

Ordinary Time
July 2023

Magnificat



Dear Friends,

We're well into Ordinary Time these days, but of course no time is actually ordinary. Our time at Mary's House certainly hasn't been ordinary as we've worked to find a new hospittaller while doing house upkeep and helping people in need as we could. I'm happy to report that we have an extraordinary person at Mary's House now, and that we're going to be back at our ordinary mission, offering hospitality to women and kids who are in need of shelter, respite, and support.

Sheri Morgan has joined us - she arrived from Atlanta at the beginning of June and has spent a whole month cleaning and organizing the house itself. Now she's beginning to work with our social worker friend Jeff to indentify her first guests. We are very happy to have someone to fill that empty space!



I first heard from Sheri last fall, when she sent an email asking about volunteer opportunities at Mary's House. I had no idea at first that she meant full-time, live-in volunteer! We had just heard that Sarah was planning to move on so it was very encouraging to have someone ask that question. It's been a time of discernment and discussion since Sarah left last January as we tried to make the best decisions we could for the house, for Sheri, and for future guests.

Sheri is originally from the Bahamas. She has a degree in Hospitality from her time there, and she clearly has a heart for sharing hospitality with people in need. We were especially excited when we heard that she had volunteered at the Open Door Community in Atlanta before it closed, living there and sharing in the work. She is full of stories about the Open Door and the great work they did together. We're a tiny effort compared to the Open Door, but we have many of the same traditions - like the mailing party (with food) that will get this newsletter into the mail.

Sheri says "Prior to coming to Mary's House I had the honor to work with diverse populations - prison, hospitality, homeless people, and the elderly - for about twenty years.

"I worked with Atlanta Food, sorting and packing boxes during Covid 19. I was a member of the prison ministry and the hospitality team at World of Faith Love Center, and at Mount Olive 7th Day Adventist Church Preschool I was a cook for two years and then a lead teacher and admin assistant for eight years. I also worked with Covenant House Ministry for adults from age 18 to 25, and the Open Door Community Services, working for equal justice for the poor and disfranchised, and abolition of the death penalty. As part of the Open Door I joined in vigils and prison visitation as well. Lastly I worked with a ministry for homeless pregnant women, Sheltering Grace Ministry.

"I believe that these encounters have prepared me for this chapter in my life."

We are very happy that the next chapter in Sheri's life is also the next chapter in the life of Mary's House - we look forward to walking together through that chapter.

We want to thank you for walking with us during this time of uncertainty, and invite you to be part of our new chapter. Thanks to everyone who gives, regularly or intermittently. Thanks to St Peters, St Francis Xavier, and Holy Family for ongoing support and friendship. And thanks to God for all of you!

God's peace,
She Uey TD

In the shadow of his planned execution, James Barber says he sees hope...
By Lee Hedgepeth

His hope doesn't lie with the State of Alabama.

Instead, James Barber, scheduled to be executed on the evening of July 20, said he puts his faith in a much higher power.

On Wednesday, about a dozen people gathered to pray for Barber, who goes by Jimi, at a vigil in the state's capital city ahead of his planned lethal injection.

Rev. Manuel B. Williams led the brief service inside Resurrection Catholic Church, asking the attendees scattered amongst the church's pews to join him in asking for God to intercede on behalf of the condemned man.

"We come this afternoon mindful that each of us in our humanity, our glory, and our grime, are perpetually in need of your forgiveness, perpetually in need of your grace and mercy," he said.

Barber was convicted and sentenced to death for the murder of Dorothy "Dottie" Epps in Harvest, Alabama, in 2001.

In the decades since, Barber said he's received something he never expected to find from some of those who his actions "hurt most" - forgiveness.

Williams read a message from Barber at Wednesday's vigil.

My hope lies in the promises of my Creator, who is always faithful.

He is hope.

He has brought back into my life some of the people my actions hurt most - truly a miracle. He created a new thing not only for them but for me. Out of a great tragedy came also great blessings for them and myself.

We have had the privilege of experiencing one of the most powerful spiritual forces in the universe: forgiveness.

I did not deserve it. I could not earn it. But I could not and will not ever take it for granted. Our lives have been changed in many wonderful and very miraculous ways.

I hope everyone who hears this will address any unforgiveness they harbor and give it to the Creator who is constantly creating new things for us and in us.

God bless you all and keep you.

In Christ, James Barber



set to be executed for the 2001 beating death of Dorothy Epps (ADOC)

Williams then read from Chapter 8 of John, in which Jesus refuses to condemn a woman to death. Instead, he tells the Pharisees, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her."

Then, Williams made way for a song of consolation.

"I need you, you need me," the congregants sang softly. "We're all a part of God's body. Stand with me, agree with me... You are important to me. I need you to survive."

Alabama's previous two attempts to execute its citizens through lethal injection led to the repeated poking and prodding of the condemned men - Alan Miller and Kenny Smith - but did not lead to their deaths. Difficulty establishing vein access by members of the execution team led to the state's failure to carry out its grim mission, officials would later confirm.

In the wake of those failures, Barber has argued that an attempted execution by lethal injection would violate the Constitution. Instead, Barber has requested that his death come by nitrogen suffocation, an untested, unregulated method of execution allowed by Alabama law.

A federal court, however, rejected Barber's argument, writing that changes to the death penalty process - an effective 6-hour extension of the timeframe executioners will have to establish vein access, for example - mean that the man's situation differs substantially from those of Smith or Miller.

Barber has appealed the ruling to the Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals, which has already scheduled oral arguments ahead of the scheduled execution. Barring a favorable court ruling, however, Alabama will proceed with its plan to lethally inject Barber at 6 pm on July 20.

It's a reality with which Barber has already come to terms.

But his hope, Barber explained, isn't in the Earth anyway. It's in something far beyond.

(Tread, by Lee Hedgepeth, is a reader-supported publication. To receive new posts and support his work, consider becoming a free or paid subscriber. treadbylee@substack.com
I highly recommend his work! - Shelley)



Note: Alabama's prisons are so bad that they're under a Federal order to improve, which they haven't fulfilled yet. Death Row and the death penalty in general are part of a notoriously violent and corrupt system. If you'd like to understand more, a good source of information is the Atlantic magazine, which has done numerous very good articles on the death penalty here. You can just google "Atlantic Monthly Alabama Death Penalty" and you'll find several years worth of coverage. Especially noteworthy is an article by Elizabeth Bruenig in the 5/19/23 issue, on the botched execution process.

Project Hope to Abolish the Death Penalty, a group of men on death row here, have a weekly board meeting report and a website which has good information on the death penalty here. This is the only group (as far as I know) of men on death row who organize to support each other and oppose the death penalty. phadp.org is their web address.

We Go On Record, September 1945
Dorothy Day responds to the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki

Mr. Truman was jubilant. President Truman. True man; what a strange name, come to think of it. We refer to Jesus Christ as true God and true Man. Truman is a true man of his time in that he was jubilant. He was not a son of God, brother of Christ, brother of the Japanese, jubilating as he did. He went from table to table on the cruiser which was bringing him home from the Big Three conference, telling the great news: "jubilant" the newspapers said. *Jubilate Deo*. We have killed 318,000 Japanese.

That is, we hope we have killed them, the Associated Press, on page one, column one of the *Herald Tribune*, says. The effect is hoped for, not known. It is to be hoped they are vaporized, our Japanese brothers, scattered, men, women and babies, to the four winds, over the seven seas. Perhaps we will breathe their dust into our nostrils, feel them in the fog of New York on our faces, feel them in the rain on the hills of Easton.

Jubilate Deo. President Truman was jubilant. We have created. We have created destruction. We have created a new element, called Pluto. Nature had nothing to do with it. (Reprinted from *A Penny a Copy: Readings from the Catholic Worker, Orbis, 1995*)

On Annihilating Our Enemies

We hold a variety of signs at our twice-weekly peace vigils. No nukes. No war. Black Lives Matter. Practice Nonviolence - we have an assortment. The one that seems to spark the most argument is one that Jim made that says "God Loves Enemies." People frequently stop to say that's not true: "God said to destroy the enemy, down to their herds and flocks. God wants genocide!"

When I read the news these days I think we humans are good followers of that god who loves genocide. From our prisons to our armies, we're all set to annihilate the enemy - the death row prisoner, the Ukrainian, the Russian, the Black person, the homeless person, the protester, the Trump supporter... the list goes on and on.

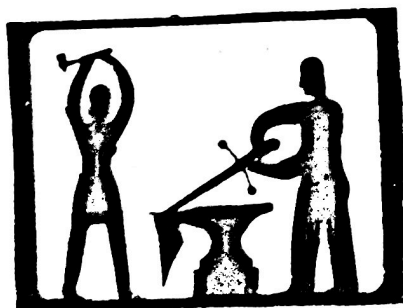
We can all too easily become little Harry Trumans, hoping for the extermination of our enemies, or little state functionaries, killing a person to show that killing people is wrong. We see the evil out there, and we try to get rid of it by getting rid of those people. I remember very well my feelings as a (naïve) teenager in 1961 when a crisis arose over Berlin - I thought that the use of nuclear weapons would be justified, because we, the good people, would be destroying evil. How could that be wrong?

The difficulty, of course, is that life is much more complicated than that. The James Barber who brutally murdered Dottie Epps because she wouldn't give him money is the same James Barber who twenty years later wrote the beautiful statement quoted above. The daughter and granddaughter of Dottie Epps, over time, realized that vengeance and hatred were destroying them, and decided to forgive. The Western powers who claimed the moral high ground in WWII (and who claim it again now) prospered from genocide and slavery and continue to exploit the world's peoples and natural life. There is no virtuous society. There are no perfect people. We're all a mix. We can't annihilate our enemy without suffering ourselves.

We're approaching the 78th anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki on August 6th and 9th. Europe and the United States are embroiled in another conflict, with the use of nuclear weapons a real possibility. Armed conflicts are flaring up everywhere, it seems, with no end in sight. Dr. King's statement is more apropos than ever. The choice really is between nonviolence and nonexistence.

The need for resistance is greater than ever, a resistance based on the practice of nonviolence as a spiritual discipline. Nonviolence takes time. It takes a willingness to accept suffering for ourselves and others. It takes patience, and the ability to imagine a future where our enemy has become our friend, and to take a step in that direction. It means moving toward justice and respect for the earth. It means being thoughtful when we'd rather lash out, and it means dealing with the beam in our own eye as an ongoing project. As a small step toward beam removal, I think we should rewrite that controversial sign. I don't think God recognizes enemies. I think we should say, "God Loves Our Enemies".

Shelley D.



WE ALWAYS HAVE NEEDS:



We need your prayers as we begin a new adventure in hospitality - for Sheri, for guests, for all support folk! And for peace, energy, and wisdom to help change the systems that keep people from being safe and housed.

We need money, of course, to pay the house bills, occasional motel stays, and to buy what our guests need - bus passes, work clothing, school supplies, and so on. For the house we can always use paper goods, especially toilet tissue.



We are part of a group that serves a Sunday dinner on the street. For that we can use single serve wrapped snacks, single serve containers of applesauce or other fruit, men's t shirts any size, men's and women's socks, gently used or new women's t shirts, cleansing wipes, small sizes of toiletries like deodorant, lotion, toothpaste, etc, plus toothbrushes, hair brushes, & combs.

We are happy to translate your dollars into needed items, or if you'd like to drop things off at Mary's House and meet Sheri, call the house at 205 780 2020, or call me (Shelley) at 629 278 3124 to set it up.

AND - we thank you! Mary's House would not exist without your help.



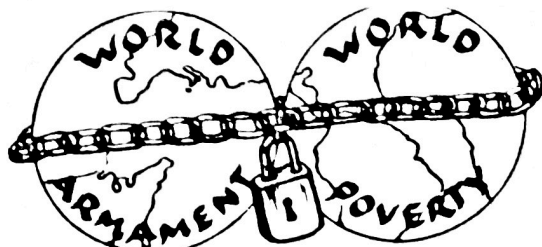
JOIN US FOR PRAYER & ACTION



First Friday Masses on the first Friday of every month, at 6:30 pm, followed by potluck supper and conversation. Bring a dish if you can, or just come yourself.

VIGIL FOR PEACE: join us on Wednesday mornings from 7:30 to 8:30 am, or on Saturday afternoons from 5 to 6 pm, when we stand at Five Points South and hold signs calling for peace and justice. We have an assortment of signs, or bring your own.

EXECUTION VIGILS: When the state of Alabama is scheduled to kill someone, we gather from 4:30 to 6 pm (NEW TIME) at the corner of Arrington & Woods N, near the art museum and the county courthouse, to vigil against state killing. We do this even if the execution is stayed. If the killing is expected to go forward we end our vigil with a short requiem prayer.





COME AND JOIN US!



PRAY: the first Friday of every month, Mass in our living room at 6:30 pm, with potluck and conversation afterward.

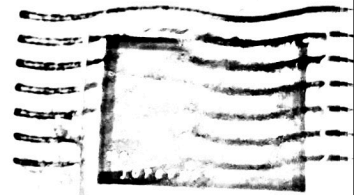
Friday August 4, Fr. Joe Culotta, Friday September 1, Fr Phil Paxton, CP

VIGIL: for peace, every Wednesday, 7:30- 8:30 am, every Saturday, 5-6 pm at the Fountain at Five Points South. We have signs, or bring your own.

We especially invite you to join us on Wednesday August 9th, the anniversary of the atomic bombing of Nagasaki, to stand against nuclear weapons at a time of renewed danger.

Against the death penalty: any day when an execution is scheduled, from 4:30 to 6:00 pm, at the intersection of Arrington & Woods N, in front of the art museum & county courthouse. We have signs, or bring your own.

PRAY/STUDY/PLAN: We are going to host a gathering to reflect on the death penalty in Alabama, learn more about it, and do some planning about ways to change our reliance on killing people who are convicted of killing people. Watch for info!



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