

a song for every one

distant thunder rumbles
up from the south
beat boxes booming, then
hard, pounding thumps,
house-rattling tympanis,
some huge heart
big as the mountains
beating harder and harder
bright pulses of lightning
coursing through the veins
of a dark sky and then
after minutes of breathless
waiting rain sweeps down
one black sheet after another

grief grips my throat
won't let words go
I watch
the long genuflection
of a knee on a neck
8 minutes and 46 seconds
to breathlessness
a month of grief a lifetime of grief
an eon of grief reaching back
as far as time can measure
one knee after another
genuflecting on a neck
God still on its side

Creedence Clearwater
blares from my stereo
the same song for fifty years:
"Saw the people standing,
thousand years in chains.
Somebody said it's different now.
Look it's just the same."
Now nobody even bothers to say
it is "different now,"
the noose
of a knee on a neck
and neighborhoods in flames
fifty years ago
the Pittsburgh Hill District burns
and I stare at the amber glare
of fires on the skyline
a night-long sunset, feeling
not fear, how could I, death everywhere
back then, might as well be mine
as anyone else's, and burning up

on the outside instead of the inside
as good a way to go as any
and then the dark, the darker,
the darkest, that long, slow descent
to the bottom of the ravine
where the Vietnam Memorial Wall
is tallest, grief intolerable
each name in relief
the ones I know the ones I don't
a tourniquet of flames around
the neck of goodness every
8 minutes and 46 seconds
another breathless measure
of what time is in the shadow
of power's eternal rage,
tower after Trump tower
glowering down on everything
it fears and hates,
tears holes everywhere;
"Richmond 'bout to blow up,
communication failed"
as it always fails again and again
every 8 minutes and 46 seconds
for 50 years when God's side of it
is still a knee on a neck
"If you know the answer
now's the time to say."
and still, now, now's the time to say
and now, now's the time to say
and now, now's the time to say
and every 8 minutes and 46 seconds
for 50 years now is the time to say

stop

genuflecting on a neck
God still on your side
"they could've
saved a million people,"
or a billion, or just one
a knee to his neck on a street
just like yours and mine
could have been saved
"how can I tell you"
how can I tell you
how can I tell you
every 8 minutes and 46 seconds
for fifty years
over and over how
can I tell you
when that knee of grief
genuflects on my neck

and “I can’t breathe”