when she heard that the board didn’t want to accept the grant that students had worked on for weeks.

When Brittany and her co-president, Chester Lobb, 17, spoke to the board at last month’s meeting, they felt little compassion coming from the adults. “They were just stone-faced while we were talking,” Chester said. “It was horrifically rude and made us feel like we weren’t even there.”

Some of the school board members insisted that they wouldn’t take money from *this* organization, assuring folks they did deep research into the group (one of the co-founders was sex advice columnist Dan Savage) and watched the videos on their website that were the alleged “indoctrination” into the “lifestyle.”

The project, which has become a huge, global nonprofit supported by major corporations, celebrities, politicians and President Barack Obama, became famous for more than 70,000 videos that LGBTQ adults posted assuring kids who were bullied, marginalized and flirting with self-harm that life can get better. Tim Gunn, Ian McKellen, Rosie O’Donnell, Portia de Rossi and thousands more gave moving testimonials about their own struggles, seeking to inspire everyone, no matter who they love.

But that message offended some of the school board members.

“There are short videos on the lifestyle that the kids would have to watch,” school board member Letitia Lowery incorrectly suggested.

Nope. The grant doesn't require kids to watch videos, read literature, wear rainbows or decorate their homes tastefully. The videos are all over the internet and kids can decide for themselves whether to watch.

The grant asks for just one thing — that they identify the sponsors, something that every grant does, one school board member reminded the room. In this case, it would be with one simple phrase anywhere in the space: "It Gets Better."

The kids voted on a sign with that phrase that's the size of a standard piece of paper.

Is hope indoctrination?

"I don't know where this started that it's going to be indoctrination and talk about sexuality," said Sharon Carter, one of only two school board members who voted in favor of the grant that night.

Carter also asked whether all grants have been scrutinized like this. And does the board plan to do this in the future?

Some board members said they were open to looking for money in the division's tight budget to create such a space on their own, totally missing the point.

"We as a board are making it more controversial than it has to be," said board member Anthony Andrews, who complimented the kids for doing exactly what we want our young people to do: show leadership and initiative, identify problems and find solutions. "If we vote no on this, we send the message that we don't trust the students."

Ultimately, the board voted 7-2 in favor of returning the \$10,000.

Members debated the grant, gayness and false narratives for longer, one adult in the audience noted, than they talked about the recent closure of two schools. The audience applauded that observation.

The teens heard from members of the community who were appalled by the situation and pledged to return to the board's next meeting Tuesday to protest the decision and the way the students were treated.

Brittany said she's trying to be optimistic. "Yeah, it gets better," she said. "But when is it going to get better for us, specifically?"

A Reading from Isaiah 56:1–8

Thus says the Lord: Maintain justice, and do what is right, for soon my salvation will come, and my deliverance will be revealed. Happy is the mortal who does this, the one who holds it fast, who keeps the sabbath, not profaning it, and refrains from doing any evil. Do not let the foreigner joined to the Lord say, "The Lord will surely separate me from his people;" and do not let the eunuch say "I am just a dry tree." For thus says the Lord: to the eunuchs who keep my sabbaths, who choose the things that please me, and hold fast to my covenant, I will give, in my house, and within my walls, a monument and a name better than sons and daughters. I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off. And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants, all who keep the sabbath and do not profane it, and hold fast to my covenant--these I will bring to my holy mountain and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar for my house

shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples. Thus says the Lord God, who gathers the outcasts of Israel: I will gather others to them besides those already gathered.

Fifth candle is extinguished

Officiant: Let us pray,

Eternal God, you created us all in your image, and yet as varied as the sands on the seashore. Teach us to rejoice in our diversity, to perceive it as yet another facet of your fathomless love, and so mightily spread abroad the power of your spirit, that all people may be gathered together as children of one Father, all barriers which divide us may crumble, suspicions disappear and hatreds cease, through your Son Jesus Christ, *Amen*

Confession of the Community:

O Lord, you open your hand, and all the earth is filled with good things, but we have cried out against you, saying, "What shall we eat, and what shall we drink?"

Lord, have mercy upon us, Christ have mercy upon us, Lord have mercy upon us.

O Lord, you have said, "In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and trust shall be your strength," but we have shouted, "No! We shall speed upon horses, we will ride upon swift steeds."

Lord, have mercy upon us, Christ have mercy upon us, Lord have mercy upon us.

O Lord, you have said, "Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream," but we have said, "When will the Sabbath be over that we may buy the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals?"

Lord, have mercy upon us, Christ, have mercy upon us, Lord, have mercy upon us.

O Lord, we have come before you with thousands of rams and ten thousand rivers of oil, and we have caused you to cry out, "Oh my people, what have I done to you? In what have I wearied you? Answer me!"

Lord have mercy upon us, Christ have mercy upon us, Lord have mercy upon us.

Sixth Candle is Extinguished

Psalm 51 (read in unison)

1 Have mercy on me, O God, according to your loving-kindness; *
in your great compassion blot out my offenses.

2 Wash me through and through from my wickedness *
and cleanse me from my sin.

3 For I know my transgressions, *
and my sin is ever before me

4 Against you only have I sinned *
and done what is evil in your sight.

5 And so you are justified when you speak *
and upright in your judgment.

- 6 Indeed, I have been wicked from my birth, *
a sinner from my mother's womb.
- 7 For behold, you look for truth deep within me, *
and will make me understand wisdom secretly.
- 8 Purge me from my sin, and I shall be pure; *
wash me, and I shall be clean indeed.
- 9 Make me hear of joy and gladness, *
that the body you have broken may rejoice.
- 10 Hide your face from my sins *
and blot out all my iniquities.
- 11 Create in me a clean heart, O God, *
and renew a right spirit within me.
- 12 Cast me not away from your presence *
and take not your holy Spirit from me.
- 13 Give me the joy of your saving help again *
and sustain me with your bountiful Spirit.
- 14 I shall teach your ways to the wicked, *
and sinners shall return to you.
- 15 Deliver me from death, O God, *
and my tongue shall sing of your righteousness,
O God of my salvation.
- 16 Open my lips, O Lord, *
and my mouth shall proclaim your praise.
- 17 Had you desired it, I would have offered sacrifice, *
but you take no delight in burnt-offerings.
- 18 The sacrifice of God is a troubled spirit; *
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.
- 19 Be favorable and gracious to Zion, *
and rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.
- 20 Then you will be pleased with the appointed sacrifices,
with burnt-offerings and oblations; *
then shall they offer young bullocks upon your altar.

An acolyte processes the last lit candle, symbolizing Christ, out of the sanctuary.

Officiant: Almighty God, we pray you graciously to behold this your family, for whom our Lord Jesus Christ was willing to be betrayed, and given into the hands of sinners, and to suffer death upon the cross.

STREPITUS *A loud sustained noise is made, symbolizing the earthquake at the time of the resurrection.*

Silent meditation *An acolyte returns with the last lighted candle and places it on the altar.*

All depart in silence.