

**Sharing Our Burdens: A Special Service of Poetry & Reflection**  
August 29, 2021 at First Church in Cambridge, Congregational, UCC  
Led by Poet-in-Residence, Jean Dany Joachim

*Texts: Psalm 19, Matthew 11: 28-30*

**READING 1**      Psalm 19



The heavens herald your glory, O God,  
and the skies display your handiwork.  
Day after day they tell their story,  
and night after night they reveal  
the depth of their understanding.  
There without speech, without words,  
without even an audible voice,  
their cry echoes through all the world,  
and their message reaches the ends of the earth.  
For in the heavens the sun has pitched a tent.  
It comes forth with the grandeur of a wedding procession,  
with the eagerness of an athlete ready to race.  
It rises at one end of the sky and travels to the other end,  
and nothing escapes its warmth.  
Your law, O God, is perfect;  
it revives the soul.  
Your rule is to be trusted;  
it gives wisdom to the naive.  
Your purposes, O God, are right;  
they gladden the heart.  
Your command is clear;  
it gives light to the eyes.  
Holding you in awe, O God, is purifying; it endures.  
Your decrees are steadfast, and all of them just.  
They are more precious than gold, than the purest of gold,

and sweeter than honey, than honey fresh from the comb.  
In them your faithful people find instruction;  
there is great reward in keeping them.  
But who can detect their own failings?  
Forgive the misdeeds I don't even know about!  
Keep your faithful one from presumption as well,  
so that my faults never control me.  
Then I will be blameless and innocent of grave error.  
May the words of my mouth  
and the thoughts of my heart  
be pleasing in your sight, O God,  
my rock and my redeemer.

**READING 2**      Matthew 11: 28-30

“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

The following are a selection of poems that were shared via Zoom as part of our morning worship service

*From Rhina P. Espaillat*

***A IS FOR***

"Arthritis," he says, and scribbles me some pills;  
"hot baths, bed rest, come back next week." I drive  
home almost happy with my bargain ills

and what they aren't. Here I am, alive,  
I tell myself, and no conditions like  
what binds my neighbor or my painter friend:  
I should almost be glad of this cold spike  
whose rusty head grinds in my spine, its end  
prying the socket of the femur.

Time takes us back to school, teaches a new  
alphabet geared to the way things are. I'm  
grateful for glasses that work, a shoe  
that fits, my teeth, the absence of some grief  
whose very thought makes this comic relief.

### **The Ballad of the Border Crossing**

The smuggler shouts to the migrant crowd  
before the truck takes off,  
“No noise, no noise at the border!  
Not so much as a breath or cough!

“The driver has got his orders:  
he’s been paid to get you through.  
But if the Border Patrol gets wise,  
that’s it for both him and you!”

“Wait, mister! We’ll need some water!  
Where’s the air vent in this truck?”  
“There’s no time for this!” says the smuggler,  
and he locks them in. “Good luck!”

“Good luck be with us this one time!”  
Some cheer, some weep, some pray.

“Holy Mother,” says one, “find work for me,  
and I’ll send my wife some pay.”  
Says another, “Watch over my mother—she’s old—  
and keep the gangs away.”

But through mile after mile of scrubland  
and town after dying town,  
the babies begin to vomit and cry  
and there’s no room to sit down.

“Poor bastards,” the driver says to himself,  
“it must be hell back there.  
But I need this cash for my motherless son,  
for whom nobody else will care.  
Pray God we get past the checkpoint  
before they run out of air.”

Through heat waves, at last, it shimmers:  
the checkpoint looms ahead.  
“Mister, mister!” his cargo screams,  
“let us out to unload the dead!”

“There’s no place to stop! We’re almost there!  
The Stars and Stripes are waving!  
We can make it now if you all keep still!”  
But the screaming turns to raving,  
until gradually silence tells him now  
there’s not much back there worth saving.

“I must save myself, for my poor boy’s sake!”  
He jams on the brake and jumps.  
The last sound he hears is the cracking of bones

as he bleeds into stones and stumps.

“If that don’t beat all,” says the Border Patrolman  
as his wife serves him apple pie,  
“how eighty dead Spics was crammed in that truck  
that stank like a filthy sty!  
We throw them out and they come right back,  
though I’m damned if I know why.”

“Maybe it’s true what you always say—  
they should stay where they belong—  
but they hug their kids like they’re just plain folks,  
and to die that way seems wrong.

“They feed old folks at the nursing home,  
and wash them and help them stand;  
they do the work that nobody wants  
and clear the stoniest land.

“They get paid the least and they work all day  
to gather my father’s crops.”  
“And they run off unpaid,” her husband laughs,  
“if you threaten to call the cops!”

In a town far south of the border,  
a little boy can see  
that he’s scraped the last grain from the iron pot.  
But there’s fruit on the mango tree.  
“Enough,” he thinks, “to last until  
my Papi comes back to me.”

**From Chris Brandt**  
***This Poem***

This poem has been beaten and thrown to the side of the road from a speeding car. This poem sleeps on the streets of New York and Kandahar and Athens, wrapped in a discarded carpet. This poem is filthy, covered with lice, on intimate terms with cockroach and rat. This poem lies down on the exhausted soil behind a foreclosed farmhouse, it sleeps under an abandoned trailer, it sits on a street corner, it opens the door to a bank's ATMs as it rattles its cup, it enters a subway car and begins begging – "I'm sorry to disturb you, but..."

This poem is poisoned by lead in its water, and methane, this poem has cancer from uranium tailings, this poem is malnourished from living in a food desert, this poem is denied healthcare because it cannot pay for it, this poem is told it should get another job, one where it can make some real money. This poem is told money is the only measure of the value of anything. This poem is told it is ugly, that it should be more aesthetic, this poem is asked, where is the music? Why does it not speak of flowers, and love?

This poem is tempted to give up and die. This poem is blindfolded and shackled to a chair that is bolted to the floor, electrodes are clipped to its genitals, this poem has a towel strapped over its upside down face and water poured over it until it thinks it is drowning. This poem has been held in solitary confinement for months to prevent it from committing suicide. This poem lives on death row, convicted for a crime it did not commit. It has never heard the charges against it, they are classified, and knowing them would be a crime but it is rumored they have something to do with its refusal to be beautiful, its scorn for poems that provide emotional comfort.

This poem is a child maimed by a Hellfire missile fired by a Predator drone triggered by a "pilot" in thousand-dollar swivel-chair comfort in an air force base, Holloman in New Mexico or Creech in Nevada, this poem is littered with limbs severed by shrapnel from bombs and IEDs, the eyes of this poem are sightless and its ears hear nothing because they are the eyes and ears of corpses. This poem is buried in the mud at Verdun, under the rubble of Stalingrad, Dresden, Tokyo, Coventry. This poem screams as its skin peels away at Hiroshima, as it becomes a shadow on a flight of stairs. This poem is replete with horrors. None of it is exempt, it meets us as it washes its hands in the restroom and dries them under a blast of warm air. This poem's hands are never clean.

But this poem refuses to give up, it will not agree to kill even a rat – it will feed it instead. This poem moves the evicted family back into its home, shouting that it's the landlord and the bank who are thieves. This poem grows that money is a fiction – it does not grow on trees or sprout from the ground, it is a measure of nothing. This poem refuses to wear lipstick and eyeshadow, it remains defiant and ugly, it will not make music until every homeless person is ushered to an orchestra seat at the concert of his or her choice, this poem says the flowers are in the faces of the beggars begging our pardon for disturbing us, this poem will not beg your pardon for its dirty face and discordant screams, this poem demands that its reader fight to change the ugly face and dirty soul of “the way things are.”

This poem is a lesbian mother of two who is asked for the hundredth time whether her partner should be called her husband, it is every immigrant who speaks a language other than English and is exhorted to *speak English dammit! You're in America!* This poem is everyone who is not in a position of power by virtue of skin color, money, privilege or greed. This poem is a shovel, a sledgehammer, a pickaxe in the hands of the many not the few. It says to the few, Beware! Your power rests on a crumbling foundation of lies, and it is coming to expose and demolish it.

And to put in its place a new foundation of truth and grace and love.

**From Jean Dany Joachim**  
***Yon Lòt Pawòl***

Anvan jounen an fini, mwen pral ekri yon tèks long pou peyi a  
Yon tèks k'ap fè longè tou pye bwa yo kole ansanm  
Yon tèks ak mo fre, tankou grenn lapli sou fèy mazonbèl

M'ap ekri pawòl ki ijan peyi a bezwen konnye a  
Pawòl anvan tout bagay k'ap fè nou tout tounen youn  
Ni sa ki lavil, ni sa'k an pwovens, ak tout sa ki lòtbò

Tèks sa a, se pou tè a, ki se ti kal nan nou tout,  
Jaden kòd lonbrit tout moun  
Moun rich rich, moun rich, moun ti mwayen, ak sa'k pa gen ditou.

M'ap ekri nan tèks sa a, jan nou bèl, lè nou an pè

Jan nou se yon pèp plezi ki renmenn ri ak fè fraz  
Yon pèp solidè, menmlè nou pa montre sa

M'ap ekri nan tèks la, pawòl ki ka sanble ak rèv  
Yon rèv tan lontan, nou kontinye fè toulejou  
Yon rèv linyon ak liberasyon

Mwen pap pèdi tan pale de istwa peyi a  
Nou tout deja konnen li  
M'ap pwofite pale de sa nou dwe fè pou'n rive pi lwen

Fwa sa a, mwen p'ap pale de solèy la  
Mwen pap menm pale de lanmè a ki fè viwonn nou  
Mwen pap di anyen sou syèl la ak makòn zetwal yo

M'ap fè yon ti rale tou piti sou rivyè ak pye bwa yo,  
Dlo sous nan tèt mòn k'ap kannale glise desann  
Pou plen krich ak kannari pou nou pa janm swaf

Tèks la ap pale de tout bèt volay: zwazo lib, zwazo kalòj  
L'ap pale de bon jan van ki vante pou kalme chalè  
L'ap pale de randevou lalin ak solèy dèyè tèt mòn

M'ap ekri tèks sa a san difiklite, san pakèt refleksyon  
Nan chache mo espesyal ak metafò  
Tèks la ap fèt ak souf peyi a

Si dòmi ta pati avè m,  
Tèks la ap kontinye tèt li poukont li  
Pou l ofri yon pawòl ijan peyi a bezwen konnye a.



**Read by Dan Smith**

*Another Discourse*

Before this day ends, I will write a lengthy text for the country,  
A text as long as all the trees put together,  
A text with brand new words, like raindrops on mazonbèl leaves.

I will write urgent words that the country needs at this moment.  
Words that before anything will join us once more:  
Us from the city, the countryside and all of us abroad.

This text will be for the land that is a part of us all,  
Our umbilical cord:  
Very rich folks, rich folks, folks with little means, and those with nothing

I will write in this text how beautiful we are when we are at peace,  
How we are joyful people who love to laugh and crack jokes.  
A united people, even if we do not show that.

I Will write in the text words that resemble a dream,  
An old-time dream that we still dream every day  
Dream of union and liberation.

I won't waste time talking about the country's history,  
We all already know it.  
I'll talk about what we need to do to move forward.

I will not speak of the sun this time,  
And won't even speak of the ocean that encircles us.  
I won't speak a word of the sky and its colony of stars.

I will make a short mention of rivers and trees,

Water sources from the hills rushing down  
to fill up jugs and kanari so that we never have to thirst.

The text will speak of all birds: free birds, caged birds.  
It will speak of the good breeze that comes to calm the heat.  
It will speak of the moon's and sun's rendezvous behind mountain tops.

I will write this text without difficulty, without lots of thoughts,  
Looking for special words and metaphors.  
The text will be made with the country's breath.

If sleep would take me away,  
The text would continue on its own  
To offer an urgent discourse that the country needs at this moment.

**From Alan Soto Smith**  
**Read by Jean Dany Joachim**

*Partimos*

A este paso  
la tierra llegará  
al horizonte.  
Olvidémonos ahora  
de la estrella  
de agua,  
y la tela  
soltera en la arena,  
es decir,  
después del bosque  
oscuro,  
donde  
nació el mar  
partimos del principio  
de que la noche  
se ahoga,  
partimos sin estaciones.

*We Proceed*

At this rate  
earth will arrive  
at the horizon.  
Let's forget then  
of the star  
of water,  
and the lonely  
cloth in the sand,  
that is to say,  
after the dark  
forest,  
where  
the sea is born,  
we proceed from the principle  
that the night  
succumbs  
we proceed without stopping



### **Questioning**

By Toni Bee / tonibee.org

*A Poem for My Haitian Cousins: for First Church Cambridge, MA: 2021*

***Cause, it was by God's grace that we made it through oh Lord I worship You***

- But Lord I have so many concerns

as I was calling your name the ground became staccato

an unharmonious song

Loved ones, we were talking, the shake then they

called on YOU before getting crushed

CRUSHED anyway

Though eye, call for my loved ones NEVER WILL they respond ears, shut

**Ohhh Lord I worship You**

- - Call THE name still relieves, Yet  
no pounding answer returns  
what am I to do - *worship you, worship you, Adore Bondye?*

- - When they say some ghost creates the seismic shift Hand grenades in the craters  
Electrodes Change weather, WHAT to believe
- they've been coming for us since liberty  
for land, for ... ..ever,
- - in the Country of the first free, pain of OUR souls Is the richest culture, most profound  
Have YOU seen the colors we make - canvas simply weeps  
Thee art, a deeply dug well of soul struggle in the depth of the unfairness, God We stay chanting  
*Your loving kindness, my heart proclaims not questioning, Lord just asking*
- - Did you know our accent differs in the north versus City south. That Nigerians say - you sound  
like us?  
Lord, precious culture of my people - Will You sustain?  
My people - - be sustained
- - IS it fair that my faith has cracks in it - like the ground it, quakes nervous with hope,
- until The next shatter

**Will YOU save us**

- IF I lash out in loud in frustration, please do not punish me Lord  
YOU are the only one left I can battle with, for all I can depend on is  
this fight ....*oh Lord I worship You / ohhhhh Lord I worship You*