

Learning to LOVE  
Sermon preached at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church  
September 14, 2025  
The Rev. Dr. Nina R. Pooley

Today we celebrate the second week of Creation Season, and our theme is LEARN. Though I have to admit, the chaos of our world has felt overwhelming lately - pushing the joys of this season to the background.

I try to remember that:  
Creation holds us,  
calms us,  
restores us,  
provides perspective.  
If we will learn from her.

But, oh friends, it's been a week - with the anxiety of our current reality crashing into us all. At our house on Thursday, we woke to a text from our younger daughter, which began with the ominous words, "I don't want to alarm you, but ..." Words every parent dreads.

She attends Tufts Medical School in Boston. Her text went on to inform us that a dental student at Tufts had threatened to bring a gun to the medical and dental school complex that day to "shoot people." The campus police later informed the school community that the individual was in custody and there was no longer a credible threat. The deans told all the medical and dental students they should go to class as normal. Or pretending that this is normal. Because this is how we live now. Keeping in mind, this is the day after the fatal shooting of Charlie Kirk, and the shooting at Evergreen High School in Colorado. Just go back to your day to day lives. Because this is our new normal. Crisis, anxiety, insanity writ large.

Sometimes I forget to breathe.

Jesus shares two parables this morning. A lost sheep and a lost coin. Parables illustrating how precious each individual is to God, each worth seeking and finding. That core truth itself has been lost. We have completely lost our way, lost the plot of Jesus' good news of God's love. Lost our sense of common human decency. How precious it is to live this human life together.

One thing that's **not** lost on me - is the date as I write this. Thursday - September 11th. It feels like we are being battered by the reverberations of violence. I search for something helpful to my spirit. In my inbox, I find the post from the Society of St. John the Evangelist. Brother Jamie Nelson writes:

It might feel like we are in a terrible sudden storm, buffeted about  
by the winds and waves of wildfire, war, political upheaval,  
and all the other sources of suffering close to our hearts and in our prayers.

Amidst it all, Jesus reminds us to place our trust in him.  
Jesus, who is our Savior, is always ready to support us, offering strength,  
hope, and the peace which passes our understanding.<sup>1</sup>

Peace which passes understanding. Peace to us. Which is where Creation comes in. I recall "A Gaelic Blessing," which David Nevin sent along to me while I was visiting my dad last week.

Deep peace to you.  
Deep peace to you.  
Deep peace of the running wave to you.  
Deep peace of the flowing air to you.  
Deep peace of the quiet earth to you.  
Deep peace of the shining stars to you.  
Deep peace of the gentle night to you.  
Moon and stars pour their healing light on you.  
Deep peace to you.<sup>2</sup>

Friends, deep breath. Long exhale. Deep peace.

Creation holds us,  
calms us,  
restores us,  
provides perspective.  
If we will learn from her.

Somewhere in my soul I know this to be true, but current events and the turmoil of our world keep obscuring that knowing. Though as much as I want it to, I doubt that learning from Creation means escaping into the wilds, and hiding from the violence and chaos. Hold that thought.

A friend shared a post from Mark Beckwith, retired Episcopal bishop of Newark. In which he addresses how to respond with creative, compassionate, non-violence in the face of a violent world. It's a long post, I'll include a link to the entire article in next week's email newsletter. But essentially - Bishop Beckwith posted on Tuesday this week, in response to our country's growing commitment to engage in violence.<sup>3</sup>

He notes:

Violence is being threatened by government actions to the degree that more and more people, especially immigrants, are afraid to venture out or send their kids to school.  
Violence is being promoted by increasingly vengeful rhetoric. And, ..., violence is being celebrated.

And then Bishop Beckwith asks:

How best to respond to violence, which seems to be an integral component of government policy? Our immediate responses are often governed by a combination of anger, adrenaline and our reptilian brain, which more often than not don't work other than to release our fear and outrage.

Bishop Beckwith goes on to recommend non-violence, modeled after Mahatma Gandhi's satyagraha, which translated from Sanskrit is "truth force."

In Bishop Mark's words:

Not to be confused with pacifism, non-violence is a strategy of engagement against injustice without resorting to violence. Non-violence makes the claim that power is not monolithic; that it can be challenged and – if not defeated – exposed as unjust, immoral and illegal.

...

Non-violence is a strategy of public love. It requires a commitment, and some training. A key ingredient of that training is to see the hidden humanity in others – even in – and perhaps especially in, one's opponents. ...

Non-violence is a commitment not to demonize or humiliate one's opponent, which may be the most difficult commitment to make.

Unfortunately, given my first instincts, Bishop Beckwith continues, writing:

Non-violence is not achieved by escaping, avoiding, or finding an existential way to hide under a rock until the storms of violence dissipate. Non-violence requires engagement – engagement with struggle. The struggle is against violence itself – and it is also the struggle to refrain from committing verbal or physical violence ourselves.

Beckwith concludes:

It requires a lot of work. Ongoing work. We need help with this work – from each other, and for our common commitment to stand up to violence – with non-violence. Develop a discipline of prayer, meditation, of a commitment to justice. Start with your own circle, and then grow it out. It can make a difference.

Friends, it's **there** that I see it - the connection between the violent reality in which we find ourselves immersed, and this celebration of Creation.

As we've noted:

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calms us,  
restores us,  
provides perspective.  
If we will learn from her.

And as Bishop Beckwith instructs - we respond to the violence of this world through building a community committed to non-violence. Active non-violence. By developing a discipline of prayer, meditation, and a commitment to justice. We begin with our own circle, and then grow it outward.<sup>4</sup>

Grow our own circle, as a tree grows her rings, outward. Or mimicking the ripples of a pond, moving from the center - echoing outward. First, we center ourselves - and then slowly, intentionally we build outward. We center ourselves in God. We center ourselves in God's beloved Creation - reminded of our own beloved-ness, and that of those around us. We share ourselves with those we trust, building our compassionate, non-violent response together, and move out into the world. We mirror the ebb and flow of the ocean. Out and back. Out and back. To the center, that we may be restored, and moving outward, where we can pour ourselves out. Constantly returning to the center, and filled by God's love, and that of our community, we can respond to the world.

Friends, the work of loving the world takes many forms.<sup>5</sup> Even in the face of horror and vileness, we embrace the constant invitation of Creation - to fall in love, over and over, with this world God so loves. To be filled with that love, so we may be ridiculously courageous in love, as if the world depends on it. Because it does. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> *Brother, Give us a Word, SSJE*, "Storm," Brother Jamie Nelson, posted on Sept. 11, 2025.

<sup>2</sup> William Sharp, "A Gaelic Blessing," *The Dominion of Dreams: Under the Dark Star*, (1909).

<sup>3</sup> Mark Beckwith, "Non-Violence Has a Power That Can Make a Difference," in his blog: *Seeing The Unseen; Beyond Prejudices, Paradigms, and Party Lines*, published on Sept 9, 2025 <https://www.markbeckwith.net/2025/09/10/non-violence-has-a-power-that-can-make-a-difference/>

<sup>4</sup> Mark Beckwith, "Non-Violence Has a Power That Can Make a Difference," in his blog: *Seeing The Unseen; Beyond Prejudices, Paradigms, and Party Lines*, published on Sept 9, 2025

<sup>5</sup> Closing paragraph inspired by a blog post from Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer, on September 12, 2025, text following her poem, "Adapting," part of her invitation to writing workshop, September Thoughtshop: Poetry of Persevering: Writing into the Pain of the World, <https://www.tickettailor.com/events/wordwoman/1840982>