

# A Blessing for Dangerous Times

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A few weeks ago, as I was browsing the internet, I went down a rabbit hole, clicking one link after another. Usually, when that happens, I end up muttering about wasting so much time. But this time, my journey down the rabbit hole ended up in a wonderful discovery of something called A Black Rock Prayer Book.

The phrase “going down the rabbit hole” was coined by Lewis Carroll in 1865 to describe Alice’s descent into the fantastical world called Wonderland. Ever since, it has become a metaphor for an engrossing and time-consuming distraction. It has been applied to browsing the internet, where it frequently refers to “an engrossing and time-consuming topic.”

My curiosity was piqued. What is this Prayer Book? Click. I learned that it is used at the annual Burning Man event.

What’s that? Click. According to Wikipedia, Burning Man is a week-long event “focused on community, art, self-expression, and self-reliance” held annually in the Black Rock Desert in northwestern Nevada. It gets its name from the symbolic burning of a large wooden effigy (‘the Man’) on the second last night of the event. This festival of the arts and other activities encourages attendees to participate, to be creators rather than observers or consumers.

So what does this Black Rock Prayer Book have to do with a festival like this? Click. It is produced by Religious AF Camp, “a group of Christians who experience God’s dream for humanity at Burning Man, who seek to be a community of hospitality, prayer, sacraments, and grace.” Their purpose is to offer non-judgmental, non-commodified Christian spiritual hospitality, prayer, and conversation to all who come. It is “a place of spiritual healing and safety.”

While being explicitly Christian, they also respect the value and validity of other spiritual paths and are deeply sensitive “to the ways toxic Christianity has harmed people.” They are present at the festival to offer hospitality and engage in conversation with any who seek it. This group doesn’t treat Christianity as a commodity, as something to be sold or pushed. “We are not at Burning Man to sell Christianity, Jesus, the Church, or our camp. We are here to freely offer blessing, prayer, ritual, and hospitality. We come to Burning Man because we experience God here. The generosity, openness, mutual support, creativity, and playfulness is how we envision God’s dream for all of humanity.”

I was fascinated by this open, welcoming, hospitable, non-judgmental approach. The church has much to learn from it. They are present to leaven the life of the festival with grace and hospitality, and they are open to those who wish to engage, but they don’t push their own agenda or demean other legitimate forms of spirituality.

What is in this prayer book? Click. After stating the purpose and principles for Religious AF Camp, the first thing in this Prayer Book is “A Blessing for Dangerous Times.”

“The world now is too dangerous

and too beautiful for anything but love.

May your eyes be so blessed you see God in everyone.

Your ears, so you hear the cry of the poor.

May your hands be so blessed

that everything you touch is a sacrament.  
Your lips, so you speak nothing but the truth with love.  
May your feet be so blessed you run  
to those who need you.  
And may your heart be so opened,  
so set on fire, that your love,  
your love, changes everything.”

These beautiful and faithful words moved me to the core of my being. In the words of John Wesley, “I felt my heart strangely warmed.”

I am deeply aware that we are living in such dangerous times. Every day in both Canada and the USA, we see the ugliness fostered by certain politicians and certain infotainment networks and blogs. These people with a large megaphone are seeking to enhance their own careers and reputations by spouting hate, demeaning the vulnerable, setting legislative policies in place which take away protections for minorities or anyone who doesn’t look like them or think like them or act like them.

In June, we celebrate Pride month. But we live in a time when hatred for the 2SLGBTQIA+ community is growing. (The acronym for this community stands for “Two–Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and/or Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, and the plus reflects the countless affirmative ways in which people choose to self–identify.) Churches which are affirming find their buildings vandalized. Rainbow crosswalks and buildings which display the Pride flag are targeted. Hateful protests abound against members of this community who seek to express their identity. Many individuals continue to be brutalized by hatred and prejudice.

These are dangerous times for immigrants, who are victimized by politicians using them as pawns in a game of political chicken.

These are dangerous times for Jews and Muslims, as synagogues and mosques are bombed and burned.

These are dangerous times as hate–filled, gun–toting crazies shoot up schools, theatres, shopping malls, and city streets.

These are dangerous times for minorities as white supremacists fight to maintain their white privilege and are encouraged in their behaviour by alt–right politicians who think that this is how to make their nation great, or espouse policies to take their city, province, or country back.

“The world now is too dangerous and too beautiful for anything but love.” It is time for us who wish to live with love and compassion to become bolder in speaking out; to become more intentional about living with grace; to become more courageous in seeking a way of living together which includes and welcomes all people; to become more daring as we become agents of grace, peace, and light.

May your eyes ... your ears ... your hands ... your lips ... your feet ... your heart be so blessed. May the way in which you love change everything.