First and Center
Pastor's Blog
May 14, 2019

In the beginning, Christianity was a religion of peace. Facing arrest and crucifixion, Jesus called on his followers to put their swords away. He criticized those in his own faith community who disagreed with him, but he did not seek to kill them or call others to do so. He stopped his disciples from even sending away Samaritans or Gentiles, and he healed and spoke to numerous non-Jews.

It's really amazing how quickly that changed. Even before the great mistake of the 4th century, when the Emperor became Christian and made it a state religion, some Christians lashed out against others, specifically Jews. There were places, notably Jerusalem at some points in history, where Christians, Jews, and later Muslims co-existed peacefully, but these were exceptions. I have been reading Jill Lepore's fabulous history of the U.S. called *These Truths*, which tells story after story of how early explorers who encountered the native peoples of the Caribbean and mainland North America said those peoples had no religion because they were not Christians. And then often killed and/or exploited them on those grounds. Our own spiritual ancestors in Connecticut differed considerably from their kin in Rhode Island or Pennsylvania, who allowed those not Protestants to live and worship peacefully among them.

It has been easy in the US since 9/11 to assume that all religious terrorism and fanaticism in the world is rooted in radical Islam. Al Qaeda, ISIS, Boco Haram, etc. seemed out to commit genocide on all non-Muslims (or other Muslims who did not share their particular form of Islam). And yet, we see often that self-proclaimed and church-going Christians have committed acts of violence in our lifetimes against Jews, Muslims, and others, and are currently seeking to enforce their version of Christianity on others in this country through legal means. In New Haven this week, an arsonist set fire to a mosque, just the latest in a long string of violence against faith communities of various kinds already in 2019, and though we do not yet know the perpetrator, I would not be surprised to hear this was anti-Islam violence.

We have to keep saying, I guess, over and over and over again, that this is so not Jesus. It really isn't. We should not harm people of other faiths. OR people of no faith. Or people in general. End of story. Say it to everyone you know. Say it.

~ The Rev. Shelly Stackhouse,
Transitional Minister