

Response to Synagogue shootings in Pittsburgh
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Where to begin?

Where to find the words to begin?

Where to begin — again.

How long, O lord — how long indeed.

Do we talk about the violence in this world that shows itself far too often? It must stop.

Do we challenge the availability of guns on our streets and work together, even imperfectly, to change that? Yes.

Do we look at ourselves in the mirror and see a culture that allows — even encourages — grievous expressions of hate? And wonder about our place in those expressions — ah, there's a rub.

Do we turn away, unable to take in one more thing, numb to the battering of this 24-hour news cycle and hoping for a better day tomorrow because we are people of faith and, of course, God will take care? No, we cannot.

Friends, *it takes a village and more* to undo what is before us and make it new. For each of us, and most certainly for those who claim to be Jesus followers, the call is now. The time is long past. When will we move beyond complacency and simple agreement that all is not well, to action that makes a difference?

It is not enough to cheer God or others on, agreeing that better (or worse) days are coming!

It is not enough to make ourselves safe during sacred worship, nor should we have to.

It is not enough to pray without follow-up action on our part. This morning I continue to cry with those in Pittsburgh whose grief is overwhelming, because Jesus teaches me that their grief is my own. I am compelled to recognize and honor their tears, tears that no one should have to shed for the reasons that they do.

Yesterday when Ken and I went across the street to our local synagogue to check in at the end of morning services, it was our common humanity and common roots of faith that took us there. Even when we have no words, we can be present.

Presence goes a long way... *standing with* those who are hurting or who are in need, *standing up* to bring attention to that which must change, *standing for* — where all can see — those things that make for peace and community. *Standing, showing up, being present* for the Kingdom of God, and in the name of Jesus is key; it is a beginning. But in the face of hate and violence we need to go further — and that means first admitting these problems are a part of the neighborhood, the community for which, in which, we share responsibility and accountability — and that community may be larger than we now imagine!

Yes, the news cycle is mind-numbing, and as long as it doesn't get too close we can turn it off. And truly sometimes we need a break — there is simply too much to take in. But friends, the events of this weekend ARE too close, geographically and spiritually. We need to see them for all that they represent of that which is truly evil. And we need to act out of our own faith and commitment to the world as God yearns for it to be. Fred Rogers, our favorite Pittsburgh neighbor, told us that in times like these we should *look for the helpers*. And so we should, for there are those who will walk with us seeking to change all that is not of God and for God's creation, both in us and around us.

May God hold us and comfort our breaking hearts, and renew our spirits with hope!

May our prayers continue to ascend for those connected to the Tree of Life Synagogue in Squirrel Hill, and those connected to far too many situations to recount. But not prayers alone.

How long O Lord... how long? Indeed friends, part of the answer to that question is in our hands.

Amen.