

This week, a young conservative activist was shot dead, live, on camera in front of a large crowd of students on a university campus in Utah. Tragically, this act of gun violence is far from an isolated incident, it wasn't even the only killing that afternoon, but Charlie Kirk's assassination has provoked enormous public outcry, both from those who supported him and from those who passionately disagree with his ideology and his values. Reading the news, scrolling through social media, the name-calling, the accusations, the aggression, the hate flowing between those of opposing political and ideological positions; the aggression and the hate is everywhere, it seems, and it's overwhelming, I think.

This week is also a week when many of us are remembering the heavy weight of shock and grief we felt on September 11, 2001 – when almost 3,000 people lost their lives; a day when the hate-fueled actions of terrorists wounded the whole world in an unforgettable way.

Why is hate so hard to eliminate? Why do we continue to trust that hate has a role to play. Why is hate so often our default response to those we most strongly disagree with? What do we expect will be the outcome, the result of sharing our hate with the world?

Hate is not inevitable. Hate is something we learn to do. We might experience strong feelings when we're afraid or feel threatened, when we've been hurt or wounded, and over time we can learn to hate the one or the ones we feel are responsible. It's particularly easy to hate when we have no relationship or connection with the one, or the group, we disagree with, or fear, or oppose. Hate is not inevitable, it's learned, and it's contagious;

we can feel emboldened when we're amongst like-minded folks, we can even feel justified, we can come to convince ourselves that our hate is a necessary response to that or to those we most energetically disagree with or disapprove of. But hate is not inevitable, instead we develop the habit to hate; after all, it's quick, and economical. I wonder if hate helps us feel powerful, helps us direct our frustrations about life, channel our response to the world as blame towards those we feel stop us living the life we want to be living, living in the world the way we want it to be. I wonder if feelings of hate trick us into thinking we're *doing something*, doing something to make the world better, especially if we use it to recruit others, bring others around to our right way of thinking – hate is a weapon, and it's as if we use it to force change.

But hate is not inevitable, hate is learned, and if we've learned to hate, surely we could learn another way to respond to the world's brokenness. We might even agree this 'other way' is core to Jesus' ministry and teaching.

Today's Gospel reading begins with a reference to two groups who got a lot of hate during Jesus' time: tax collectors and sinners. Jesus' community suffered horrifically under the occupation of the Roman Empire – freedoms were limited, taxation was heavy, they weren't entitled to self-rule, they were occupied and oppressed, and they longed for liberation. I imagine the occupying forces were physically threatening, soldiers in the streets, it would have felt dangerous, we know the Romans used violence as a means of intimidation and control. Folks would surely have been afraid and would have been trapped in a way of life they didn't choose for themselves, they would have felt powerless to bring about change, unable to do or say anything to actually get themselves free.

In times of communal stress and shared suffering, especially, it seems it was as easy in Jesus' time as it is now, for folks to divide and lash out against each other. We still as a culture, as a society, believe it's a valid/justified use of our time and energy to push back on those who are on 'the other side' to push back with violence of speech or action against those we disagree with/disapprove of. So much of our effort and energy continues to be spent trying to course-correct others, trying to change the minds and behaviors of others. We don't seem to trust we are actually all in this together, we are *all* beloved children of God, and God longs for the restoration of the world, not for the annihilation of certain people or groups we believe to be 'bad actors.'

Jesus was insistent on another way, emphasizing love and forgiveness over hate and violence. Jesus longs for us to see the world as a whole, a whole that's fragmented, and that it's the fracturing, the breaking up of the whole that is the root of such great suffering. Whenever we see the world in terms of "us and them" we're playing a role in keeping apart that which God longs to be restored. The Gospel reading today emphasizes that God works in the world for the restoration of the whole; that is the truth of God – that Divine power never stops calling us all back into restored relationship - with God, and with one another.

The 'lost sheep' isn't left to its own devices – blamed for wandering off, getting now what it deserved. The lost coin isn't given up on because it's hard to find, the woman in the story doesn't just get on with her life because there are far more important things to do than tear her house apart looking for a single lost coin, assuming "oh, it'll turn up again, one day."

These stories should have us consider our own world view, and our understanding of God, and have us reflect on our own actions in the world. God is the Good Shepherd, who cares for the whole flock – and the story is saying that God cares especially for the one that’s wandered off and got lost, cares especially that the flock is now fragmented, split apart. God is the woman, who won’t stop until that one lost coin is found and restored to the purse.

Our mission as church is to restore, to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ.¹ When we disagree, when we dislike, or reject the ideas, or ideologies of others, that’s valid - we’re not called to pretend we’re all best friends, pretend there’s relationship when there can be none, but we are called to remember that we are all beloved children of God. And, when there’s no possibility of relationship, we’re told we’re to put our swords down (John 11, vs 11) – we’re to “shake the dust from our feet” (Luke 9, vs 5) - and simply .. move on. We don’t need to fake friendship, *and* we don’t need to make our point.

And, we’re to do all we can to heal our own selves, recognize our own sin, spot all the ways we’re seeking our own will and not the will of God, because our own sin, just like the sin we see so clearly in others, our own sin is distorting our relationship with God, our relationship with other people, and our relationship with all creation.²

Our call in this world isn’t to take the place of God, by attempting to control the thinking, the speaking, and the actions of others, because we believe we’re right; our call is to follow Jesus.

¹ Book of Common Prayer, 855.

² Book of Common Prayer, 848.

Our call is to conversion of life, our own lives specifically, and to be transformed by the mighty power of God's love that, ultimately, we might learn how to disagree without hate, disagree without harming each other, without violence of thought, speech, or action – because we've come to trust with our whole being that God is present and is acting in the world.

We'll never heal the world by being just like it.

We become healers of the world by focusing on healing ourselves, because, healed, healed of fear and hurt, healed of fury and judgement, we're also healed of hate.