

November 22, 2015 Last Sunday after Pentecost

Romans 12: 2, 18, 20, 21

We have all been shocked and dismayed by the events over the past week and a half in Paris, France. ISIS terror attacks caught the world off guard. I have received some emails from friends and parishioners forwarding early and angry Internet responses along with their own personal concerns, questions and sensitive suggestions.

Here is part of one of my replies:

It is hard not to get hooked on future fear mongering. The Muslim hoards are coming.... But xenophobia rarely is the answer either. The West can't reasonably expect to get away scot-free from its three hundred fifty plus year legacy of colonialism. When we play with fire we should expect to get burned. What seems to be forgotten in all of this is that between the first and second World Wars, France ruled Syria. This is not an excuse for what happened in Paris, just a reality check. We have real responsibilities in all of this. When it comes to welcoming Syrian refugees to Canada some sort of accommodation and assimilation seem to be necessary. Your sensitive suggestions move in this direction. Thanks.

Rev. John.”

Then as the week wore on the tone on the Internet began to turn. In an email forwarded to me, Blogger Rabbi Brian of Religion-Outside-The-Box reminds us that as we feel helpless to act we can make a difference with **love**. He then quotes Martin Luther King, Jr.

Darkness cannot drive our darkness; only light can do that.

*Hate cannot drive our hate; only **love** can do that.*

Another email forwarded to me a link to Quaker elder **Parker Palmer**. He writes: “Heartbreak is such a constant that every ancient wisdom tradition seeks to answer three questions: How can we prepare for heartbreak? How should we hold it when it comes, as it always will? Where will we let it take us – toward more death or new life?”

He goes on to say, “Left intended, our hearts can become so brittle that under stress they break apart into a million shards, and are sometimes thrown like fragment grenades at the ostensible source of their pain. Violence is what happens when we don't know what else to do with our suffering.

I know many people whose own wounds – held in a broken-open heart, instead of a broken apart heart – have made them ‘wounded healers’. Instead of growing bitter and brittle and passing their pain on to others, they've said, “This is where the pain stops and the love begins.” Not in spite of their suffering but because of it they are better able to offer active forms of compassion to others who suffer.”

Then there is the Youtube video recorded in the Montreal Barri Metro this week entitled “#Love Over Fear”. Four young men; roommates I understand, one from New York, one from Paris, one from Turkey, and one from Beirut hold hands and signs urging passer-by to choose love over fear. Even police officers come forward offering hugs and appreciation. Check it out.

I could go on but you get the message. And so did the Apostle Paul when he wrote to the Christians in Rome struggling with State sponsored terror.

“Do not conform yourself to the standards of this world but let God transform you inwardly by the complete renewal of your minds.

Then you will be able to know what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Do everything possible on your part to live in peace with everybody.

For as the scripture says:

‘If your enemies are hungry, feed them.

If they are thirsty, give them something to drink.

For in doing this we will make them burn with shame.’

Do not let evil defeat you, instead conquer evil with good.”

Finally, as I was searching for images for our service, I came across this saying that I have used before, but it is so perfect for today. It offers an answer to the question of our Spiritual Focus: What kind of Kingdom does **Jesus** bring? Let it be our

Application for Today:

“They drew a circle that shut me out – heretic, rebel a thing to flout.

But love and I had the wit to win. We drew a circle that took them in.”

Amen.

John 18: 33-37

When I review the transition this week from defensive anger, blame and bluster on the Internet to #Love Over Fear, my spirit soars. What began in the counter culture peace movement of the 1960’s is now morphing into a worldwide recognition of Jesus’ message and example. **Love your enemies or the more secular version; Love conquers all**, is finally getting some universal traction. War and religion are no longer automatic bedfellows. It has taken 2,000 years but better late than never. So no wonder way back then, Pilate the Roman Governor of Judea didn’t get what **Jesus** was up to.

You see, Pilate wants to locate **Jesus** on the power grid of his time. **Jesus** just doesn’t fit into the system where religion and state sponsored terror go hand in hand. **Jesus** doesn’t buy into humankind’s all too aggressive way of thinking;

‘might makes right.’ Or our perennial faith in sanctified violence since truth be told ‘misery only wants miserable company.’ **Jesus** does not seek the overthrow of the Roman Empire to the Jewish authorities for that matter. He doesn’t see **God** in the history of Empires. But he is totally consumed with seeing and feeling and knowing **God** realized in our everyday humanity, through life-giving relationships.

So **Jesus** gathers a community around himself. He takes it on the road teaching, restoring and enacting a new way to live together, where love is the rule. When the time is right he brings his program, his kingdom of God lived on earth through life-giving relationships, to the religious authorities in Jerusalem. He presents it to them, teaches in the temple each day, all without any defences. Either the religious authorities will become his disciples or hand him over to the Roman authorities who will become his executioners. Leading the Kingdom of **God** lived upon the earth **Jesus** hands himself over to their decision. When Pilot asks **Jesus** “are you the king of the Jews?”

Jesus replies;

*“My kingdom does not belong to this world.
If my kingdom belonged to this world,
My followers would fight to keep me from being handed over
to the Jewish authorities.”*

Notice, **Jesus** doesn’t expect any kind of divine intervention. He only refers to his followers. There is no sanctified violence divine or human in God’s New Day.

When we let go of seeing **God** in the history of Empires, when we let go of violent solutions, when we let go of the inalienable right to self-defence, we can open up to **God** engaging our humanity. With the Apostle Paul, we can let go of being *“conformed to the standards of this world and let God transform us inwardly by the complete renewal of our minds.”*

We become willing to be the steak-spice instead of being the steak. (Montreal steak-spice of course). We see ourselves as the seasoning instead of the plate of food.

We open up to a spiritual presence, we open up to grace. We open up to intensified humanity. We open up to the risen Christ who has no political agenda and no economic or military might. We open up to the kingdom of God lived through acts of Love Over Fear.

So if Jesus isn’t the world’s kind of king, then what kind of kingdom does he bring?

Jesus’ kingdom is a spiritual presence that resonates in our souls animating love over fear.

Jesus' kingdom is **in** our humanity, the evolving of or human consciousness towards care and compassion, and love over fear and hate.

Application for Today

Jesus brings life-giving relationships.

The recognition that only love drives out hate,

And violence of any kind is a non-starter.

Amen.