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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

peace, coffee shop, sung, words, face, slow, sunlit, poem, unharmed, shooting, strangers, hearing, proximity, setback, oblique, roomful, hymn, man, contemplates, stricken



00:05

I'm us Poet Laureate Tracy k Smith.



00:09

And this is the slow down.



00:22

I attended a chapel service recently, and was moved by the closing gesture, a simple hymn sung first by a soloist, and then by the full congregation, go now in peace. Go now in peace. May the love of God surround you, everywhere, everywhere You may go. It was a Thursday, the day after a shooting in Thousand Oaks, California, less than two weeks after the shooting in the tree of life synagogue in Pittsburgh. And so the benediction go now in peace, everywhere you may go, felt like an urgent consolation singing those words with a roomful of strangers, hearing them sent along by every other voice in the sunlit room created something powerful, a mood that seems too fleeting, an energy or intention may be a possibility. Words after all, do a great deal to foster our sense of the possible words tell us what the world looks like? Or what it might grow to look like. I left the chapel thinking, what if those words became a part of our daily life? What if we thought to take leave of friends and even strangers with such a wish? Go in peace. Go in peace. Could a lifetime of hearing that instill a glimmer of hope? A feeling of being ever so slightly less alone? I wish I had thought to say as much to the woman I encountered once at an ATM, who collected her money and turn to look at me with a stricken face. Do you believe in prayer? she asked. Pray for me. My sister died yesterday. My name is Denise. Go in peace.

I wish I had told her and the man in the airport who stormed into my path, frustrated at some private setback, some travel disaster. The one who looked at me long enough to say get out of my face. Go in peace. Or my own children bickering amongst themselves Go in peace. Or myself in the mirror. My colleague in grief, all of us suffering privately in some way. That's perhaps an oblique lead in to today's poem by Baltimore poet Lia purpura, which contemplates the terrible fact that here in 21st century America, we live our lives at an alarming proximity to violence. So much so that going to a bar, or a school or a place of worship and emerging unharmed is itself almost a feat. There is much to be said. And much to be done in the face of such a reality. I'll add simply this. Go in peace everywhere. Everywhere you may go.



03:35

proximities



03:37

a man walks into a coffee shop. But it's not a joke. I bought coffee there last summer, small with milk. It's never a joke to walk in or out of a shop unharmed. It's easy to forget you aren't a person being shot at I'm not. I wasn't though. I was there last summer. Not shot at and I never knew it did not once think it thinking it now. The moment thins it shears and I move back to other coffee shops where I never fell or bled. And then I sit for a while with my regular cup and feel things collapse. Or go on. I can't tell.



04:33

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