

**“Voicing lament” a sermon based on Luke 13:31-35 preached at Knox Church Dunedin by Kerry Enright on 17 March 2019.**

Over the last day I have read many prayers and reflections and reactions about what happened on Friday. From all over the world.

On Friday the world of Islamophobia became more evidently our world. The perpetrator lived in one of our streets.

He initially thought of targeting our mosque. These are our neighbours. It seems less a day for proclaiming than a day for lament.

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings ...”

“Christchurch, you have experienced terrible earthquakes, and now you experience mass murder and deep terror. People of the Al Noor Mosque and people of the Linwood mosque. People who live in fear. People of the Al Huda Mosque here in Dunedin. Muslim people around the country whose mosques have had to be closed for a time so Muslim people can be safe. People who pray Friday prayers. People who “look” Muslim.

We who gather here today follow one who said: “How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings ...”

But a hen seems so powerless. Hens aren’t mighty. They only have wings. Wings cannot withstand foxes. Wings do not stop bullets.

And ...

Wings gather people together. Wings reach out to invite people together and protect with fierce love. As a mother hen gathers her brood ..

One Sunday we were at worship in a church near San Francisco. While our eyes were closed in prayer, someone behind us touched our shoulders and pointed out the adjacent window.

There was a fox walking through a field. It was pointed out because it looked, beautiful. Sleek and on the prowl. And it was deadly.

The backdrop for the ministry of Jesus was the lurking fox, Herod and his armies. When Jesus spoke of foxes and hens, he knew the power of both. He knew of Jerusalem with its killing and stoning.

Yet he chose to speak as a hen, lamenting for Jerusalem.

How can we be people gathered under the wings of God?

How can we be people who reach out to gather others under the wings of God?

Friends at our local mosque sent this message - Please care for your Muslim neighbours.

One Muslim leader said this – “If you see a hijabi Muslim in New Zealand today, assure her outwardly that she is safe there and that you are there for her. Don’t just look at her. If you know Muslims offer this to them, offer to accompany them in public spaces.”

Dave Andrews is an Australian Christian who has done much for building relationships between Christians and Muslims. When he was last in Christchurch he went to Friday prayers in the Al Noor mosque. He wrote this yesterday, speaking of Australia:

“Security may track threats. Police may arrest extremists. But there is no quick fix. No short cut. If we want to create a culture in our country that resists the current Islamophobia, we need to encourage everybody we know, in every way we can, to develop their emotional capacity for empathy towards Muslims, their intellectual commitment to the rights of Muslims, and their personal relationships with Muslim friends.”

On the Gold Coast in Australia, Christians and Muslims gathered yesterday at a local mosque to pray for Muslims in New Zealand.

For the first time in our history, synagogues closed, in solidarity with Muslims.

Nicholas Wolterstorff – “To lament is to risk living with one’s deepest questions unanswered.”

It is time for lament – here is part of a prayer from the Presbyterian Church (USA):

“God of our weary years and our silent tears,  
We are shattered by the deaths of 49 Muslim neighbours in New Zealand,  
cut down in the midst of Friday prayers.  
We are horrified, angry, despairing  
We struggle with a knowledge that our prayers alone are not enough  
our silence in the face of intolerance and fear is complicity  
a fear that we do not know a way forward that will help  
an emptiness: we have been here before, too many times,  
and we know we will walk this bloodied path again.  
What can we do, with such fear and anger and longing,  
that can bind us together,  
rather than further tear apart the fabric of our common life?  
We are failing one another, and we are failing You, O Maker of the  
Universe:  
our Mercy, our Justice, our Peace.  
We pray for our neighbours in Christchurch  
and for our whole broken and heartbroken world  
in this hard season of violence, death and extremism  
each one lost is a child made in Your image.  
each survivor is beloved to You  
each afflicted community is part of your commonwealth.”

Amy Butler the minister of Riverside Church in New York wrote this:

“As I hear the news about the mass shooting at the mosques in New Zealand, I must confess I am overcome by one sensation more than any other: I am tired.”

She writes of the torrent of anti-immigrant, anti-semitic, anti-Muslim rhetoric emanating from figures of power. She speaks of the sin of silence in the face of such rhetoric and then she says ...

“The ceaseless onslaught of violence in word and deed is meant to dull our senses, to inure us to human suffering, to wear us down until we see no point in fighting. So I am also tired of being tired.

We do not have to live like this. We do not have to accept the world as it is.

In this season of Lent, we are reminded that speaking words of truth may lead to suffering and rejection. But it is also the only way we will find our way to new life.”

When Jesus was faced with the power of the fox he said ...

“Today, tomorrow, and the next day, I must be on my way ...”

We must be on our way, for peace and inclusion and deep respect, as people of the mother hen.

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