

I. Advanced organizer

A. It's been a hell of a week

1. Omar Mateen - walked into the Latin Night at a gay nightclub in Orlando Florida called Pulse, and started shooting. By the time it was done, he'd killed 49 innocent people, and injured another 53.

B. "Live the Love" teaching series

1. Lots of conversation of love verses hate. But what does the mean? How do we go beyond the sentiment to the actual lived reality?
2. Jesus told us to love one another. He seemed to understand himself as love incarnate. What can he show us about this?
3. We start today with where many rightly are: in grief. Look at a story in which Jesus meets a couple his friends in grief

II. John 11

A. Back story; heat is increasing around Jesus.

1. He's performed a number of miracles and has been calling himself the Son of God, and the religious leaders are increasingly threatened and angry. In the last chapter, John 10, he's in Jerusalem and a number of them pick up stones to throw at him. They want to stone him for blasphemy, for calling himself God's son. His followers, gather around him and say, we gotta get away from Jerusalem. It's not safe for you here. They escape to the North.
2. And then we hear that one of Jesus' friends is sick. Lazarus, the brother of the women in Bethany Jesus has stayed with. He lives in a suburb of Jerusalem; a town not far away from the city. Lazarus is the brother of the sisters Martha and Mary: Martha the housekeeper extraordinaire; Mary the friend of Jesus who sat at Jesus' feet listening, the posture of a student with a Rabbi. At another point, she breaks a jar of perfume over his feet, anoints him with oil, intimately massaging the oil into his feet with her hair. **These sisters loved Jesus, and so did their brother. And the brother is taken very ill. So the sisters send for him.** They tell Jesus to come. "The one you love is fading fast." He's slipping away. The time is urgent. Yes, it's dangerous for Jesus to come back to Jerusalem, but he should know. His friend is dying. No one can help him but the rabbi, miracle worker, and beloved friend Jesus.
3. Jesus hears of it. But he doesn't come. He waits. A day goes by. Another day. His followers probably figure he's decided it's too dangerous. And then out of nowhere he says, "My friend Lazarus is asleep. I need to go wake him up."
4. His followers are confused. Jesus clarifies: he's dead. Which is even more confusing. If they were going to risk all of their necks going back to Jerusalem, wouldn't they do it when they could actually help? What good could they accomplish now? But at this point, Jesus' closest followers have learned that it's best not to argue with the guy, so they pack up their things. "Let's go along and die with Jesus," says Thomas. This is where we pick up the story.

B. John 11:17-37

17 When Jesus arrived at Bethany, he was told that Lazarus had already been in his grave for four days. 18 Bethany was only a few miles down the road from Jerusalem, 19 and many of the people had come to console Martha and Mary in their loss. 20 When Martha got word that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him. But Mary stayed in the house. 21 Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if only you had been here, my brother would not have died. 22 But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask."

23 Jesus told her, "Your brother will rise again."

24 “Yes,” Martha said, “he will rise when everyone else rises, at the last day.”

25 Jesus told her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying. 26 Everyone who lives in me and believes in me will never ever die. Do you believe this, Martha?”

27 “Yes, Lord,” she told him. “I have always believed you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one who has come into the world from God.” 28 Then she returned to Mary. She called Mary aside from the mourners and told her, “The Teacher is here and wants to see you.” 29 So Mary immediately went to him.

30 Jesus had stayed outside the village, at the place where Martha met him. 31 When the people who were at the house consoling Mary saw her leave so hastily, they assumed she was going to Lazarus’s grave to weep. So they followed her there. 32 When Mary arrived and saw Jesus, she fell at his feet and said, “Lord, if only you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

33 When Jesus saw her weeping and saw the other people wailing with her, a deep anger welled up within him, and he was deeply troubled. 34 “Where have you put him?” he asked them.

They told him, “Lord, come and see.” 35 Then Jesus wept. 36 The people who were standing nearby said, “See how much he loved him!” 37 But some said, “This man healed a blind man. Couldn’t he have kept Lazarus from dying?”

- C. Two sisters. Grieving. And Jesus in the midst of them. And in the middle of their grief, a mere 10 minutes before he’s about to perform his most stunning miracle to date; the miracle that will ironically assure his own death. He’s about to bring Lazarus back to life. He knows this. It’s why he waited so long. It’s why he’s come now. To wake up his friend. And yet, here he is as they grieve, and with them he weeps. Why? Why does Jesus weep?
- D. We’re going to take some time this morning to enter the story. Fill in the blanks imaginatively. Connect with it on an emotional level to understand what’s going on.

III. Imagine the experience of the sisters.

- A. **Lazarus is fading.** They send for Jesus. Hold out hope that he will come and everything will be ok. Why would he not come? He’s been in their house multiple times. He’s eaten Martha’s food. Mary has sat at his feet, learning torah from the rabbi, one of the first women to do this. Of course he’ll come. They assure Lazarus. He slips in and out of consciousness. “Hold on”, the sisters whisper. “Just a little longer.” He’s coming. Internally, they wonder, “**Where is he?**” Lazarus breathes his last.
- B. **Jews bury right away.** You have to get it done quickly before the body begins to rot. There’s an old Jewish tradition that says the spirit hangs around for three days to see if it can re-enter the body. After the third day, it’s beyond hope. The body has begun to decompose. The spirit leaves, moves on. Three days come and go. No Lazarus, no Jesus.
- C. **The sisters each grieve differently. Martha is the active one.** She can’t sit still. She weeps as she cooks. She weeps as she cleans. There are people here to be with them in the grief, people coming from Jerusalem - to help with the burial, to sit with the family they need to- be fed. There is food to be made, there are embalming spices to be prepared and Martha is the best at getting stuff done. At executing. So that’s what she does. She cooks, and she cleans,

and she helps, and she tries not to think about how disappointed she is in Jesus. If he had been here...he should have been here. Why wasn't he here? But she loves Jesus. And **she's seen him do things no-one can do, and say things no-one can say, and no one can take that from her. So even in her grief, she has no doubt that he is the Anointed One, the Messiah, the hope of the world.** Even her anger and confusion and grief don't change that.

- D. **For Mary, the experience is a bit different.** For her, the loss is paralyzing. She is overwhelmed by the sorrow. **She feels things particularly deeply, I imagine her to be like me, an NF on Myers-Briggs personality profile, an intuitive feeler.** This loss cuts to her core. She can't eat. She keeps replaying in her mind those words...She won't talk to the people who have come. All she can do is vacillate between the wailing of grief, the numbness of loss, and the seething of anger. She rocks on her floor, she keeps her song of lament, while the visitors speak in hushed tones. How can he be gone? She wonders. How can it be? And where was Jesus? Why wasn't he here? How can he heal people he doesn't even know, people up close, people miles away and not lift a finger for one of his friends? Who is this Jesus? I thought he loved us. When word arrives that finally, four days after Lazarus has been buried, Jesus is approaching, Martha runs out to meet him. **But Mary, no. Mary doesn't want to see him.** It's too painful. She doesn't know if she can look him in the face; she's certainly not going to run and welcome him into town. It isn't until her sister comes to her, after seeing him, her sister who shares her pain but wears it differently, comes to her and says, "the teacher's here. He's asking for you" that she can bring herself to go.
- E. As the sisters show us **there is more than one way to grieve.** More than one way to respond. **Corliss and Stephen Tomlinson lost their son Shane this week in the massacre at Pulse nightclub.** They're both heartbroken, as any parent would be. They're both people of faith, trying to navigate what that means in the wake of something like this. For the mother, Corliss, it's enough to know he's gone. She doesn't want to know the specifics of the horror. She doesn't want to hear the autopsy reports. She fears it'll only make her nightmares worse. But her husband feels differently. He wants to know every piece. Where was Shane when he was shot? What was he doing? How many times was he shot? In what part of his body? **There is more than one way to grieve.**
- F. As most of us know, **you didn't have to know someone personally at Pulse nightclub to be emotionally impacted; to need to grieve.** It's important to say it out loud. This was not simply an act of terrorism; this was an act of terrorism inflicted upon a group of people who are double marginalized; LGBTQ people of color. LGBTQ people suffer the highest incidence of hate crimes in the United States today. They are the most marginalized group, and 80% of those hate crimes against LGBTQ people are inflicted on queer people of color. So it is right and fitting that our brothers and sisters who are LGBTQ, and particularly those who are LGBTQ people of color should feel this differently than those of us who are heterosexual, and particularly heterosexual and white.
1. I've been reading reflections from a lot of LGBT people this week grieving and sharing why their grieving and what it looks like. I found this one particularly resonant with this point about how this grief manifests in different ways. This comes from Annette Marquis, LGBTQ and Multicultural Programs Director for Unitarian Universalists
- "Today, we are a people in mourning – mourning not from natural causes but from an unnatural act of hatred directed against us. We hear the horrors of what happened at Pulse in Orlando and it cuts into us like a hot blade. Suddenly our world, which, with the tremendous gains we have made in recent years, had begun to feel a little safer, is ripped open, bleeding and raw, once again."*

We hear the words of US Attorney General Loretta Lynch, just last month, when she addressed the transgender community by saying, “no matter how isolated or scared you may feel today, the Department of Justice and the entire Obama Administration wants you to know that we see you; we stand with you; and we will do everything we can to protect you going forward,” and those words ring hollow today. “You can’t protect us,” we scream! Not when hatred and division are the order of the day.

It is times like this when retreating into the safe place inside ourselves beckons. We long for security, for safety, for peace. And many of us have learned that the sanctuary of a dark closet with a locked door offers the safety we seek. So we stop reaching for our lover’s hand as we walk down the street. We scrape the rainbow sticker off our car. We seek shelter in our welcoming congregations but don’t lift our voices too loudly. We opt for the thousand little cuts that slash our souls instead of the bullets that rip open our hearts.

For others of us, we defiantly fly our rainbow flag and dare anyone to mess with us. Our anger turns to rage that we direct at a perceived enemy, in this case, Muslims, and, in countless other cases, Christians. We want to fix what allowed this to happen. We assert the need for gun control. We demand that the government do a better job of tracking and shutting down the terrorists among us. We blame the politicians, the trolls on social media, each other.

And still there are others of our community who feel so overwhelmed by grief, so devastated by this senseless attack, that we find ourselves immobilized -- unable to cry, unable to act, unable to love.”

2. There is more than one way to grieve.

- G. Sadly, a year ago Friday was also the one year anniversary of the massacre in Emmanuel AME church in Charleston, South Carolina. On that evening year ago, a young white man named Dylan Roof walked into an African-American church in the South, attended the Bible Study being held there, and then pulled out a gun and opened fire, killing nine people, who had just been praying with him moments before. To mark the anniversary, the *New York Times* sat down with some of the family members and asked them about the experience of healing. All of these are people who aspire to follow Jesus, and who believe theoretically in the importance of forgiveness. But as they admitted to the interviewer, they’re in different places.
1. **Nadine Collier lost her mother**, Ethel Lance, in the shooting last year. At the bond hearing for the shooter, Nadine famously stood up and publicly forgave him. When asked if she stands by that she said, *“I stand behind it. All the way. I don’t have no regrets at all. I just believe in God. And didn’t have that hatred in my heart.”*
 2. **Rev. Sharon Fisher is Nadine’s sister**, and she says something a bit different. *“Forgiveness is a personal journey for everybody. I have not gotten to that point where I could forgive Dylann Roof. That’s just me. Being in clergy, I’m mandated to forgive, yet I understand that God is a loving god and that he gives everybody an opportunity to reach that path of forgiveness.”*
 3. But **Tyrone Sanders is somewhere else**. He’s pictured here with his wife Felicia who survived the attack while she shielded her 11 year old granddaughter, but they lost their 26 year old daughter, Tywanza. Tyrone says, *“I want to put on the record that I’m not there yet. I don’t know if I’ll ever forgive.”*
 4. Three different people, who suffered the same tragedy also in three different places, even a year after. **There is more than one way to grieve.**

IV. So back to Mary and Martha. What is Jesus' response to these two women? How does he demonstrate love to each of them?

A. Martha comes to Jesus in a mix of emotion. Grief, frustration, and a fierce hold on her lifeline of faith. **"Lord, if only you had been here, my brother would not have died. 22 But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask."** I'm confused, but I trust you. I'm heartbroken, but I know you are God's Anointed. I need to stand in that. I need to be assured that it is true.

1. **And Jesus meets her where she is.** He gives her an assurance she isn't even prepared for. "Your brother will rise again." At first she takes this as a "someday you'll see him again" kind of consolation. The kind of thing we say at funerals to people when we don't know what to say. "She's in a better place." "He's with God" But Jesus actually means NOW. He's going to show her soon enough that he has capacity that she doesn't even imagine. He's going to reveal that **there's more going on here than Martha has any idea of**, fervent in her faith as she may be. Jesus meets her where she is and **comforts her as she needs to be comforted. He gives her what she needs: a word from him that assures her that even when she doesn't understand, he has got this.** He is there. He is real. He is God's anointed and he sees her and her pain.

2. In grief, **some of us long for the assurance of faith.** We need the familiar comfort of prayer. We long to hear the story again. To be reminded that our pain is but a passing sorrow in a bigger journey.

a) In the ***Lord of the Rings***, this is what Sam does for Frodo when hope seems lost. (*Show scene*)

b) **Jesus wants to do this for us.** This is a way he demonstrates love. He meets Martha where she is and brings her a word of solace that lifts her chin to see that this is not the end of the story.

(1) **As a community, this is a way we can demonstrate love to one another and to our friends.** Not to cheer them with hollow consolation. We can't force someone there. We cannot give the trite words that do more harm than good by trivializing pain - "Don't worry. God has a plan. He's got this." Martha's friends surrounding her could not do for her what Jesus could. Ultimately, we're not God. Our words alone have no ultimate power to bring hope and healing and life. But we can come along side our friends and make space for our friends to hear from the living Jesus. To make room for them to hear from him. We can sit with our friends in quiet, holding them in prayer and inviting God's presence to speak. We can even listen on our friends' behalves, gently and sensitively sharing the words we hear, and with humility, see if God speaks to them through us. **But ultimately we need to look to this Jesus who met Martha, and make space for Jesus to lift their heads and show them the horizon they're straining to see.**

3. But not everyone is there. Not everyone is looking for that from Jesus right now.

B. **Mary comes to Jesus with a different experience; a different need.**

1. Maybe Mary isn't ready to throw herself in the story of God right now. Maybe it's all she can do to bring herself out of the house and before Jesus at all. *How could you abandon us like this, Jesus? I thought you loved us. I thought you cared. I told Lazarus you would come. Where were you? Where were you? And how dare you...how dare you show your face now?* All she can do when she sees him is fall at his feet and wail, *"Lord, if only you had been here, my brother would not have died."*

2. **Isn't this the great implied question that hangs unanswered in the midst of tragedy: God, where were you?** Lord, if you'd been here, this wouldn't have happened. How can you let this happen?
 - a) One of the most heartbreaking stories that came out this week for me as a mom was the story of Eddie Justice, who was texting his mom, Mina, right up until he died. After getting his cry for help via text, she called 911 but the police didn't get there fast enough to save her son. The last communication Mina had from him were these words on her phone. *"Call them mommy. Now. Im still in the bathroom. He's coming. Im going to die"* Really? Really? *Lord, where were you? If you had been here...*
3. As if Orlando wasn't enough, as if Charleston wasn't enough, just **this week in Oakland, 16 year old Regina Jeffries** on Tuesday afternoon attended a funeral for her two fifteen year old friends who had lost their lives in a tragic drowning accident. To honor them, she danced a passionate liturgical worship dance for those in attendance. On her way to a memorial gathering afterward, just minutes after getting off the phone with her mother, Regina was gunned down in downtown Oakland and lost her life. The random casualty in a random shooting at 5:30 on a Tuesday evening in downtown Oakland. Really? Really? *Lord, where were you? If you had been here....*
4. **Mary speaks the question without the assurance Martha has.** She doesn't hang on her faith. She just falls at Jesus' feet and wails. *"Lord, if only you had been here, my brother would not have died."*
5. **And Jesus does what? He weeps.** He weeps. He feels. He allows her pain to become his. Yeah, he knows what's coming, but he knows in this moment her grief is connected to the bigger grief. The grief he will suffer at the cross. The grief of a world impacted by violence; impacted by evil; impacted by death that steals life; impacted by the ultimately lonely question of a humanity separated from God, *"Where were you? If only you'd been here, Jesus..."*
6. And **Jesus doesn't let himself off the hook.** He doesn't correct her. He doesn't justify. **He feels with her. He cries with her.** He cries for her. And he doesn't just shed a few tears. He allows the pain to enter his bones.
 - a) It says in English, "A deep anger welled up within him" but the Greek word actually refers to **the snort of a pig**.
 - b) **Can you resonate with that feeling?** Have you felt it this week? That internal cry of rage against the universe that says, "No! This is not right! This is not how we're meant to live!" When you heard about **Pulse**? When you heard about people slaughtered in their space of safety? *Did you feel it?* When you heard about the **Pastors who said we shouldn't grieve** the loss because they were gay? Who called it good? *Did you feel it?* When you heard the **politicians tweeting carelessly**? Congratulating themselves, disconnected from the blood on the floor? Unmoved by it? *Did you feel it?* Or **the silence**? The deafening silence of so many straight people of faith who haven't acknowledged the pain of the event or **our corporate culpability in it**? *Have you felt that snort?*
 - c) I have. And **one of the only things that has given me comfort is the knowledge that Jesus feels it too.** Jesus doesn't tweet out a detached condolence. Jesus weeps, and snorts and feels. He lets himself stand with us in the "This is not right." You want to know how to love in this moment? Don't just hashtag lovewins. Don't just tweet love greater than hate. Love right now means grief. Can we make space to grieve? Are we loving enough to enter one another's pain and take it as our own.

- V. We are part of a tradition that values the role of grief and lament. Woven throughout our sacred texts.
- A. Songs of lament in the Psalms that take our honest anger and heartbroken despair to the divine.
 - 1. **“My soul is in deep anguish.
How long, Lord, how long?
I am worn out from my groaning.” (Ps. 6)**
 - B. The book of lamentations is a whole book of lament over the destruction of Jerusalem.
 - C. Ecclesiastes, calls it's listeners to grief and to reflecting on the fragility of life.
 - 1. **(Ecclesiastes 7:2)**
**It is better to go to a house of mourning
than to go to a house of feasting,
for death is the destiny of everyone;
the living should take this to heart.**
 - 2. **(Ecclesiastes 9: 12)**
**Moreover, no one knows when their hour will come:
As fish are caught in a cruel net,
or birds are taken in a snare,
so people are trapped by evil times
that fall unexpectedly upon them.**
 - D. And after Jesus comes, to the early church in Rome, Paul invites them to remember to, **“Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.” (Romans 12:15)**
 - E. **So we will. Take time this morning to lament.** To make space to grieve. To enter the grief of our brothers and sisters. To get in touch with our grief. To lament. To take our laments to Jesus who weeps with us and for us. To make space for people to have their own processes. To be wherever they need to be. To honor the process, as Jesus honors is. And to stand in the hope that this grief is not the last word. That this is not the end of the story.
- VI. Jesus told Martha, **“I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying. 26 Everyone who lives in me and believes in me will never ever die.”** This death you grieve is not the final word.
- A. Jesus' willingness to come and be with Mary and Martha, and demonstrate his power even over death as he brought Lazarus back, assured him his own death. It was a threat to the finality of evil. The finality of death. And it had to be stamped out. They tried to stomp out Jesus in violence. They tried to silence his voice. but it would not go silent. And three days later, when he rose, he initiated a new kind of resurrection. Lazarus was resuscitated, a miracle to be sure, but his body would again eventually see decay and die. But this, the new life Jesus was initiating through death and resurrection was impenetrable. It is a life that is no longer subject to evil and violence. And with it, came a promise that we too, could live in that kind of life.
 - B. Paul said it this way in 1 corinthians 15:
 - 1. **“51 But let me reveal to you a wonderful secret. We will not all die, but we will all be transformed! 52 It will happen in a moment, in the blink of an eye, when the last trumpet is blown. For when the trumpet sounds, those who have died will be raised to live forever. And we who are living will also be transformed. 53 For our dying bodies must be transformed into bodies that will never die; our mortal bodies must be transformed into immortal bodies.**

54 Then, when our dying bodies have been transformed into bodies that will never

die, this Scripture will be fulfilled:

“Death is swallowed up in victory.

55 O death, where is your victory?

O death, where is your sting?”

- C. Thank you Jesus that we can stand in the hope that hate is not the last word. Violence is not the last word. Death is not the last word. Life, and freedom and love will endure. **In the end, love wins.**