

**Sermon: Remember When**  
New North Church, Hingham  
Rev. Steven M. Aucella  
29 May 2022

Based on **Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20-21; John 17:20-26**

What have we learned in this Easter season? A few things. One, that we are to love others as Jesus loves us, and that everything will be okay because God is God, and that God is at work in the world even if it's not immediately noticeable to us.

This is what Scripture tells us and yet we have a nagging suspicion that all is not okay in the world and that we might be powerless to deal with it.

When we approach a letter such as Revelation, we think, holy-moley, what is this? For a vision, this is a *bit* over the top.

We think that because it is; that's the nature of apocalyptic writing.

But now we have reached the end. Today's reading is a part of an epilog and a benediction, bringing us to a gentle ending of a violent story. Jesus is closing the loop, tying up some loose ends, applying to himself God's title of Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, something which the LORD God claimed in chapter one.

Jesus also said the blessed may enter the new Jerusalem 'by the gates,' meaning by the front door, the way a citizen would, but not a thief or a criminal. And the churches he mentions are the same seven John named in his opening salutation. It's all good.

In the Gospel, in chapter 17, Jesus has been praying for his disciples, and in this passage, he has extended his prayer to the churches beyond them. He is asking God "on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, *that they may all be one.*"

That last phrase, '*that they may all be one,*' is now the motto of the United Church of Christ. As a motto, it reflects a spirit of unity as a gift of God. How we express unity is as diverse as there are people and opinions. The common thread is the unity of love and love of God. Jesus is praying that, in that, may all be one.

Jesus also admits that the world – meaning all the non-believers – does not know God, and that may be a hint of trouble. But, he also said, "surely, I am coming soon."

*Remember when* Adam and Eve lived in the Garden, and everything was great – for about five minutes?

*Remember when* the LORD said to Cain, “sin is lurking at the door; its desire is for *you*, but you must master it?” (Genesis 4:7) And then Cain rose up against his brother and murdered him because he was jealous.

After that, *remember when* God made murder illegal, and carved it into stone? (Deuteronomy 5:17)

*Remember when* the Adversary observed that Job lived behind a protective fence, with God’s blessing? And how, after removing that blessing, everything went wrong for Job (Job 1)?

And do you *remember when*, after receiving bread from Jesus, Satan entered into Judas, and we don’t know why? (John 13:27)

*Remember when*, while we were engaged in a great civil war, Abe Lincoln said, “that we here highly resolve that these dead [on the battlefield at Gettysburg] shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom?” And yet, *people* died, not slavery and not segregation.

And, finally, *remember when*, after World War Two, when the facts of the Holocaust became known, we swore, “Never again!” But anti-Semitism is still with us.

And today, we are living in the aftermath of this country’s 212<sup>th</sup> mass shooting this year, and the twenty-seventh school shooting. Are we becoming accustomed to horrific things? Is it becoming normal for people to shoot other people in a school or a church or a synagogue, and after the shock wears off, we simply get on with it?

The perpetrators of these shootings are all over the map: a white supremacist in a grocery store in Buffalo; a Chinese shooter in a Taiwanese church in Laguna Woods, CA; a black man at a Korean spa in Dallas, and now an 18-year-old Hispanic boy in Uvalde.

Nor can we fit the victims into any single profile. An Eagle Scout; a UCLA grad student; an Afghan refugee who worked as an interpreter for the Army; a 70-year-old nurse; a 19-year-old Burger King cashier; an eight-year-old boy in Chicago; and now a bunch of fourth grade students and their teachers.

It seems as if our society and our politics are in the grip of some kind of deadly anti-social, anti-human sickness.<sup>1</sup>

It is a highly complicated problem which we must solve, if we are to take the words of God, Jesus, and Lincoln seriously. Whether we blame mental illness or too many guns – and we do have a lot of guns<sup>2</sup> – there is at least one underlying cause. Maybe ten, maybe fifty, but at least one.

Society is a complex system, and for a long time, our social ties have been coming undone. We can sense a kind of moral rot out there, a spiritual decay. As a society, our moral conscience is failing us. We're losing our spiritual capacity to know right from wrong and good from evil.

We know people are more isolated these days, and that's partly Covid's fault. But something else is missing. One commonality among these shooters is a lack of purpose and meaning in their lives.

A blogger named Michael Smith wrote that 'It isn't [necessarily] the things outside us that are the problem, it is the things missing on the inside.'<sup>3</sup>

Jesus can't get here soon enough.

John Adams wrote, 'Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.'<sup>4</sup>

Maybe that's what Jesus meant when he prayed, "Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me. I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."

We need God's love. We need the Bible. We need prayer. We need God.

And may the grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints.

Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Bari Weiss, *American Madness: On the mass murder of children in Texas* <https://bariweiss.substack.com/p/american-madness>, accessed 25 May 2022.

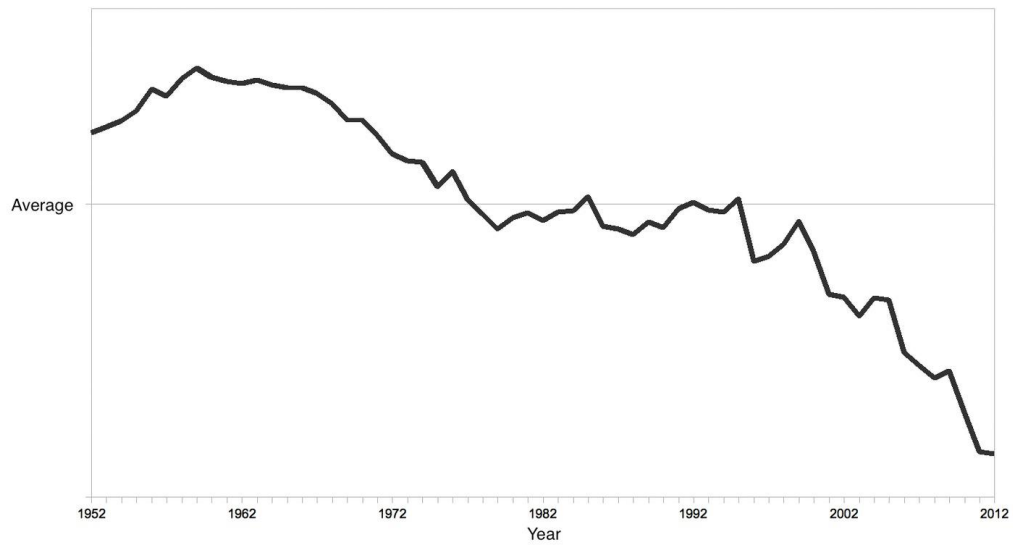
<sup>2</sup> Chicago has a reputation for strict gun laws, but Federal courts struck down its ban on handgun ownership in 2010, and its ban on gun sales in 2014. A New York Times analysis showed guns were easily available from nearby jurisdictions, especially Indiana. And Chicago is more lenient about illegal handguns than New York, prescribing a one-year minimum sentence for possession. The murder rate in Chicago: 204 so far in 2022, which is fewer than a year ago. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/05/18/us/chicago-murder-problem.html>

<sup>3</sup> Michael Smith, *Spiritual Illness* <https://michaelsmith.substack.com/p/spiritual-illness>, accessed 25 May 2022.

<sup>4</sup> <https://oll.libertyfund.org/quote/john-adams-religion-constitution>

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## The Great Decline: 60 years of religion in America



Graph by Corner of Church & State, a Religion News Service blog  
Source: Aggregate Religiosity Index, J. Tobin Grant. *Sociological Forum*.