

Where is the Love? Pentecost+?

But if you only have love for your own race
Then you only leave space to discriminate
And to discriminate only generates hate
And when you hate then you're bound to get irate, yeah
Madness is what you demonstrate
And that's exactly how anger works and operates
Man, you gotta have love just to set it straight
Take control of your mind and meditate
Let your soul gravitate to the love, y'all, y'all

Not the Roberta Flack version, mind you, in its adulterous and sinful tunefulness, but the black eyed peas

Eleven days ago, the Reverend Clementa Pinckney died along with eight other people, during a Bible study in the church he led, Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina. Just 41 years old, Pinckney, was also the state senator for South Carolina's 45th district.

In October of 2013, he gave a speech as part of the Civil Rights Ride about what it means to be an American and a Christian. "America is about freedom, equality, and the pursuit of happiness. And that's what church is all about: freedom to worship, and freedom from bondage to sin, freedom to be fully what God intends us to be; to have equality in the sight of God. And sometimes we've got to make noise to do that, sometimes maybe you have to die like Denmark Vesey to do that, sometimes you have to march, struggle and be unpopular to do that."

Denmark Vesey was one of the church's founders. He attempted to organize a slave rebellion in 1822, for which he

was executed.

In the speech, Pinckney also discussed why he was called to public service. "There are many people who say why would you as a preacher be involved in public life? But our calling is not just within the walls of the congregation. We are part of the life and community in which our congregation resides."

Being part of the life of the community means opening our doors with the words "all are welcome" and opening our arms with the words, "you are welcome." It means working to address issues of injustice and poverty with tools of service and love. It means speaking truth to power as did the Amalekite, as did Denmark Vesey, as did the families of those killed at Emanuel, when they spoke words of forgiveness to the killer. Being part of the life of the community for a Christian means continually meeting the poisonous spirit, the violent acts and the ungodly language of racial hatred that produce the kind of evil this terrible boy embodied, meeting all these with neighbor love, with the peace that passes mere understanding, with the spirit of truth, with acts of selfless kindness, with language of justice, mercy and humility.

He did not have to die. Any more than Vesey had to die. Any more than King David's Amalekite had to die.

Sometimes a man forces his despair on another person. Louise Gluck

2 Samuel 1:1-27

A man came, with his clothes torn and dirt on his head. We need look no further than the story itself, the very chapter

we're reading, of what is called the first book of Samuel (-----
-----) to find precedent for this dirt on the head, torn clothes
program. This guy was on the same page. And yet, David
acted out, took out his grief, wildly executed this man, purely
for the purpose of assuaging David's pain over Saul. Btw David
wasn't all that nice to Saul to begin with. So it's not just
sorrow, but a blend of sorrow and pure guilt, with a soupçon of
self-doubt that have David's head in a whirl. Knockers in a twist.
Don't forget this is David whose instincts run rampant already
have balked at investigation; Bathsheba. And who all died
because of that. How much info do we need to determine that
David is not our heroic guy; David is our class fuckup? And yet
he controls the language. The house and lineage. The story
proceeds from David forward. The emotions are his (cf
Psalms) and anything that doesn't make sense or indicates
problems/toxicity is at the very least set aside, at worst
discounted. To the victors is allotted the writing of history.
Wrong, wrong, wrong. TJ July 4 just passed one of the most
amazing and admirable minds in our American history. One of
the most stunningly wrong and ethically/morally ineffectual
figures we have ever produced or might even imagine. How
indeed have we managed or been thrust into this environment,
this milieu, this ecosystem, wherein the greatest country in the
world is also the worst. The greatest man in our history is also
the worst. The greatest monument in our history is also the
worst? Prisoners. TJ. "All men." Where is Jesus? Where is truth
and compassion? Where is the love amidst the triumph?

After the death of Saul, when David had returned from
defeating the Amalekites, David remained two days in Ziklag.
On the third day, a man came from Saul's camp, with his
clothes torn and dirt on his head. When he came to David, he
fell to the ground and did obeisance. David said to him, "Where
have you come from?" He said to him, "I have escaped from the

camp of Israel.” David said to him, “How did things go? Tell me!” He answered, “The army fled from the battle, but also many of the army fell and died; and Saul and his son Jonathan also died.” Then David asked the young man who was reporting to him, “How do you know that Saul and his son Jonathan died?” The young man reporting to him said, “I happened to be on Mount Gilboa; and there was Saul leaning on his spear, while the chariots and the horsemen drew close to him. When he looked behind him, he saw me, and called to me. I answered, ‘Here sir.’ And he said to me, ‘Who are you?’ I answered him, ‘I am an Amalekite.’ He said to me, ‘Come, stand over me and kill me; for convulsions have seized me, and yet my life still lingers.’ So I stood over him, and killed him, for I knew that he could not live after he had fallen. I took the crown that was on his head and the armlet that was on his arm, and I have brought them here to my lord.”

Then David took hold of his clothes and tore them; and all the men who were with him did the same. They mourned and wept, and fasted until evening for Saul and for his son Jonathan, and for the army of the Lord and for the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword. David said to the young man who had reported to him, “Where do you come from?” He answered, “I am the son of a resident alien, an Amalekite.” David said to him, “Were you not afraid to lift your hand to destroy the Lord’s anointed?” Then David called one of the young men and said, “Come here and strike him down.” So he struck him down and he died. David said to him, “Your blood be on your head; for your own mouth has testified against you, saying, ‘I have killed the Lord’s anointed.’”

David intoned this lamentation over Saul and his son Jonathan. (He ordered that The Song of the Bow be taught to the people of Judah; it is written in the Book of Jashar.) He said: Your glory, O Israel, lies slain upon your high places! How the

mighty have fallen! Tell it not in Gath, proclaim it not in the streets of Ashkelon; or the daughters of the Philistines will rejoice, the daughters of the uncircumcised will exult. You mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew or rain upon you, nor bounteous fields! For there the shield of the mighty was defiled, the shield of Saul, anointed with oil no more. From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan did not turn back, nor the sword of Saul return empty. Saul and Jonathan, beloved and lovely! In life and in death they were not divided; they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions. O daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you with crimson, in luxury, who put ornaments of gold on your apparel. How the mighty have fallen in the midst of the battle! Jonathan lies slain upon your high places. I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; greatly beloved were you to me; your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women. How the mighty have fallen, and the weapons of war perished!

Though David rose against Saul in spirit, he still mourns when Saul is killed. He blames the messenger who was only following Saul's order. David's love for Jonathan – go figure – makes him violent. David's fear of the future makes him violent. Standard grief procedure includes violence against self. Cursing the land and mountain is violence. JC breaks from this kind of violence. Symbolic violence. Like Confederate flag. See Makkim speech. Violence hiding within sentimentality and masquerading as honor. Not what you are doing when you are flying high that matters, but what how you behave when down. Those who are healthy have no need of a physician but those who are sick.

Toni Morrison

Nobel Prize for Literature Lecture

delivered 7 December 1993

"Once upon a time there was an old woman, blind but wise." Or was it an old man? A guru, perhaps. Or a griot soothing restless children. I've heard this story, or one exactly like it, in the lore of several cultures. "Once upon a time there was an old woman, blind...wise...."

In the version I know the woman is the daughter of slaves, black, American, and lives alone in a small house outside of town.

170 ft sq vs 1000 too small

Her reputation for wisdom is without peer and without question. Among her people she is both the law and its transgression. The honor she is paid and the awe in which she is held reach beyond her neighborhood to places far away; to the city where the intelligence of rural prophets is the source of much amusement.

One day the woman is visited by some young people who seem bent on disproving her clairvoyance and showing her up for the fraud they believe she is. Their plan is simple: They enter her house and ask the one question the answer to which rides solely on her difference from them, a difference they regard as a profound disability -- her blindness. They stand before her,

and one of them says, "Old woman, I hold in my hand a bird. Tell me whether it is living or dead."

She doesn't answer, and the question is repeated. "Is the bird I am holding living or dead?" She still doesn't answer. She's blind. She can't see her visitors, let alone what is in their hands. She doesn't know their color, their gender, or their homeland. She only knows their motive.

The old woman's silence is so long, the young people have trouble holding their laughter. Finally she speaks and her voice is soft but stern. "I don't know", she says. "I don't know whether the bird you are holding is dead or alive, but what I do know is that it is in your hands. It is in your hands." Her answer can be taken to mean: If it's dead, you have either found it that way or you have killed it. If it is alive, you can still kill it. Whether it is to stay alive, it's your decision. Whatever the case, it's your responsibility.

For parading their power and her helplessness, the young visitors are reprimanded, told they are responsible not only for the act of mockery but also for the small bundle of life sacrificed to achieve its aims. The blind woman shifts attention away from assertions of power to the instrument through which that power is exercised.

Speculation on what (other than its own frail body) that bird-in-the-hand might signify has always been attractive to me, but especially so now -- thinking, as I have been -- about the work I do that has brought me to this company. So I choose to read the bird as language and the woman as a practiced writer. She's worried about how the language she dreams in, given to her at birth, is handled, put into service, even withheld from her for certain nefarious purposes. Being a writer she thinks of language partly as a system, partly as a living thing over which

one has control, but mostly as agency -- as an act with consequences.

So the question the children put to her: "Is it living or dead?" is not unreal because she thinks of language as susceptible to death, erasure; certainly imperiled and salvageable only by an effort of the will. She believes that if the bird in the hands of her visitors is dead the custodians are responsible for the corpse. For her a dead language is not only one no longer spoken or written, it is unyielding language content to admire its own paralysis. Like statist language, censored and censoring. Ruthless in its policing duties, it has no desire or purpose other than maintaining the free range of its own narcotic narcissism, its own exclusivity and dominance. However moribund, it is not without effect for it actively thwarts the intellect, stalls conscience, suppresses human potential. Unreceptive to interrogation, it cannot form or tolerate new ideas, shape other thoughts, tell another story, fill baffling silences. Official language smitheryed to sanction ignorance and preserve privilege is a suit of armor polished to shocking glitter, a husk from which the knight departed long ago. Yet there it is: dumb, predatory, sentimental -- exciting reverence in schoolchildren, providing shelter for despots, summoning false memories of stability, harmony among the public.

She is convinced that when language dies, out of carelessness, disuse, and absence of esteem, indifference, or killed by fiat, not only she herself, but all users and makers are accountable for its demise. In her country children have bitten their tongues off and use bullets instead to iterate the voice of speechlessness, of disabled and disabling language, of language adults have abandoned altogether as a device for grappling with meaning, providing guidance, or expressing love. But she knows tongue-suicide is not only the choice of children. It's

common among the infantile heads of state and power merchants whose evacuated language leaves them with no access to what is left of their human instincts for they speak only to those who obey, or in order to force obedience.

The systematic looting of language can be recognized by the tendency of its users to forgo its nuanced, complex, mid-wifery properties for menace and subjugation. Oppressive language does more than represent violence; it is violence; does more than represent the limits of knowledge; it limits knowledge. Whether it is obscuring state language or the faux-language of mindless media; whether it is the proud but calcified language of the academy or the commodity driven language of science; whether it is the malign language of law-without-ethics, or language designed for the estrangement of minorities, hiding its racist plunder in its literary cheek -- it must be rejected, altered, and exposed. It is the language that drinks blood, laps vulnerabilities, tucks its fascist boots under crinolines of respectability and patriotism as it moves relentlessly toward the bottom line and the bottomed-out mind. Sexist language, racist language, theistic language -- all are typical of the policing languages of mastery, and cannot, do not permit new knowledge or encourage the mutual exchange of ideas.

The old woman is keenly aware that no intellectual mercenary, nor insatiable dictator, no paid-for politician or demagogue; no counterfeit journalist would be persuaded by her thoughts. There is and will be rousing language to keep citizens armed and arming; slaughtered and slaughtering in the malls, courthouses, post offices, playgrounds, bedrooms and boulevards; stirring, memorializing language to mask the pity and waste of needless death. There will be more diplomatic language to countenance rape, torture, assassination. There is and will be more seductive, mutant language designed to

throttle women, to pack their throats like pâté-producing geese with their own unsayable, transgressive words; there will be more of the language of surveillance disguised as research; of politics and history calculated to render the suffering of millions mute; language glamorized to thrill the dissatisfied and bereft into assaulting their neighbors; arrogant pseudo-empirical language crafted to lock creative people into cages of inferiority and hopelessness.

Underneath the eloquence, the glamour, the scholarly associations, however stirring or seductive, the heart of such language is languishing, or perhaps not beating at all -- if the bird is already dead.

The conventional wisdom of the Tower of Babel story is that the collapse was a misfortune. That it was the distraction, or the weight of many languages that precipitated the tower's failed architecture. That one monolithic language would have expedited the building and heaven would've been reached. Whose heaven, she wonders? And what kind? Perhaps the achievement of Paradise was premature, a little hasty if no one could take the time to understand other languages, other views, other narratives. Had they, the heaven they imagined might have been found at their feet. Complicated, demanding, yes, but a view of heaven as life; not heaven as post-life.

She wouldn't want to leave her young visitors with the impression that language should be forced to stay alive merely to be. The vitality of language lies in its ability to limn the actual, imagined and possible lives of its speakers, readers, and writers. Although its poise is sometimes in displacing experience, it's not a substitute for it. It arcs toward the place where meaning may lie. When a President of the United States

thought about the graveyard his country had become, and said, "The world will little note nor long remember what we say here; but it will never forget what they did here," his simple words are exhilarating in their life-sustaining properties, because they refused to encapsulate the reality of 600, 000 dead men in a cataclysmic race war. Refusing to monumentalize, disdaining the "final word," the precise "summing up," acknowledging their "poor power to add or detract", his words signal deference to the uncapturability of the life it mourns. It is the deference that moves her, the recognition that -- that recognition that language can never live up to life once and for all -- nor should it. Language can never "pin down" slavery, genocide, war. Nor should it yearn for the arrogance to be able to do so. Its force, its felicity is in its reach toward the ineffable.

Be it grand or slender, burrowing, blasting, or refusing to sanctify; whether it laughs out loud or is a cry without an alphabet, the choice word, the chosen silence, unmolested language surges toward knowledge, not its destruction. But who doesn't know of literature banned, because it is interrogative; discredited because it is critical; erased because alternate? And how many are outraged by the thought of a self-ravaged tongue? Word-work is sublime, she thinks, because it's generative; it makes meaning that secures our difference, our human difference -- the way in which we are like no other life. We die. That may be the meaning of life. But we do language. That may be the measure of our lives.

You, old woman, blessed with blindness, can speak the language that tells us what only language can: how to see without pictures. Language alone protects us from the scariness of things with no names. Language alone is meditation.

Psalm 30

I will extol you, O Lord, for you have drawn me up, and did not let my foes rejoice over me.

O Lord my God, I cried to you for help, and you have healed me.

O Lord, you brought up my soul from Sheol, restored me to life from among those gone down to the Pit.

Sing praises to the Lord, O you his faithful ones, and give thanks to his holy name.

For his anger is but for a moment; his favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning.

As for me, I said in my prosperity, "I shall never be moved."

By your favor, O Lord, you had established me as a strong mountain; you hid your face; I was dismayed.

To you, O Lord, I cried, and to the Lord I made supplication:

"What profit is there in my death, if I go down to the Pit? Will the dust praise you? Will it tell of your faithfulness?

Hear, O Lord, and be gracious to me! O Lord, be my helper!"

You have turned my mourning into dancing; you have taken off my sackcloth and clothed me with joy,

so that my soul may praise you and not be silent. O Lord my
God, I will give thanks to you forever.