Shout! Sermon and Readings Rev. Tracey Robinson-Harris April 8, 2018

**What They Did Yesterday Afternoon by Warsan Shire**

they set my aunts house on fire

i cried the way women on tv do

folding at the middle

like a five pound note.

i called the boy who used to love me

tried to ‘okay’ my voice

i said hello

he said warsan, what’s wrong, what’s happened?

i’ve been praying,

and these are what my prayers look like;

dear god

i come from two countries

one is thirsty

the other is on fire

both need water.

later that night

i held an atlas in my lap

ran my fingers across the whole world

and whispered

where does it hurt?

it answered

everywhere

everywhere

everywhere.

**from Pope Francis's Palm Sunday homily**

The temptation to silence young people has always existed. . .There are many ways to silence young people and make them invisible. Many ways to anesthetize them, to make them keep quiet, ask nothing, question nothing. There are many ways to sedate them, to keep them from getting involved, to make their dreams flat and dreary, petty and plaintive. . .

Dear young people, you have it in you to shout. . .

**from Dr. Martin Luther King's 1967 speech "The Other America" (Stanford University)**

…I think America must see that riots do not develop out of thin air. Certain conditions continue to exist in our society which must be condemned as vigorously as we condemn riots. But in the final analysis, a riot is the language of the unheard. And what is it that America has failed to hear? It has failed to hear that the plight of the Negro poor has worsened over the last few years. It has failed to hear that the promises of freedom and justice have not been met. And it has failed to hear that large segments of white society are more concerned about tranquility and the status quo than about justice, equality, and humanity. And so in a real sense our nation’s summers of riots are caused by our nation’s winters of delay. And as long as America postpones justice, we stand in the position of having these recurrences of violence and riots over and over again. Social justice and progress are the absolute guarantors of riot prevention.

**Sermon - Shout!**

Here lately, and somewhat to my embarrassment, I've been humming that almost 30 year old Tears for Fears song. Do you remember the words?

Shout Shout Let it all out

These are the things I can do without

Come on I'm talking to you Come on

So. . . . I've been heard shouting out loud at the news. I find myself speaking "more loudly" than necessary as my housemate and I comment on the state of the world. Sometimes I catch myself. . . momentarily wordless and. . . gathering all that energy and breath and tension in my body. . . working up to a really fine shout – or what my grandmother would have called hollerin'. . . just because I don't know what else to do.

Shouting comes in many languages – that of fear, of pain, of frustration, of surprise. . . . and it comes when we've had enough. It comes in the language of poets, of religious leaders, of activists with a passion for justice. . .from people of all ages and in all kinds of places.

SHOUT WITH TEARS, PRAYER, A TOUCH AND A WHISPER

One of the many languages shout comes in is tears. You've had some experience with this, with me, over this year. . .moments of tears, crying as I stand here because I am enraged and sad about harm being done, because love, because justice. . . crying in rage and caring seem hardwired in me somehow.

Warsan Shire's poem is one of the loudest shouts I have ever read. . .it begins with tears. . .she describes herself as folded at the middle. . . I imagine her not just with tears on her face but making sounds. . .the sounds. . . of wailing, of weeping. . .the shouting sounds of tears escaping from her at the news that her aunt's house had been set on fire.

Her shout does not end there. It comes next as prayer.

dear god

i come from two countries

one is thirsty the other is on fire

both need water.

Then comes the light touch of fingers on the pages of an atlas and a whispered questioned. Whispers, too, can shout. "Where does it hurt?"

And the answer, quiet, perhaps. Or a shout. To be heard – a tired, aching shout. . . everywhere everywhere everywhere

A poet's shout - tears, prayer, a touch and a whisper

SHOUT BECAUSE YOU MUST.

Shouts come from the street, come from the people who take to the streets, from young people in the streets. . .

Maybe you remember the Children's Crusade – a sure enough shout for civil rights - in Birmingham in May 1963. That was when 7th grader Gwendolyn Sanders helped organize her classmates, hundreds of kids from high schoolers down to first graders who took part in a massive walkout. By walking out, high schoolers like Gwendolyn defied their school's principal who attempted to lock the gates to keep students inside. Some reports estimate 1200 children were arrested that first day. The second day they were met with water cannon set a level to peel bark off trees and attacked by police dogs.

And then came the shouts of young people in the streets of Ferguson, Missouri - that Black Lives Matter - in August 2014. Those voices echo around this country – and right here – still.

And then came the shouts of young people gathered on March 24th . . . in DC and in sibling marches all around the globe – March for Our Lives.

Every time other voices were shouting. To be louder. To claim truth on their side. To impose silence. . .to convince themselves and others that those in the streets are flat out wrong, just plain lying, and worse.

Shouts for justice are often met with shouts of denial. They are also met with shouts of encouragement.

And so it was on Palm Sunday that Pope Francis spoke to those gathered in St. Peter's Square, reminding them of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, the joyous welcome that greeted him, the condemnation that was to follow. . . .Among those gathered were some 300 young people in Rome for the church's World Youth Day celebration. As the Pope continued his homily, he made the connection between that ancient story and the events of the day before – March 24th – March for Our Lives. (If you've heard the Pope's voice perhaps you can imagine his quietness.)

First there was this shout out to the truth:

“The temptation to silence young people has always existed. . . There are many ways to silence young people and make them invisible."

Then affirmation:

"Dear young people, you have it in you to shout!”

Followed by a warning with an admission. . . .

"Even if others keep quiet, if we older people and leaders, some corrupt, keep quiet, if the whole world keeps quiet and loses its joy"

And then. . . the shout out of encouragement

“It is up to you not to keep quiet. I ask you: Will you cry out?” And the young people in the crowd shouted, “Yes!”

SHOUTING - A LAST RESORT OF THE UNHEARD

In a time when he was persistently questioned about his commitment to non-violence and his opinions about the riots taking place in cities around the country, Martin Luther King spoke at Stanford University. His 1967 address was entitled "The Other America". Dr. King spoke clearly – perhaps to some it was more like shouting - about the racist oppression African Americans face daily, about the failure of this nation to live up to its promises of justice and equality for all persons. His words – new to so many then - are familiar to us now:

We are all caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny.

We shall overcome because the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward Justice.

We will be able to transform the jangling discourse of our nation into a beautiful symphony. . .

And in words he would, of necessity, repeat in days that followed, when he spoke at Stanford he spoke about the riots.

". . . I think America must see that riots do not develop out of thin air. Certain conditions continue to exist in our society which must be condemned as vigorously as we condemn riots. But in the final analysis, a riot is the language of the unheard. And what is it that America has failed to hear? . . . It has failed to hear that large segments of white society are more concerned about tranquility and the status quo than about justice, equality, and humanity."

Riot. The language of the unheard. Sometimes we use other words. March. Protest. Unrest. If it crosses the line into violence. . .riot. And even then - call it shout. Collective. Insistent Persistent. Shout. The response to a failure to be heard.

So there I am. At home. In my car. Listening to the news. In that moment, I can't keep quiet. A one woman riot. Shouting.