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This is our home
and this is where we will
not be intimidated by evil.

Julia Cordover (2000-)



YOUR ONE WILD AND PRECIOUS LIFE: A PLEA FOR GENTLENESS

I waited until both mine and the world's shock died down a bit before commenting on these events. But this goes on my list of “things never to be forgotten.”

Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent for many, and Valentine's Day, the time for expressing love, came on the same day this year. In our short Ash Wednesday service at Starcross, there were two quotes that

stayed with me as the tragic events of the day unfolded.

Mary Oliver (1929–) wrote a poem about holding a grasshopper in her hand as it nibbled on sugar. She closed with these lines,

*Tell me, what is it you plan to do
with your one wild and precious life?*

Our service ended with the well-known words of Anne Frank,

*How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment
before starting to improve the world.*



Valentine's Day Massacre #1 1929 — There was gang warfare in the streets of Chicago. Al Capone was the most powerful gang leader. He



sought to have complete control of illegal trades like bootlegging, gambling, and prostitution by eliminating his rivals. The chief rival was George “Bugs” Moran. On Valentine's Day, some of Capone's men

dressed as policemen and entered the large garage where Moran kept contraband goods “arresting” seven men associated with “Bugs.” They lined them up against the wall and murdered them. 70 rounds of ammunition were fired. It took a long time before the authorities

were ever able to convict Capone of anything. He was finally convicted of tax evasion and sentenced to 11 years. He was imprisoned first in Atlanta and then on Alcatraz. Capone was released in 1939 and spent his remaining years at his palatial Florida home until he died in 1947.

There were solid results from the massacre. Citizens banded together to clean up Chicago and it was no longer a “wide open” town. Law enforcement agencies were strengthened, especially the FBI. Gun regulation laws were enacted.

Valentine's Day Massacre #2 2018 — You already know the details. A heavily armed 19-year-old using a semi-automatic AR-15 assault rifle which had been legally purchased in Florida, enters his former

high school in Parkland, Florida and murders at least 17 people — students and staff. This weapon has a big capacity magazine and is designed to kill large numbers of people in a short period of time. In many places,

adolescents who are too young to buy beer can

legally buy an AR-15. In one city, grade school kids were selling raffle tickets for an AR-15. The Parkland killer was trained by a white supremacy group in Florida on how to use this weapon.



Parkland joins a growing list of school shootings; Columbine, Virginia Tech, Sandy Hook, and many others. It was the 9th school shooting in the United States since the first of the year. A few days before Parkland in a small Kentucky town, a 15 year-old killed 2 students and injured 18 others.

Any contemplated Federal governmental response? None that I know of.



Does this happen anywhere else in the world? I am told that it does not. In Scotland there was a school shooting a number of years back. They immediately banned ownership of all handguns. Last year Scotland had 3 shootings. I am told that here in the United States we lose one person every 15 minutes to gun violence.

Anne Frank, herself a teenager facing death, advises that every single one of us can start to improve the world. What can we do here? Well, for one thing I personally am not going to vote for anyone who receives funds from the National Rifle Association, unless the NRA changes its approach to gun regulation. But that is not enough. I strongly support the spirited demands for safe schools that teenagers, parents and teachers are making across the country. But let us go deeper still.

Our country has never been perfect but I remember it being considerably gentler. There have been major struggles in my lifetime: civil rights, sexual orientation, war, and others. But after each of



these clashes, I felt a gentle peace was put forward as a value we all prized. And somehow or other this was transmitted to those who were going to follow us. Maybe I am wrong, but that's how I felt.

“Gentle” — what do I mean? All I can do is use other words like moderate, amiable, benevolent,

compassionate, kindly, etc.

In the past couple of years, I personally feel that our society has become crude, vulgar, belligerent, cruel, callous, ruthless, heartless, and even brutal. *“I am more powerful than you in strength or in money so I win!”* I fear we are passing this attitude on to many young people. Even in the complex realm of international affairs, “diplomacy” has become a bad word in many quarters.



I believe we have to return to an attitude of gentleness and work hard to make it understood as a virtue we value. This is the powerful

wisdom of the ages.



Rumi: *Our greatest strength lies in the gentleness and tenderness of our heart.*

The Talmud: *The highest form of wisdom is gentleness.*

The Buddha: *Our problems are not solved by physical force, by hatred, by war. Our problems are solved by loving kindness, by gentleness.*

Jesus: *Happy the gentle, they shall have the earth for their heritage.*

The Tao: *In associating with others value gentleness.*



Take your pick! It is universal wisdom to “value gentleness.”



What's my point? I'm making a desperate plea that we be more compassionate with ourselves, with others, in our homes, our communities, our country, our neighbors, our environment, our planet. And let us choose leaders who reflect our views.

Let us also teach by example the young people who will follow us. It starts with each one of us, and who knows what changes it will make.

Well, it's worth a try!

Brother Toby

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