

Let Me Out! I'm Stuck in Your Pocket!

My text message alert right now is a funny little voice that says "let me out! I'm stuck in your pocket!" It confuses and then amuses people, myself included. But I have found myself feeling that it is too much of a metaphor for life in these times. I feel stuck in the pocket of systems seemingly beyond my control, and if it weren't for my faith, I shudder to think the shape I would be in.

As if to drive home the point of how important our summer explorations have been, in conversation with a significantly more conservative clergy person recently, he said "we all know that God's boat is a battleship, not a pleasure cruise!" No. No, I don't know that. In fact, if I believed that, I would, indeed cry out to God: let me out! I'm stuck in your pocket!!!!

It is so tempting, when the world seems to be just too much to look for a place utterly outside of reality: Disney, the mall, the rapture. Anything that says there is an escape hatch where everything is safe and orderly and nice and the excitement is very carefully orchestrated to be only so exciting. It is, I suppose, equally tempting to see the world as a battle, and imagine ourselves on the Christ Crusade Battle cruiser. We are right and the vague they is wrong. I confess loudly that I have fallen victim to some version of these, and undoubtedly will again.

Here's one of the biggest problems with that: there's nowhere else to go. There is no out. There is only this world, and Jesus says 'my kin-dom come ON EARTH as it is in heaven. We can't escape, and if we fight, we hurt some part of God's world, the very thing we are trying to save.

God's sense of humor is large, and, if we are honest, leans way into the ironic.

Now, before you go all “Well then, what is the point of any of it? I can’t stop this insanity! I’m just trying to mind my business and not make it all worse! What do you want from me?” Before you go there, think back for a moment over this summer’s series. We’ve tackled some really big, timely issues from a Christian perspective. We’ve looked for good news to share about our country, immigration, feminism, masculinity, the environment. And we’ve explored our God given talents to not only share good news, but turn the madness of the world into something with form and meaning, to wash the unclean in a holy bath of love.

Now, today, I want us to contemplate the ways we can touch the divine all week, engage everything we see, hear, and say, as Christians. Not by being our nice, polite church selves, but by allowing our everyday selves to speak for and with Jesus in all of our messiness.

Let’s be honest. Sometimes, on a random Tuesday, you find yourself seeing something or hearing a news story that just seems too impossibly out of synch with what should be right in the universe. In that moment of ‘let me out, I’m stuck in your pocket!’ What, in that moment, grounds you, gives shape and meaning? For me, lots of times, it’s U2, or Black 47, my favorite Irish band. Lately it’s been Rhiannon Giddens and the Carolina Chocolate Drops. Occasionally it is Taize music. But mostly, I need something more specific. Something that speaks not to an ephemeral other time when things will be well but sights and sounds that speak to a belief that things can, with some holy touch be made well here and now.

This is how I worship all week. It is often loud, and messy, like the world, but it is a beautiful mess. The psalmist doesn’t tell us to sing Godly songs to God.

We aren't encouraged to make a joyful noise to the lord with our hymns, but with our every sound. We are called to see the beauty in all the music and art and wonder, too. And that's why I wanted to take a moment and blur the lines between the sacred and the secular. Because I don't think it confuses the issue. I think it helps to straighten us out. Reconnect us with each other and the divine. Place us, in the best possible way at the intersection of the cross, where reaching out to one another and up to God are in perfect balance, if only for a moment.

Here's an example. Thursday night I listened to a host of responses to the firing of Eric Garner's killer. The responses were all over the map, sometimes conflicted within a single person. I took a deep breath and waded in, and predictably, got slammed all the way around. It got me that night. I left, weary and heartsick and burst into tears. I spent the rest of the evening praying for a space to turn it off. No luck. And then, Friday morning, I got in the car and...there it was. This incredible song: Nina Cried Power. It's a song about the people throughout our history who have spoken truth to power, truth to us, in song, melting a tiny bit of our glacial hearts with song. They cried power, and the crying is the power. And suddenly, I was on holy ground. Right there on 299, headed toward Poughkeepsie. I wasn't alone, I was surrounded by the heart cries of a cloud of witnesses telling me to melt a little more. Just a little more.

1. Beloved, we need new hymns. We need to hear that they are all around us:

Unemployment at a record highs
People coming people going people born to die
Don't ask me because I don't know why
But it's like that and that's the way it is

People in the world tryin' to make ends meet
You try to ride car train bus or feet
I said you got to work hard you want to compete

It's like that and that's the way it is

Money is the key to end all your woes
Your ups, your downs, your highs and your lows
Won't you tell me the last time that love bought you clothes?
It's like that, and that's the way it is
Bills rise higher every day
We receive much lower pay
I'd rather stay young, go out and play
It's like that, and that's the way it is

Wars going on across the sea
Street soldiers killing the elderly
Whatever happened to unity?
It's like that, and that's the way it is
Disillusion is the word
That's used by me when I'm not heard
I just go through life with my glasses blurred
It's like that, and that's the way it is

You can see a lot in this lifespan
Like a bum eating out of a garbage can
You noticed one time he was your man
It's like that (what?) and that's the way it is
You should have gone to school, you could've learned a trade
But you laid in the bed where the bums have laid
Now all the time you're crying that you're underpaid
It's like that (what?) and that's the way it is

One thing I know is that life is short
So listen up homeboy, give this a thought
The next time someone's teaching why don't you get taught?
It's like that (what?) and that's the way it is
If you really think about it times aren't that bad
The one that flexes with successes will make you glad
Stop playing start praying, you won't be sad
It's like that (what?) and that's the way it is

When you feel you fail sometimes it hurts
For a meaning in life is why you search
Take the bus or the train, drive to school or the church
It's like that, and that's the way it is

Here's another point in life you should not miss
Do not be a fool who's prejudiced
Because we're all written down on the same list
It's like that (what?) and that's the way it is

That's by the well known psalmist Run-D.M.C.

So...in this summer of Good News in Bad Times, how can we hear anew?
Can we challenge ourselves to hear hymns where, perhaps what we have
been hearing is noise? Can we sing hymns that are not our own, to do the
holy work of asking to have a revelation of an experience beyond
ourselves?

Can we point out to others that they just heard a new hymn? A new song to
the Lord, if only we have ears to hear? I believe we can. I believe we must.
I believe we will.
Amen.