

Feast of the Assumption - Thursday 15 August 2019
The Rev. Jacqueline Cameron at Church of the Ascension, Chicago

Isaiah 61:10-11
Galatians 4:4-7
Luke 1:46-55

Do you have a favorite image of Mary?

There are, of course, lots to choose from—if you haven't conjured up one or two visual or theological images of your own, there are probably hundreds or thousands or more that others have developed over the centuries.

Here are a few from the table of contents of just one (Jaroslav Pelikan) book on Mary:

Miriam of Nazareth
The Daughter of Zion and the Fulfillment of Prophecy
The Second Eve and the Guarantee of Christ's True Humanity
The Theotokos, the Mother (bearer) of God
The Handmaid of the Lord *and* the Woman of Valor
The Paragon of Chastity *and* the Blessed Mother
The Mater Dolorosa (mother of pain) and the Mediatrix
The Mater Gloriosa and the Eternal Feminine
The Woman Clothed with the Sun
The Queen of Heaven (...her dormition and assumption)

It's a good thing to have lots of images, because no single one fully captures the mystery and the majesty and the ordinary human-ness of Mary—just as with Jesus.

And, of course, different images will resonate with different people and will make more or less sense at different times and seasons of our lives.

So here are a few questions for you to ponder: what sorts of *feelings* are conjured up by your favorite image(s) of Mary? What sorts of *thoughts*—especially spiritual or theological thoughts—are stirred up by your favorite image(s) of Mary?

But here's another question: how does this affect your daily life? What sorts of *effects* do these images have on you and what sorts of *action* might be inspired by your favorite images of Mary? (obviously, the same questions apply to your favorite images of Jesus or of God or of Spirit)

I wonder if I might invite you to consider a new image of Mary...? Warning: it may prove a bit uncomfortable.

Here we go...

Late in the evening of Sunday July 28, Chantell Grant (26 years old) and Andrea Stoudemire (35), two young mothers who live in the Englewood neighborhood of Chicago, and members of the group Mothers and Men Against Senseless Killings (MASK), stepped out of their apartments and met on the corner of 75th and Stewart. They just wanted a breath of fresh air on a warm summer evening.

As the Chicago Tribune reported,

Just before 10 p.m. (Friday), Grant and Stoudemire were standing at the corner when [a blue SUV passed by and someone opened fire](#), according to Chicago police. Both women were shot several times in the chest and died at University of Chicago Medical Center. A man was hit in the arm and was stabilized at St. Bernard Hospital.

Police had no motive and have made no arrests.

We'll probably never know who killed them. Chantell and Andrea were Mothers Against Senseless Killings, and lost their lives to even more senseless killing.

75th and Stewart is the location where MASK – Mothers and Men Against Senseless Killings—has founded a community center and a public play space. Children play and are fed here every day. They chose that corner because it was the place where another young mother had been gunned down, and they were determined to reclaim it as a place of life and renewal rather than simply a place of death and grief.

Shootings happen all of the time here. While mass killings such as we've seen in Dayton and El Paso and Gilroy and Virginia Beach and everywhere else (we'd be here all day if we tried to list them) get lots of media attention, the steady, daily horror of constant gun violence in our very own city—amongst our very own neighbors—goes practically unnoticed.

According to Areavibes.com—admittedly, a real estate, not a scholarly website—Englewood gets a C+ for cost of living, an F for crime, an F for employment and an F for schools. And a D for weather.

Just for comparison, Lincoln Park gets an F for cost of living, a D- for crime, an A+ for employment and a B for schools. And a D for weather.

Chicago overall gets a whole lot of Fs. And a D for weather.

But violent crime in Englewood is nearly 3 times that of Chicago overall and nearly 10 times the national average.

The City of Chicago heat map for gun crimes shows red dots for incidents of gun crime—and there are red dots everywhere. But on the north side, it looks like our city has a bad case of the measles, while on the south and west sides, it's just an unending sea of (blood) red.

Tamar Manassah, founder of MASK, says,

"MASK (Mothers/Men Against Senseless Killings) was established in 2015 as a way to put eyes on the streets, interrupt violence and crime, and teach children to grow up as friends rather than enemies. A group of caring individuals in the community began to simply hang out on the block, cook food, and emanate love.

- *violence prevention*
- *food insecurity*
- *housing*

MASK partners do not protest or march—they feed and build friendships and build relationships with community and public services and

'ensure that community members have access to necessary city services, opportunities for education & professional skills growth, and economic development.'

Building friendships. Feeding. Playing. Encouraging one another. Building a stronger, healthier, safer, more equitable, more loving community.

...courage that is sometimes quiet and subtle and sometimes shouted through a megaphone, but courage that endures/always enduring.

This work is both ordinary *and* extraordinary.

It requires reflection *and* action,
solace *and* courage,
refuge *and* taking it to the streets

Don't you think that if Mary had lived in twenty-first century Chicago rather than first-century Nazareth, she would have been a Mother Against Senseless Killings?

I do!

Having lost a son a son to senseless violence after a rigged trial that served political ends, Mary knew a thing or two about senseless killings, and I think she'd be out there on the corner of 75th and Stewart—or many other corners in Chicago—cooking food, playing with the kids, talking with the neighbors. And probably bugging the alderman...and the mayor...and anybody else with power to make change.

And if Mary had lived here and now, it may well have been that a bullet rather than a cross that killed her son. And it may even have turned out that instead of a sword piercing her soul, a bullet (or, more likely, 5 or 10 or 15 bullets) might have pierced her heart.

We, as Christians—particularly as Anglican Christians—as Christians who bear a particular love for the sacraments—we know something about sharing food and about facing death, and about building community.

We know something about stubborn hope in the face of unjust killing and rigged trials, amidst lies and hate and political maneuvering.

We know something about death *and* about resurrection, even though that does not give us comfortable clarity or quick fixes.

And we have much to learn from sisters and brothers, mothers and fathers, from different neighborhoods and different communities and different countries.

In Acts 2:24, Peter was speaking to a crowd about Jesus, and said, “But God raised him from the dead, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power.”

It’s a powerful image—I can’t really picture God, and we have no real idea of what exactly took place in that tomb on what we now call Easter morning, but I can imagine the broken body of Jesus being gently and lovingly lifted from its resting place on the cold slab—perhaps not unlike we would lift a baby—with God somehow supporting Jesus’ head and supporting Jesus’ body and breathing fresh breath and life back into him and lifting him into a place of light and of new life and of new hope.

How can we lift one another out of brokenness now? How can we feed one another, shelter one another, encourage one another, make sure that everyone has access to the good things available to some of us—like food, like safe and clean housing, like health care, like meaningful work, like the ability to walk our streets without constant fear of being gunned down?

We can take a cue from Mothers and Men Against Senseless Killings.

These actions are *sacramental*—the collision and the sticking together of things earthy and earthly together with things heavenly—things of God.

Sacramental people are not afraid of the ugly things in our world. Every single one of our sacraments stare death and human brokenness straight in the eye, and bind that together with a fierce trust in God’s love and faithfulness. (OK, sometimes it’s more flickering than fierce...)

So let’s be sacramental people.

Mary had been warned that her love for her precious son would result in a pain that would pierce her soul. And it did.

But I believe that she calls us to follow her example and to go on birthing and bearing God's light and love in(to) the world. Let's embrace her courage in loving despite the deadly pain she was warned it would cause.

Let's join Mary of Nazareth—who could just as easily have been Mary of Chicago—or Mary of Englewood or Mary of Garfield Park—and let's be mothers and fathers and sisters and brothers against senseless killings.

And when our struggle and when the love and the pain and the joy of our time on earth is over, may God gather each and every one of us into his loving arms, and lift us all to that place where death and pain and sorrow will be no more.
