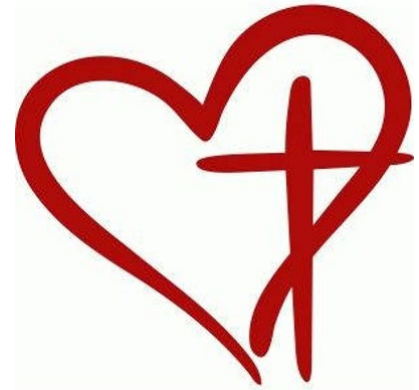


First and Center

Pastor's Blog

August 6, 2019



Hate seems to be winning. It has become acceptable in many circles in this country, apparently, to hate openly, publicly, and violently. The hate is often aided, abetted, and urged on by some of our national and local leaders. Hate spreads across social media like a wildfire, with only the thinnest of attempts to tamp it down. Hate comes accompanied with wild conspiracy theories to raise the fear factor and justify violence of all kinds.

And although we would like to think this is something new, it is not. Our African American, Native American, Hispanic, and Asian kin can tell us stories reaching back centuries of the hate seemingly knitted into the DNA of the United States of America. Mass killings happen now with machine guns. In the past, they happened with thousands of lynchings, conducted like picnics, with forced marches off ancestral lands that killed thousands, with internment camps, and much, much more. We like to think that the image that sums up the U.S. is Lady Liberty's torch. In reality, the image that sums up the U.S. might more honestly be the gun.

It is time for us to stop the magical thinking that leads us to believe that mass shootings are aberrations, conducted by a few mentally ill people influenced by violent video games. The penchant to violence came before the video games and led to their creation. Most mentally ill people are not dangerous and are more likely to be victims of crime than perpetrators, as those of us who work with the homeless population know. That's too easy a rationalization for this hate, and an utterly false narrative.

Hate, and violence, of course, pre-date the founding of the U.S. We read it in the Biblical narrative and in all of history -- which is why Jesus and later leaders in the early church make a point of speaking against violence and hate. It's hard to do sometimes. It's hard not to give up on the idea that Love can overcome this depth of hate and fear.

This morning, I read these words from the letter called I Peter near the end of the New Testament (3:14-15): *"Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, but in your hearts hold to Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you."* The only way I can account for the hope that is in me is because I believe in God's love as the foundational love, in Christ's resurrection, showing love overcoming hate and evil, and in the power of the Spirit to keep us loving when the whole world around us seems to be dissolving in hate.

In your hearts, hold to Christ. Do not fear what they fear. Don't be intimidated by their hate. Live and act in outrageous hope.

~ Rev. Shelly Stackhouse,
Transitional Minister