

Living in the Shadow of Orlando
(Psalm 22:19-28 and Galatians 3:23-29)

I. The Shadow of Orlando

We are here together on this late Spring day, glorious light
filtering through stained-windows as we invite
the very presence of God into our midst
to surround us, to bathe us, like cool morning mist.

All is peaceful, all is calm, like a long ago bright Bethlehem night
when shepherds in the fields caught sight
of angels in the star-filled sky above, their voices raised,
in harmony singing, the God of all Creation be praised.

But we can't pretend, so after we sing, holding our books so blue
then sitting here, each one in our given pew,
our minds can't shake the truth lodged deep within
that yet again guns senselessly blazed, a terrible sin.

Bodies, once vibrant, lie still, having taken that desperate, final breath.
See the bloody dance-floor, hear the whispered cries, recognize the truth of undeserved death.
Thus we must absorb the truth that we live today in the shadow of Orlando,
just as scant months ago we found ourselves underneath the cloud of San Bernadino.

And before that there was Nickel Mines, a splayed Amish school book,
and dare we forget the young, beautiful school children of Sandy Hook,
nor not remember teenagers gunned down at Columbine,
or students at Virginia Tech, caught in the ugly fury, death's truth summoning while in their
prime.

II. In the Beginning

In the beginning God created them male and female
never mentioning that this one, or that one, is somehow beyond the pale,
as though this one is endowed with God-given inalienable rights
but for these we can, discreetly of course, dim the lights.

But like Jacob of old separated his lambs,
the blemished over here, the pure for his hands,
the urge to separate, parse, and distinguish
has surely not reached its finish.

We inherit this deeply human trait,
it is our common, undeniable fate
to place our like-minded friends, near the warm hearth of our hearts, on the inside,
and assign our foes to the deserted wastelands of our hearts, where, on the outside

we leave them unwanted, unnamed.
Our lips then grow untamed,
indulging every evil tendency,
this dystopian flight of fantasy.

III. A nation's wrong

The list is long cataloguing our nation's wrong,
a mournful dirge, this an unwelcome national song.

The president makes yet another trip
to comfort the grieving, to hold moms' in his embrace, yet nothing can flip

our nation's well-honed narrative,
foundational for how we live,
practiced here and in countries afar--
Afghanistan, Iraq, and Qatar.

Righteousness and justice must sometimes be exacted at the point of a gun.
This sober truth we teach to each daughter, each son.
It fills our lives, it infiltrates our psyches, it's taught via culture
so that our ways are preserved, and, for our children, a known future

can be promised. Yet this truth can quickly boomerang.
We aren't the only ones who wag the serpent's poisonous fang.
For it lurks within many all around, this urge to control, to win and dominate
such that others must bend, submit, to some massive, unrepentant hate.

IV. Neither Jew or Greek

Now we hear the call to be a different kind of place
Where all our welcome, where no one has to lose face.
Jew and Greek,
a place for all who come and seek.

Slave and free,
here in this place you can be
male and female,
no one here beyond the pale.

Gay and straight,
the newly arrived and the late.
The free thinking and the traditional,
the practical and the visual.

This kingdom vision stands in stark contrast to the truth of a shattered dance hall,
frantic texting, bodies huddled in a bathroom stall.
The dancing now stopped, the music forever gone
Life no longer the same yet these wounded must find a place to belong

within us, yes, even at this great distance, these are our brothers,
these dancing, merry fools, yes, these are our sisters,
these lovely ones so full of soul, hearts of love,
O God above, O Heavenly angels, bring forth peace like a dove.

These unwarranted deaths remind us too of Nigerian girls far away, living their private horror,
and of Syrian refugees seeking solace on a Mediterranean shore,
of people on our streets without a home, no good place to make a bed

and of people scratching and longing for their daily bread.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted, Jesus once said.
And so in that spirit we let slow music ring in our head.
We sound the bells to remember each one who died.
This is my brother, this is my sister, Jesus from Golgatha's cross once cried.

We embrace them and all who suffer
guarding them in our hearts, our bodies close to each other.
We enter this pain.
May God's sweet peace fall on us all like a gentle rain.

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