

The Way of Peace

PASTOR DAN BRYANT'S ADDRESS TO TEMPLE BETH ISRAEL

Thank you to everyone, and to members of this community that have responded in this way by showing up. Nina [Corrigan, executive director of Temple Beth Israel] began by asking: What will we do in response to this tragedy?

Yesterday I felt the need to come here, and I told many people it was not because I had some grandiose sense of standing in protection of the synagogue. It was for very personal reasons.

Two weeks ago my son took a position at Carnegie Mellon University. He moved into a new neighborhood I had never heard of but now we have all heard of — Squirrel Hill. He is just a mile from The Tree of Life synagogue. His polling place in this election is a neighboring synagogue.

I could not be with him. I needed to be with you — some reassurance that all is well here.

There is another reason I needed to be here because, truthfully, Christianity has contributed — no, not just contributed — it has created anti-Semitism. The great lie that the Jews killed Jesus is the source of much anti-Semitism and we, especially I, as a Christian leader, have to take responsibility for that, to counter it.

And so it has indeed been a central aspect of my own ministry to make sure that we are clear that this is not the Christian message today and that we deeply regret all that we have done over the centuries to contribute to the pogroms, and ultimately to the Holocaust.

And we stand now with our Jewish brothers and sisters, who gave us the faith out of which we were born, to say we stand as one, one people, under God.

It just so happened that the text chosen earlier for the worship services at my home congregation downtown was the prophet Micah. "What does the Lord require of you? He has shown you, oh mortal, what is good: to do justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God."

And the irony that a Jewish organization,

HIAS, that brings in refugees as part of their mission of doing justice, loving kindness and walking humbly with God, should be blamed by the shooter for this horrible tragedy, that someone targeted them because of the fear and the hatred of immigrants that is being stoked in this country.

And when I hear that we should arm houses of worship as the solution to violence — as if adopting the instruments of violence will be what brings its end, or that promoting fear will bring an end to fear, or that promoting hate will somehow end hate. And we know as people of faith that only love can overcome hate, only hope can overcome fear, and that is the message we need to preach.

And so I join with the prophet Micah, who also said the time has come to beat swords into plowshares, and spears into pruning hooks. That is the way of God. That is the way of peace — to do justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with God.

I came yesterday and found this beautiful Bar Mitzvah service in progress and the families coming here to celebrate life. And I watched as members of the community came in, bringing their flowers. And this wonderful, beautiful, young Muslim family, bringing flowers from the Islamic Cultural Center, greeted by the rabbi with a big hug.

I posted the picture of those flowers on Facebook — over 250 likes at this point. And I said this is what gives me hope. Look around. Take a moment and just look around. Look at all these people here. See the faces, the diversity; see the gift of God that is here in this place. This is what gives me hope. This is doing justice, loving kindness, walking humbly with God.

And so my heart is filled with hope, to counter the grief, the fear, the tragedy, because you are here.

Rev. Dan Bryant is pastor at Eugene's First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

Prayer

I invite you to join me in just a word of prayer:

Oh Lord, the concerns that normally consume our lives seem so small on this evening, and our prayers in the face of such enormous tragedy, so great, as we seek answers and hope, love and peace in a world so gripped by war and families torn apart by violence. We join this evening with those not only in this community and nation, but around the world, as we lift up The Tree of Life congregation and all those in Pittsburgh affected by such unthinkable horror and trying to make sense of it all.

We pray especially for our brother Rabbi Yitzak [Husbands-Hankin], thankfully spared from the violence, but not from the grief. As we can only imagine what it was like to hear that gunfire outside of that place where, on the night before, he had read the Torah and led that congregation in worship. Be with him as he ministers to that congregation in this time, as he shares with those whose world has been shattered by the unholy.

And Lord we pray for all houses of worship, that they may be places of safety and peace, love and goodness. And we pray for our nation, as we approach another election, and for all our elected leaders and all the candidates running for office, that they will address issues and policies, rather than attacking people, that they will choose their words carefully and not further stoke the animosity and the divisions, the fears and the hatred, be it of the opponent of the other party or the refugee simply seeking a better life free of violence and extreme poverty.

Lord, bless us this evening, that we may be your witnesses, to the justice you call us to lead, to the goodness you call us to be, to the kindness you call us to share, in your holy name, we pray. Amen.

Editor's note: Rabbi Yitzak Husbands-Hankin, mentioned in the prayer, led a Friday night service at Tree of Life, and narrowly missed being at the synagogue during the Oct. 27 shooting the next day.

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