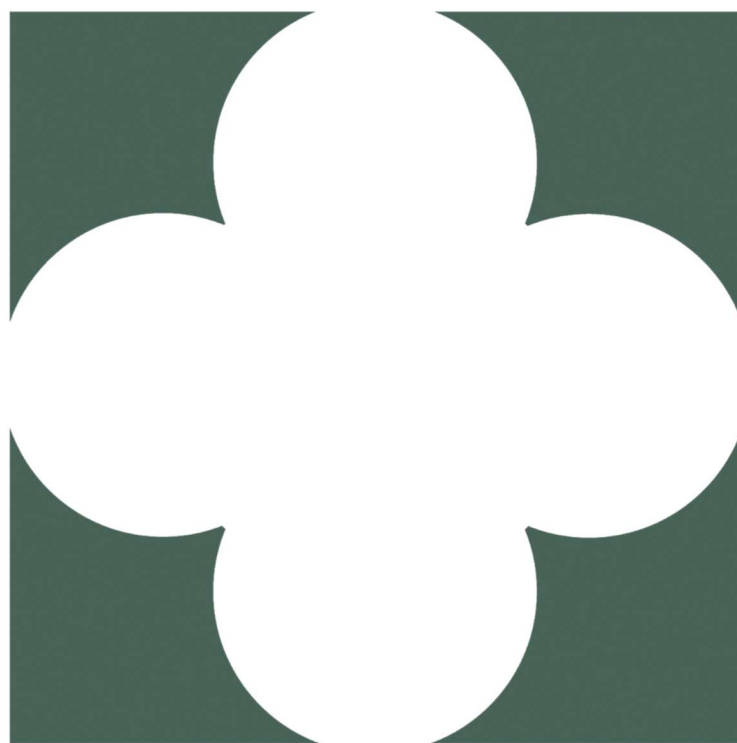


# A Service of Lament and Action

Rev. Anita Peebles



seattle first baptist

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## Gathering

*Pastor Anita Peebles*

Today's worship is a little different than what we are used to. When tragedies happen in our world, it is always a complex choice to figure out what to do with worship. Sometimes pastors will shape prayers around current events, sometimes we focus our sermons on current events, sometimes we note it in announcements and then carry on with what had been planned before. All of those choices make sense in various contexts.

But the past few weeks have been extraordinarily hard. This past Wednesday was the two year anniversary of when George Floyd was choked to death by a Minneapolis police officer as he cried out, "I can't breathe." Given the tragedy on top of tragedy with recent mass shootings, the most recent three specifically targeting people of color, I felt called to center our gathering on honoring victims of gun violence.

And I'll be honest with you, because I love you. I wasn't sure if we should center our worship on this topic. I worried that it was performative. I worried that because the children in Uvalde, Texas were killed on a Tuesday and our worship is on a Sunday, that we would move on by the time worship rolled around. I worried that another tragedy might have happened in this in between time, another crisis overshadowing gun violence. I worried, friends. But I realized that there's no space for waffling around when school children have been killed, and Black grocery shoppers have been killed, and Taiwanese American worshippers have been killed. But doesn't my thought process say so much about how desensitized this country is to violence, and isn't that thought process part of the problem.

Today we will have two movements in our worship: lament and action. In the lament portion, we will access the wisdom of the lament tradition in the Hebrew Bible—a strong current throughout the wisdom and prophetic books. Lament is a powerful form of worship as we make space for the grief of living in this world. Then, we will move on to an action portion that I will share more about later. We move from lament to action so that we do not get mired in feelings of helplessness, but that we remember that we can make a difference in the world, particularly when we work together.

Your emotions are welcome here, beloved ones. When we can't hold the gravity of the world on our own, the Holy reminds us we don't have to. That's why we have community. So come into this space. Let us lament together.

## We Pray Together

Not again, not again, *not again!* we scream, O God.  
And yet our screams, our laments, are unheard.  
The cries of parents and grandparents and siblings who have lost a  
loved one, murdered by gun violence, go unanswered.  
How long, O Lord? How long, how long, *how long?*  
For though we wish You would tear open the heavens and come down  
and save us,  
You have given us every tool, every insight, every bit of wisdom and  
knowledge to know how to prevent this, but we are unwilling.  
We have valued money and power over the blood of our children.  
You desire mercy and not sacrifice, but we continue to sacrifice,  
sacrifice, sacrifice  
Believing that somehow it will save us?  
We made a mistake, O God, those of us who are Christian  
We made the cross our symbol and worshiped it instead of You.  
We have worshiped violence,  
Believing that only violence can stop violence  
“Those who live by the sword die by the sword.”  
Jesus said this before he was taken away and killed.  
So we know. *We know.*  
That violence will not save us.  
The only choice we have, if we believe in Christ,  
Is to give up our love of violence.  
To give up our weapons that are made to kill another.  
This is the only choice if we  
are faithful.  
This is the only choice  
if we want our children to live.  
O God, may we be brave enough  
to make the right choice.  
Amen.

- Rev. Mindi Welton-Mitchell, posted on [rev-o-lution.org](http://rev-o-lution.org)

As we sing this next song, *Precious Lord, Take My Hand*, you are invited to  
come forward and light a candle for victims of gun violence.

## We Pray Together

*Pastor Anita Peebles*

Our God, who art  
Right here,  
In Uvalde,  
Again,  
After Buffalo,  
After Sandy Hook,  
After Virginia Tech,  
After, after.  
Hallowed be thy gunshot body.  
Thy kingdom does not come today.  
We give you this day our outrage  
And our mourning.  
Lead us not into the temptation of apathy  
And resignation.  
Deliver us from the evil of idolatrous prayers  
Prayed while children are given up  
On altars built for guns.  
For thine is the dying,  
And ours is the doing,  
And both of us meet in  
The work of rising again.

- Prayer by Laura Martin, posted on Facebook May 24, 2022

## Sermon

Friends, I have said before that this country, and particularly White Euro-American culture, is not good at grieving. We have trouble talking about our emotions. We don't know what to do when they boil over, so we tend to hide them and downplay them and dismiss them and repress them. But I know that each of us as individuals has much to grieve right now—and as a church, as human beings, we have much to grieve. Every culture around the world has some kind of ritual for expressing communal grief, whether that be moments of silence or crying out with wailing; gathering next to water or around a fire; sharing stories or making up new ones together. There are many ways to express grief, and I invite you to reflect on ways you were taught, or not, to express your grief.

We might feel a bit awkward talking about sad things, but God can handle our emotions. We don't need to hide our hearts from the Holy.

This week has been heartbreaking.

On top of already heartbreaking and horrifying news of continued war in Ukraine, refugee crises in Eastern Europe, continued violence in Palestine, natural disasters and oppressions continuing all over the globe, and the most recent mass shootings that were targeting Black people in Buffalo and Taiwanese American people in Orange County...nineteen children and two teachers were gunned down in their elementary school during an end of the school year celebration. And more were injured.

It is too much. How long, O God? How long? It is too much.

We're not here to go over the details of this horrific tragedy. We're not here to speculate about what led another 18-year-old young man to murder. We're not here to parse out timelines about law enforcement and what they did and didn't do.

Here in this space, in our place of worship, we are here to mourn the loss of these beautiful lives. To grieve all of the recent happenings in the world that have just become too much, too overwhelming. To hold each other,

particularly our siblings of color who, some have said, feel like they're walking around with targets on their backs. We are here as followers of the Way of Jesus to comfort the heartbroken, to protect the vulnerable, to love those who feel forgotten, to welcome and celebrate our children...

And we are here to act, because Jesus didn't just say "thoughts and prayers," and keep on moving. He didn't shrug and say, "that's awful," and divert his attention. He engaged with those who were hurting. He laid hands on those who needed healing. He conversed with those who thought differently from him. He gathered crowds of people needing to hear the good news of God's love and then fed them. Jesus is one example of how prayer can look like action. And so are you.

The choir recently sang an anthem called "There are no other people's children." Do you remember it? Part of it goes "there are no other people's heartaches. There are no other people's injuries. There are no other people's children in this world."

That is about the only good news I can come up with, the only gospel to be preached this week.

We are not alone, though the powers and principalities in this world try, and too often succeed, in dividing us. We are not separate, though this country and many forms of Christianity insist that individuality is sacred. We are not better or worse than anyone else—each of our lives is precious, no matter what we've done or who we've been or how we've hurt or been hurt. We do not exist in a vacuum, we cannot turn our faces away from each other, what affects one of us affects us all.

We are connected as siblings through our beating hearts. There are no other people's children. We are each other's.

And so, as followers of the Way of Jesus, which is a way of peace and a way of liberation and a way of love, let us turn our lament towards action. Let us pray with our minds and hearts and words and writing and calling and marching. Let us end the white supremacy culture that is so deeply internalized in this country. Let us liberate young men from standards of masculinity that they only know how to express through subjugation and

violence. Let us see all little children as precious and do what is in our power to protect them, not through militarizing our schools but by eliminating civilian access to assault rifles, at the very least. Let us take on the prophetic acts of turning swords into plows and guns into gardening tools, creating tools of flourishing from tools of destruction. Let us recognize the inherent dignity in all humanity, though our hearts break over and over, let that knowledge of divine interconnectedness break our hearts open so that action emerges.

Another world is possible, beloveds. As the apostle Paul wrote in Galatians 6:9, “do not grow weary of doing good.”

How long, O God?

Not one more life lost to gun violence. Not one moment longer.

### Call to Action

We have held space for each other for lament. We have held space for each other for grief. We will continue to hold that space as we go forward, as grief moves through each of us in different ways. But keep the grief moving, as much as possible, do not let it make you stuck. And so we follow our lament with action.

You will find two form letters included in your bulletin. Now, here in this place, we will spend time writing letters to our state senators.

You may wonder why we are doing this in worship and why not somewhere else, in the Fellowship Hall or Parlor, and not in the sanctuary?

Action is a form of worship. When we worship, we recognize the goodness and beloved-ness of God’s creation. And as we take this time now to write letters to our lawmakers asking for stricter gun safety laws, we are worshipping by recognizing the goodness and beloved-ness of God’s creation. Action is a form of worship.

Another form of action you can take is to text “JOIN” to 64433. This is a number that will take you to the anti-gun violence group Moms Demand Action and Everytown for Gun Safety that will have steps for you to follow.



So, in this time, I encourage you to talk with one another, and listen to one another. To move around the sanctuary and share your hearts with one another. That, too, is action.

### Spiritual Practice: Writing Letters

Please find the two form letters in your bulletin. Ushers will distribute writing implements to those who need them. When you are finished writing your letter, please bring it up to the basket at the front of the sanctuary or bring the letters to the welcome table downstairs in the fellowship hall. I will be writing a pastoral letter to our senators and sending these letters in bulk to them.

You may be wondering why we are writing to our state senators, wOver the next few weeks at least, there will be other opportunities to write to lawmakers in other states.

For our friends joining online, please note the links that Cherry is sharing in the chat of the video if you are watching on Facebook. These are links that you can click on to email lawmakers or sign petitions. As we write, please feel free to talk to one another and share together. I will regather us when it is time to sing together.

## Benediction

from the *Black Rock Prayer Book*

The world is now too dangerous  
And too beautiful for anything but love.  
May your eyes be so blessed you see God in everyone.  
Your ears, so you can hear the cry of the poor.  
May your hands be so blessed  
That everything you touch is a sacrament.  
Your lips, so you speak nothing but the truth with love.  
May your feet be so blessed you run  
To those who need you.  
And may your heart be so opened,  
So set on fire, that your love,  
*Your love*, changes everything.