

**Music and Meditation at St. Peter's**  
**August 18<sup>th</sup> 8:00 pm**

*Liturgy created by Brit Montoro*

**Prelude**

**Breathing and Somatic Exercises**

**Opening Prayer**

Lord, we are approaching the beginning of a new season. In such an eschatological time. An end time. An ending of one season into the next. An ending of one way of being into a newer way of being. An old wineskin for a new wineskin. A new heart, transformed by radical ways of living, being, and praying. A heart transformed by your love and motivated by your justice. As we come together this sacred night, let us put our hearts, minds, and bodies into your loving care as we come together for healing and connection.

**Opening Hymn**

**Savior, Breathe an Evening Blessing**

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*You will not fear the terror of night. Ps. 91:5*

1. Sav - ior, breathe an eve - ning bless - ing, ere re -  
2. Though de - struc - tion walk a - round us, though the  
3. Though the night be dark and drea - ry, dark - ness  
4. Should swift death this night o'er - take us, and our

pose our spir - its seal; sin and want we come con -  
ar - row past us fly, an - gel guards from thee sur -  
can - not hide from thee; thou art he who, nev - er  
couch be - come our tomb, may the morn in heav'n a -

fess - ing: thou canst save, and thou canst heal.  
 round us; we are safe if thou art nigh.  
 wea - ry, watch - est where thy peo - ple be.  
 wake us, clad in light and death - less bloom.

James Edmeston, 1820

EVENING PRAYER 8.7.8.7.  
 George C. Stebbins, 1878

## Collect

*A prayer of Social Justice from the Book of Common Prayer, p. 823*

Grant, O God, that your holy and life-giving Spirit may so move every human heart [and especially the hearts of the people of this land], that barriers which divide us may crumble, suspicions disappear, and hatreds cease; that our divisions being healed, we may live in justice and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## Poem by Brit Montoro

*This poem was written two years ago when I worked for a parish in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. At that time, I was in the closet about my transition and I was actively challenging the racism and sexism I witnessed in the workplace, which led to my needing to leave the unsafe environment. I wrote this due to the callous remarks I heard in the workplace relating to the systemic racism, sexism, and classism I witnessed.*

“As the hypocrites do”

Why do you sit there as the hypocrites do  
 Your idle chatter is boring and unproductive to me  
 How little you care for those who desire to be free  
 You made a joke out of a dead man  
 Who wasn't asking to die  
 But there you go on and on and on and on  
 Broken records are your siren song  
 Why do you condemn so easily  
 Telling an innocent man he had no respect for authority  
 Like every time you tell a woman how good she looks  
 Neither of which were asking for death or objectification  
 Why do you push people to the margins, as the hypocrites do  
 I never see you covered in sackcloth or ashes  
 You look clean as whistles  
 Eating your flavorless food. Talking your flavorless talk

You are in exile in your ivory towers and I shout, unheard  
The voiceless Elijah, Why?  
Because you see me as a woman. Because I am just as much a man  
Because I am neither and both and that is what you can't stand.  
Why do you not listen. Why do you not learn.  
As the hypocrites do  
Every day is a target on the back of those you do not pray for  
Every day is a person you could meet and change their life but you won't  
I have seen you, I have heard you, I have witnessed you full of your mouths firing off senseless things  
God listens most of all God listens to us all  
And sees what we have not done in God's name  
Why do you eat and pray and act  
As the hypocrites do  
Because the church taught you to be the biggest hypocrite of all  
Believe everything Question nothing  
Even the priest believes everything and question nothing Because they don't want to lose their free housing  
The homeless do not dine as you  
While an immigrant cleans your house one is being deported  
Can you not see the sordid way in which injustice works  
You do not see You do not listen  
You hypocrites  
I cannot drive you out as Christ once did  
You give me the payment upon which I have no choice but to sacrifice for others you do not lend a hand to  
I am a hypocrite. But I will not do  
As you hypocrites do

### **Silence and Meditative Music**

#### **Prayers of the People** *from The United Church of Christ*

For all those who have fallen victim to hatred and inhumanity, for those loved ones who are left behind to mourn, for the souls of those whose hearts are cold, **Lord, hear our prayer.**

For the children who are being born into this world of conflict and violence, for women and mothers who suffer needlessly, **Lord, hear our prayer.**

For all those who have been forced into unemployment, who long to return to work, for all those who struggle to support their families, **Lord, hear our prayer.**

For the soldiers who are misguided in thinking that their bullets will bring about peace, for those who feel called to conscientiously object to military orders, **Lord, hear our prayer.**

For the children who cry in their beds at night and wonder “what have I done?”  
For the mothers and fathers who must try to explain the unexplainable, **Lord, hear our prayer.**

For all the children who have died before their time, for the soldiers who allow their uniform to strip them of their humanity, for the healers who are denied the opportunity to use their gifts,  
**Lord, hear our prayer.**

For the redemption of souls of both victim and perpetrator, for those who commit themselves to the forgiveness of sins, **Lord, hear our prayer.**

## **Reflection**

“How music can be a tool for social justice even during a pandemic” by Steph Auteri

<https://www.feministbookclub.com/how-music-can-be-a-tool-for-social-justice-even-during-a-pandemic/>

The Montclair, New Jersey-based [Women’s Fire Choir](#) formed after the 2016 election. Drawn by equal parts hopelessness and helplessness, I attended a community singing workshop that was held in the small back room of my local independent bookshop. Pressed shoulder to shoulder with about 30 women, our chairs lined up in front of shelves filled with picture books, I sang for the first time in five years. I remember how, when I sang through the blockage that seemed to come up out of my throat, I cried. We all cried.

About three years later, we were still meeting once a week at a Quaker Meeting House to learn songs like “Bambelela” (a traditional South African chant) and “One Voice” (a Canadian bluegrass song) and “Rise Up!” (a contemporary resistance song... not [the Andra Day song I am also obsessed with](#)).

Sometimes, we sang at local festivals or at peace vigils. But for me, more than anything else, it was the community built around this all-women a’cappella group that filled me up. The act of all of us, together, making music that reflected our hopes and our values.

Then the pandemic materialized, singers were pinpointed as possible [COVID-19 super-spreaders](#) and, suddenly, choirs were flailing about on Zoom, hamstrung at a time when anti-racist rallies were taking place across the country. How would choirs sustain their communities now? How would they do the work they were meant to be doing amidst the swath of social distancing directives?

And with the world in such a state, did it even matter?

### *Music as a Tool for Communication*

“That’s when we do our best work,” says Thea Kano, the Artistic Director of the Federal City Performing Arts Association and the conductor of the [Gay Men’s Chorus of Washington, DC](#) (GMCW). “In the face of injustice.”

When I ask Kano what music can accomplish, she tells me that she has thousands of stories in which she’s seen music make a difference in people’s lives.

“We have seen more and more people opening their hearts and minds just because they heard us sing something,” she says.

Kano tells me about a performance the chorus did in Virginia. In between songs, chorus members shared stories of their lives as out, proud people. Afterward, a straight couple approached Kano, in tears. They told her that their son had just come out to them.

“They said to me, ‘You don’t know how healing it was for us as parents of a queer kid to see a group of 30 happy, successful gay people and hearing their stories,’” says Kano. “Thank you for giving us that hope and confidence that our kid’s going to be okay.”

Kano goes on to explain the power of music to communicate a message. “I am not comfortable talking with someone about politics if they have a view of equality that’s opposite from my own,” she says, “whereas I’ll sing all day. That’s my means of communication. And I think for the chorus, for a lot of our singers, that’s their voice. That’s how they find their voice.”

Ben Grosscup, a songwriter and the Executive Director of the [People’s Music Network](#) (PMN), feels similarly about music’s ability to convey important messages.

“If you are strategic about the use of storytelling,” says Grosscup, “in how events unfold in a song, you can really break through ideological confines and you can buoy people’s sense of purpose in movements that are counter-systemic and antihegemonic.”

### *Music as Community*

While many of these groups and organizations are of course motivated by their commitment to social justice work, another essential component of their time together is, unsurprisingly, the community they create. Kano tells me that, in the case of the GMCW, the chorus can oftentimes be the only family its members have. Grosscup, meanwhile, speaks to how PMN is a community of communities. And Abbie Betinis, a composer and Executive Director of [Justice Choir](#), speaks passionately about the act of making music together.

“To solve complicated problems, you can’t just yell,” says Betinis, speaking to music’s ability to both focus a message and evoke vulnerability. “You have to really listen to each other. ... [Y]ou can get really quiet together — like at a vigil — and still be really powerful. Or you can get loud and shake the rafters.”

She explains how creating music can be a way to engage collectively in real-time. “Learning songs on the fly, by ear, is the perfect way to simulate the process of powerful and long-lasting change-making,” says Betinis. “Because you first must listen. Learn the song. Sing quietly to yourself as you learn it. Find how you resonate with the material. Make sense of it. Maybe make a bunch of mistakes. Once you learn it, you try some things out, maybe add your own ideas. ... It’s such a beautiful experience when everyone comes to it with the willingness to be part of something larger than themselves.”

### *Music as Power*

Then there is the power of music to change the person who is making it. Tamara C. Williams, Founder and Director of [Music Beyond Measure](#), tells me of the journey she took to creating an organization that provides arts-based healing services to survivors of trauma.

She recounts how, in graduate school, where she was majoring in Jazz Studies, she was told that, as a songwriter and a performer, she had to use all of who she was — her culture and her experiences — and put that into her arrangements and her performances. As she internalized this message, she found that the music she created drew out old traumas, forcing her to deal with them more directly.

“It completely changed the way I walked in the world,” says Williams of the work she did at that time. “It was almost like I saw myself for the first time.”

At that point, she wished for a group in which people could use music to heal together, though it would be years before she created it herself. Now, Music Beyond Measure’s flagship program, “Sing Your Story,” allows trauma survivors to explore their experiences by creating their own songs.

Williams speaks of how songwriters can use music to change themselves and others. “That’s when you really see the power of music at work,” she says, “because you have people giving themselves over to a new life. But oftentimes they’re giving themselves over to a chord change. ... If the music wasn’t there, would they have the same response? Music is a spiritual vehicle that allows us to process in a whole other way, whether we’re listening or... especially if we’re singing ourselves.”

When asked to give an example of a time she’s seen music effect real change, she decides to focus on something simple.

“I saw a woman’s posture change,” she says. “With the way she was able to express herself in her music... She normally sat sort of hunched down and you could tell she was trying to fold into herself. After a couple of workshops, she was sitting up, back straight, chest up, head tall. It’s the pride. Whenever you hear someone say music really changed their life, that’s what they mean. It’s something so visceral that allows us to stand tall both internally and externally.”

### *Music During Quarantine*

When the social distancing directives came down, many groups struggled to figure out next steps. While Zoom has proven a boon in helping people maintain connections during self-quarantine, it’s not perfect. And, well, it’s impossible for groups to sing together while unmuted. The video and the audio don’t sync up. And if you try, you just get a mess of sound.

Still, you can’t tell a social justice choir to stop singing. To stop speaking out. Especially not when messages of love and resistance are needed now more than ever.

In the wake of the pandemic, groups adapted and, when George Floyd was killed in May, those same groups stepped up.

[Sing in Solidarity](#), a socialist movement choir in New York City, put together [virtual choir videos](#) and organized weekly [phone banks](#). They remained active on Facebook, one of its members even performing a set on Facebook Live in order to raise music for protestors’ bail funds in Louisville and Minneapolis.

The Resistance Revival Chorus, also in NYC, did an entire [rally on Facebook Live](#) dedicated to music with a message. In between individual performances and speeches, they asked for people to donate money to their local mutual aid funds.

Images of choirs singing at protests while wearing masks spread across social media, while even more [virtual choirs](#) popped up across YouTube in order to spread messages of hope and unity. Performance groups created [new resistance music](#) in response to current events.

Kano tells of how, when Floyd was murdered, the GMCW posted a song to their social media feeds that they felt really spoke to that. It was from a performance they’d done the year before at their Let Freedom Sing concert:

Since then, they've been posting songs to their YouTube channel every couple of days.

Betinis tells of how the Justice Choir organized a [Juneteenth Solidarity Sing](#). People all across the country stepped outside of their homes to simultaneously sing the Black National Anthem, "Lift Every Voice and Sing," in support of Black lives.

Groups like PMN and Music Beyond Measure, meanwhile, have been asking themselves what people need most at this moment. PMN has been hosting [virtual song swaps](#), during which people share the songs they've been working on.

"A lot of activist music is about group participation," says Grosscup. He says that the song swaps allow people to "gather with songwriters of kindred spirit" and gain inspiration for their own work. "We're creating a lively, consistent space where people can share in an intentional way the kind of politically-inspired music they are creating at this time," he says.

The folks at Music Beyond Measure, for their part, have been focusing on wellness. They've continued their songwriting workshops, using a combination of Zoom, focused assignments, and songwriting software that all participants can access. They've run online workshops for parents to help them adjust to this new normal. They spent the entire month of May — Mental Health Awareness Month — sharing resources for steps people can take to maintain their mental health.

And with no end in sight for the pandemic, these groups aren't going anywhere. Kano is already brainstorming how the GMCW might put together virtual performances in celebration of their fortieth anniversary, utilizing a mix of virtual choir recordings, archival videos, and performances from individual members.

I can't deny that — at a time when I again feel both hopeless and helpless — creating harmony in this one, small way can make all the difference in the world. At least for me. Hearing one of the GMCW outreach groups [sing "Rise Up"](#) can make me weep. Making [my own mini virtual chorus](#) can make me feel whole.

### **Reflection Questions**

1. How has music made you whole?
2. What is your resistance song?

### **Closing Prayer** by Desmond Tutu

Disturb us, O Lord  
when we are too well-pleased with ourselves  
when our dreams have come true because we dreamed too little,  
because we sailed too close to the shore.

Disturb us, O Lord  
when with the abundance of things we possess,  
we have lost our thirst for the water of life  
when, having fallen in love with time,  
we have ceased to dream of eternity  
and in our efforts to build a new earth,  
we have allowed our vision of Heaven to grow dim.

Stir us, O Lord  
to dare more boldly, to venture into wider seas  
where storms show Thy mastery,  
where losing sight of land, we shall find the stars.

In the name of Him who pushed back the horizons of our hopes  
and invited the brave to follow.

**Amen**

### **Closing Hymn** “Amazing Grace”

1 Amazing grace! How sweet the sound  
that saved a wretch like me!  
I once was lost, but now am found,  
was blind, but now I see.

2 'Twas grace first taught my heart to fear  
and grace my fears relieved;  
how precious did that grace appear  
the hour I first believed!

3 The Lord has promised good to me,  
his word my hope secures;  
he will my shield and portion be  
as long as life endures.

4 Through many dangers, toils and snares  
I have already come;  
'tis grace that brought me safe thus far,  
and grace will lead me home.

5 When we've been there ten thousand years  
bright shining as the sun,  
we've no less days to sing God's praise  
than when we first begun.