

CHARLOTTESVILLE

POSTED BY GREG JACOBS ON AUGUST 14, 2017

THE CANON'S BLOG: OUT OF THE ORDINARY

Perhaps it was inevitable. The bloody confrontation in Charlottesville between white supremacists and those opposing their racist ideology poignantly exposed and confirmed the political/racial/cultural/ideological divide that has existed in this country for quite some time.

Even before this most recent incident, hate crimes and acts of violence perpetrated by those espousing an agenda of bigotry have soared. The Southern Poverty Law Center has chronicled over 2900 instances of hate-fueled attacks and intimidation since the 2016 election. Moreover, hate-speech, masquerading as free speech, broadcast over various media is on the rise as well. We would do well to be alarmed not only about the future of civil discourse in this country, but also about the fear, anxiety, and violence that bigotry and hatred in its myriad forms has spawned.

Any and all pronouncements, demonstrations, and acts of violence intended to fuel hatred of another's race, culture, religion, gender, or sexual orientation must be universally condemned whether the perpetrator is wearing a suit, a collar, khakis, or blue jeans. Recently, protests against the removal of Confederate commemorative statues have become a convenient venue for spreading racist propaganda. Yet, regardless of what we choose to call this rising tide of intolerance – “domestic terrorism”, “hate speech,” or “supremacist rhetoric” –we are increasingly being confronted by venomous ideologies and worldviews that seek to divide this country.

In response, we look first to our elected leaders and those in authority to condemn in unconditional and unambiguous terms any speech or conduct that demeans, demonizes, and devalues the humanity of any of God's children. The failure to do so not only gives apparent legitimacy and encouragement to those who espouse hate and violence, but also calls into question the moral integrity of those to whom we have entrusted the protection of “liberty and justice for all.”

We as God's people have a critical role to play. Edmund Burke once remarked that the only thing that is necessary for evil to triumph is that good men do nothing. Remaining silent in the face of rhetoric and conduct that seeks to divide us and prevent us from coming together, is not an option. Charlottesville, Orlando, and Charleston stand as grim reminders that the intolerance and violence that is unfolding in city after city cannot be minimalized or trivialized. Lest we forget, none of us is free so long as one person is the object of unbridled and unmerited hate.

Our failure to speak out boldly and courageously will be tantamount to making peace with oppression. In times like these, we are being reminded that our baptismal vow to “respect the dignity of every human being” compels us to speak out and to act out wherever we encounter hatred and bigotry.

“Every step toward the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering, and struggle, the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals. Without persistent effort, time itself will become an ally of the insurgent and primitive forces of irrational emotionalism and social destruction. This is no time for apathy or complacency. This is a time for vigorous and positive action.” – Martin Luther King, Jr.

We must not allow injustice to go unchallenged any longer. We will need to risk going to places where we have never been comfortable – engaging in conversations that risk being unpleasant and disturbing to us, our colleagues, and friends – conversations even with those we would rather avoid. But this we must do for our sake and the sake of future generations.

Make no mistake, it will take all the strength, faith, and determination that we can muster for the “living of these days.” Let us pray for the wisdom and the courage to be uncompromising in our desire to be people of light united against the forces of darkness, bringing us one step closer to the Kingdom of God.

IN THE WAKE OF CHARLOTTESVILLE

POSTED BY MARK BECKWITH ON AUGUST 14, 2017

THE BISHOP'S BLOG: SIGNS OF GOD'S GRACE

Bishops and clergy of the Diocese of Virginia stand together with the Charlottesville Clergy Collective (CCC) in opposition to the so-called "Unite the Right" rally. PHOTO COURTESY DIOCESE OF VIRGINIA FACEBOOK PAGE

The opposite of faith is not doubt. The opposite of faith is fear. And fear was on full display this past weekend as white supremacists gathered in Charlottesville to make their hate-filled witness.

Fear can easily morph into hate. Hate is fear being acted out. Hate is almost always accompanied by violence, which was the tragic case on Saturday when Heather Heyer was literally run over and a score of others were seriously injured.

Fear can also cause people to run for cover, and try and seal themselves off from the whole horrible business.

We Christians are not people of fear. We are people of faith, which is the antidote to fear. Yet faith can be hard to come by in the face of overt racism, an escalating nuclear standoff, not to mention preachers who align themselves with the President's fire and fury threats – which may not be made in fear, but certainly stoke it.

We are people of faith, which means we follow Jesus' example of standing up to fear. And we stand up to fear with the power of love, which builds as we join in that love with one another. I am grateful that my colleagues in the Diocese of Virginia, Diocesan Bishop Shannon Johnston, Suffragan Bishop Susan Goff and Assisting Bishop Ted Gulick joined with other people of faith in Charlottesville to witness against fear.

We need to join them. By engaging our faith – in private prayer, in corporate worship and especially in public witness. In our neighborhoods, in our churches, in our communities – wherever and however fear shows up. I am asking the liturgy and music commission to offer worship resources for congregations. I am asking the Namaste commission in the diocese (which has continued to design and implement anti-racism dialogues) to provide resources as well.

When I was in Massachusetts, Archbishop Desmond Tutu came to preach at the church I served on the occasion of his granddaughter's baptism. He began his sermon by thanking us, which seemed a bit odd because we felt so grateful for his commitment, his witness and his joy. He thanked us for our prayers, which he said ended apartheid, which was a policy of fear in South Africa. He told a story about a nun who lived alone in a hut on a mountain in Northern California. She wrote Bishop Tutu to tell him that she got up every morning at 3 AM to pray for an hour for the end of apartheid.

"They didn't stand a chance," he said, "against a woman praying every morning before dawn for the end of apartheid."

Our faith can no longer be private. The world needs our witness. Our prayer needs to be done in private – and in public. We need to join God in God's work, as God continues to offer hope and healing to a broken world. Faith will never be able to vanquish fear, because fear will never go away. Fear is real, and it is debilitating. But faith in God's love, power and mercy can expose fear for the destructive force that it is. Faith has the capacity to contain fear, and if our faith in God's power can be joined effectively with the faith of others, we can put fear on the run.

Faith is power. Engage it and use it.