

baptism by fire

by Sarah Vance

the coach down the hall hangs Trump flags and yells
at black students to stand for the pledge,
or go back where they came from.
ignorant to the fact that they were born here.

unable to separate christian from nationalist,
black from hispanic. he preaches of border walls
and making America great to a group of students whose
very parents carried them across rivers, for an American dream

his small worldview will never allow him to understand.
his allegiance with those of the board, job secured.
in my class I begin by letting students know they are
safe, welcome, loved, there is no opening slide

introducing my family, no talk of my kids or my wife
still - word gets out - I am outed, students unable to separate
love from sin, gay from wicked. I preach of proximity and equality –
displaying John Lewis, James Baldwin, and Rose Parks

to a group of students whose very parents handed them
generations old bias -- I stand in the face of those world-views
asking them to love anyway. My allegiance with those
on the margins, job jeopardized. I could leave, should leave,

would leave – except the desk that was mine at 17 lies feet from
where I now stand at 34 – a seat which at any moment
could be filled by a broken kid, certain who they love
has damned them to eternal torment, unable to separate

pastor from politics, parent from big, our presence
preaches of a quiet resistance, defiant hope to a community
who casts out its own in the name of a caricatured Christ.
each of us a homegrown Judas sprouted from their righteous seed,

crumbling their worldview, infidels amongst them.
their allegiance to the altar on which they burn us.
still ashes to ashes we rise finally free until
we settle back on this Tennessee soil.