

What Do We Do Now?

A Sermon by the Rev. Daniel W. Hinkle, Interim Rector
Preached at St. John's Episcopal Church, Kingsville, MD USA
In response to the tragic events of the week of July 4th, 2016
The 8th Sunday of Pentecost: Year C July 10, 2016

Scripture: Luke 10:25-37

I am angry! I am disgusted! And I am deeply, deeply saddened!

Two more of our innocent, African American brothers and fellow American citizens have been murdered by white police officers, the very people who have sworn an oath to protect and to serve. Yes. Murdered! There is no other word for what happened. We've all seen the video proof. Alton Sterling, shot! while pinned to the ground and helpless. Philandro Castile, shot! in his car while reaching into his back pocket to retrieve his driver's license. Shot! in front of his girlfriend. Shot! in the presence of her four year old daughter. Shot!

Sadly, there is a long and shameful history of white on black crime in our country. It's written into our national Constitution. And it is time for the white community to speak out against it. It is time for the white churches to speak out. We must hold our public servants who are privileged by us to wear the blue to a higher standard. To do nothing... to keep silent is to prove our personal complicity and approval of these shameful, criminal acts. So, we can no longer keep silent. We must speak out. Enough!

As if these two murders were not enough tragedy for one week, a black sniper shoots twelve white police officers in revenge. These peace officers were shot! while properly doing their duty serving and protecting "Black Lives Matter" marchers. Shot! while citizens peacefully exercised their 1st Amendment rights. Shot! while Americans protested the murders of our brothers. Shot! Tragically, five of those innocent police officers died. Murdered! They were murdered! There is no other word for what happened. Seven of the twelve are recovering from wounds, some are still in critical condition. All of their families and their spouses and their children are also grieving. What good has revenge been?

Enough! Dear Lord, Jesus! Enough!

I do not want to live in this kind of society. Do you? I do not want this for my children or for my grandchildren. Do you? No. None of us do. So, none of us can stand by and just keep silent while escalating hatred and violence is tearing at the very fabric of our country. We do not have the moral right to turn a blind eye. We can not turn our backs on what is happening and just pass on by like the Priest and the Levite in our Gospel lesson for this morning. We have no right to claim, "It doesn't affect me. I'm not getting involved." We are already involved.

The famous 17th Century English poet, preacher and Anglican priest, John Donne (his Feast Day is March 31st in our Prayer Book calendar), Donne once said, "No man is an island, entire of itself; everyman is a piece of Continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea,

Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friends or of thine own were; any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankind; .. And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; .. it tolls for thee." (*Devotions upon Emergent Occasions* 1624 Meditation XVII)

So what now? What do we do now? What is the proper Christian response? Do we counteract the anger and the violence with more anger and violence? That is the way of the world. Some American Evangelical pastors are giving away military style AR-15 semi-automatic rifles to new male members of their churches. Maybe that's what I should do to help grow St. John's Church, offer free guns to new members. Then you can be the good guys with guns who kill the bad guys with guns...in the name of Jesus. Is that what we should do? Is that what Jesus would have us do?

One of our greatest American heroes and preachers, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., once said,

The ultimate weakness of violence is that it is a descending spiral, begetting the very thing it seeks to destroy. Instead of diminishing evil, it multiplies it. Through violence you may murder the liar, but you cannot murder the lie, nor establish the truth. Through violence you may murder the hater, but you do not murder hate. In fact, violence merely increases hate. So it goes. Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that.

So, what do we do now? What is the Christian response to all this hatred and violence? How do we unleash the power of peace? As our Collect for the Day says, "O Lord, grant that we may know and understand what things we ought to do, and have the grace and power faithfully to accomplish them." (BCP, p. 231, My paraphrase)

Beneath all the xenophobia, Islamophobia, homophobia, racism and sexism lies a fundamental misunderstanding about the nature of reality. We think we are separate from one another. There's the good guys and the bad guys. The white guys and the black guys. Jew and gentile. Slave and free. Male and female. The police and, well, everyone else.

The question is, how do we respond to this false idea of separateness without engaging in the same posture of attack that such an idea engenders? How do we respond without becoming just like the perpetrator in what we do? I'm going to suggest three ways, based on the principles of nonviolence as taught by Jesus. "Love your neighbor as yourself." We know his teaching. It's been recited as a part of the opening to the Anglican/Episcopal Eucharistic liturgy for 400 years. (BCP, p. 324)

Ist - Love Your Neighbor. Stand in Solidarity with Those Under Attack.

When gay people, transgendered people, people of color, women, Muslims — or any group — is being attacked, it's essential that people of other demographic groups — straight people, white people, men, non-Muslims — stand in solidarity with them.

The first reason this is important is so that they are not left to face the bigotry and violence alone. The feeling of isolation can be just as painful as the attack itself. The second reason it's important is because solidarity is an effective line of defense.

In 1993, in Billings, Montana, a white supremacist threw a cinder block through a Jewish family's window because they were displaying a menorah. In response, thousands of non-Jewish residents began displaying menorahs in their own windows. At first the vandalism intensified, but the act of solidarity continued, and in the end the violence and intimidation ceased.

Inspired by that story, a Philadelphia neighborhood mobilized when a gay man's house was being vandalized because he had a rainbow flag flying outside his home. Scores of neighbors began displaying rainbow flags outside their own homes and eventually the homophobic intimidation ceased.

And of course one of the great moments of solidarity in our country's history was in the 1960's when thousands of white people, shocked by the racist brutality being perpetrated upon peaceful Black demonstrators, joined with their African American neighbors to demand change.

It's impossible to overstate the importance of solidarity. It wasn't until the late 1970's that a public reckoning about the Holocaust took place in Germany. So when the PBS mini-series "Holocaust" was broadcast for the first time on German national television, it was an historic occasion. After each episode, viewers could dial into a radio forum to share their feelings. Thousands of people called in to pour out their grief and shame. You could still hear the sobs of one elderly woman who described seeing her Jewish neighbors being taken away in the night. "Warum habe ich nichts gemacht?" she said over and over again. "Why didn't I do anything?" Hearing her anguish makes me realize the cost of being a bystander. Nearly 40 years later she was still tormented by her inaction.

Martin Niemoller was a famous, highly decorated German U-boat Captain of World War I. He became a pastor after the war and eventually a pacifist who opposed Hitler and the Nazis. He was arrested and spent most of World War II in Nazi prisons. He once said,

First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out — because I was not a Socialist. Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out — because I was not a Trade Unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out — because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me — and there was no one left to speak out for me.

The time to stand with those who are coming under attack isn't when the Gestapo is knocking at the door. It's when the persecution first begins. People who target other groups for harassment, intimidation, violence and even genocide often assume that others will stand by and let it happen because they are not directly affected. But when we stand in solidarity with those being targeted, such as our African American and Muslim and Hispanic and Native American brothers and sisters, we assert the reality that there is no "other." "No man is an island, entire of itself; ...I am involved in Mankind."

So, Stand in Solidarity with Those Under Attack! Jesus welcomed everyone to his table. Become a with-stander, not a bystander. What happens to my black brothers and sisters and the police, happens to me. Speak out! Enough!

I contacted the local African American Episcopal Church and the local police where my family and I live in Atglen, PA. I sent them both a message to say that I stand with them as a fellow American citizen and a Christian during these difficult times. They are not alone. We are in this together. I urge you to do the same. Reach out to the African American community. Reach out to your local police department. We are all in this together.

2nd - Loving our Neighbor includes loving our Enemy. Love the Person Consumed by Hatred. Solidarity is essential. It can stop hate-movements from gaining the traction they need to become truly dangerous. But by itself it doesn't go far enough in dismantling the erroneous idea at the root of the violence. In fact, acts of solidarity can reinforce a mentality of separateness if they are done with the intent of shaming the perpetrator.

If we really want to be agents of transformation we have to go farther. We have to learn to love our enemy, the person consumed by hatred. "Father forgive them for they know not what they do" Jesus said even as he was being nailed to the cross. (Luke 23:34)

Let me state the obvious: anyone who has to attack another person in order to feel right about him or herself has no clue who and what they truly are. They don't know they're expressions of the Source of All Being. They don't know they were born worthy. They don't know their goodness is and always has been a given. They believe instead that their worth and their power arise from their ability to dominate or even destroy another. Blinded to their own divine nature, they can't see the divine nature of those around them. Oblivious to the reality of oneness, they don't comprehend that when they attack another it is themselves they attack.

As followers of Jesus, our task is to witness to the truth of who the perpetrators really are. We don't condone their actions or defend their ignorance, but we hold to the truth of what they cannot see: that in their essence they are whole, and far more beautiful than they imagine. This goes for the white police officers who murdered those innocent black men, and the black sniper who murdered those innocent white police officers doing their duty.

So, Love our Neighbors and Love our Enemy. Stand in Solidarity with Those Under Attack, Love the Person Consumed by Hatred. and finally, the 3rd aspect of releasing the power of peace in response to hatred and violence is to

3rd - Love Yourself. Heal Your Own Mind.

Perhaps the most important contribution we each can make to the healing of the world is to heal our own mind. We are sovereign over our mind. I decide what thoughts I will cultivate and which beliefs I will nourish. So pay attention to how the story of separateness plays out in your own mind, because this is where it all begins.

Start by noticing the attacks you launch upon yourself: the vicious thoughts of self-judgment, of unworthiness, of shame. I call these the late night heebee-geebees. A good Christo-therapy

technique is “Mind fasting and Spirit feasting.” It’s based on St. Paul’s recommendation to think on good things. Notice your self-judgment and refuse to feed it. Don’t dwell on it. Stop the racing thoughts. Get up and read a good book or listen to good music. Say your prayers. You will find the heebee-geebees soon lose their power. The more we can turn our own mind into a zone of peace, the closer the world will move toward peace. Because we are all one, and in the peace of your mind, I find my peace. As you realize your divinity, I am more able to see my own. Why? Because there is no such thing as separateness. We are interindividuals in this together. “And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; ..it tolls for thee.”

So, Love your neighbor and your enemy as yourself. Stand in Solidarity with Those Under Attack, Love the Person Consumed by Hatred, and finally, Heal Your Own Mind. These three actions will unleash the power of peace into a world desperate for the love of Jesus. Amen?!

Source: “[Three Ways to Be a Peacemaker in a Time of Hatred](#),” by Patricia Pearce, Spiritual teacher and author of *No One in I Land*. Website: patriciapearce.com.