

A LITURGY FOR THEIR NAMES • To honor the dead • To grieve and repent.
By Anne Louise Hoffmann

IT BEGINS...Someone should introduce the installation, explain its origin and where it has traveled.

3 people speak – with the following sentence:

“My name is _____ and I am here because_____”

(The assembly is asked to speak that same sentence for themselves...They speak in unison • The Reader starts as soon as they finish.)

READER

*We all have names
Every name born by human hope*

*A new mother practises saying the name
Pronouncing
Sounding
Imagining what notes these syllables sing
How their friends would call them
And how their grandmother’s voice would croon
This name*

{**Reading of names**} (A different person should read each group of 20 names. If space allows they should walk the rows and read the names from the hearts.)(20 names)

READER

*Say a name
It has a story
A joke once told
A heart once broken*

*These are the names
Listen to their cadence
Bouncing a ball
Starting a car
Kissing your ear
Making love
Humming “live”*

(Leader begins soft claps on their chest to the sound of a heartbeat- clap CLAP)

*They were known by these names
Those whose hearts
once beat like ours*

(soft) Black lives (clap CLAP) matter (clap CLAP) Black Lives (clap CLAP) matter (clap CLAP)- say it with me - softly.

CONGREGATION: Black lives (clap CLAP) matter (clap CLAP) Black Lives (clap CLAP) matter (clap CLAP)

(The chant begins softly under the names and fades as conducted by the reader)

{Reading of names} (20)

READER

*God put Ezekiel in the valley of the dry bones and asked him,
“Ezekiel, can these bones live?”*

*How does a creature say “live” when death surrounds and hope seems lost?
How do we bear their grief?*

Black lives (clap CLAP) matter (clap CLAP) Black Lives (clap CLAP) matter (clap CLAP)

{Reading of names} (20)

READER

*See me here
your knee on my throat
See me here
your hand on my neck*

*The taser
The gun
The club on my back
My face in the dirt*

*Their hearts
In our hands*

{Reading of names} (20)

READER

*It's not just him
It's not just her
It's not just them
It's not just us
When did it begin?*

Black lives (clap CLAP) matter (clap CLAP) Black lives (clap CLAP) matter (clap Clap)

{Reading of names} (20)

READER

*400 years is a very long time.
Time enough to build a country
Time enough to create its wealth
Time enough to forge a system*

A system needs our consent to make it work

{Reading of names} (20)

READER

Black lives (clap CLAP) matter (clap CLAP) Black Lives (clap CLAP) matter

*We cannot turn back
Here is where the work begins
To listen and listen and learn again*

{Reading of names} (20)

READER

*How do a people repent?
Do we wear sackcloth and ashes?
Do we walk the streets bowed down ?
Do we say I'm sorry over and over -
Asking a world we made –
asking the dead?*

{Reading of names} (20)

READER

*What does it do to a body that has been bred as collateral?
What does it do to the slave to be born to be beaten?
What does it do to the Master that holds the whip and makes the cut?
What does it do to the slave to be sold?
What does it do to the Master who must wring his wealth from the lives of others?
What does it do to a people who have seen the dreams of their children die?*

We bear these exigences in our DNA. In our molecules. We are woven by cords that bind and tear...by chains and whips and ropes that bear and witness what was and IS.

(THE ASSEMBLY TOGETHER) Black lives (clap CLAP) matter (clap CLAP) Black lives (clap CLAP) matter (clap CLAP) ...fades

PRAYER (Should be read by someone other than the Reader)

O God we have screwed up so often
Made so many mistakes
It's no small thing to have been given this great green earth
and failed as gardeners.

Instead of a world where all people thrive,
we have sowed from the seeds of greed and power the despair of slavery.
We have grown violence and hopelessness on the bodies of generations.

Teach us to pray the names until we know them by heart.
The sound they make will be like a gentle rain on the dry places;
or like the tears of a people finally coming to see themselves.

Teach us to pray the names and hear all the heartbeats that were lost to an old world
longing to be remade.

Teach us to hope with an existential bravery that knows even if the way is hard and
discomfort gives over to pain, that we will push and push back the walls we have built.

Crack us open, O God, that we might truly be washed in the suffering of those who have
died for our sins.

And when we're finished, when the world is reborn, teach us the dances of joy. Teach us
the songs that wash away sorrow. Bring us all to that place where tears are no more
and everything shines with the light that you always knew was here from the beginning.

AMEN

(After a suitable silence a blessing may be spoken)

BLESSING:

Go now. Remember these names. Remember how a heart sounds when it beats to “Black Lives Matter.”

In the name of God who knows our names; Jesus our kin and earth walker; and the Holy Spirit, breather of life who can blow away despair, do something, say something, be hope itself walking visibly into the world. AMEN

This liturgy might include music - recorded or live. You might have a drum beat the heart beat. You might have a Cantor sing or intone the names. You might have a flower placed at each heart as each name is spoken. You might have people read the names directly from the hearts or from a list at a podium. You might create a newsletter of the event with children and or adults writing about a particular name that moved them. You might have a notebook at the installation for people to write a few words about how the hearts have touched them. You might do more or less.