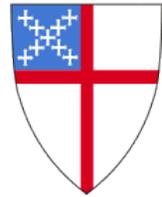


Second Sunday in Lent

The Rev. Dr. Gail Shafer
March 17, 2019



The LORD is my light and my salvation;

whom then shall I fear? *

the LORD is the strength of my life;

of whom then shall I be afraid?

I can tell you that after each attack on a house of prayer, whether Jewish, Muslim, or Christian, I find myself somewhat frightened. I have had nightmares of being shot during the Eucharistic prayer. The fear engendered by these people who shoot or bomb peaceful people at prayer fills me with sorrow. They threaten our feelings of safety, and trust. But God tells us that we are not to fear. We are to trust in the Lord.

Close friends, Tom and Jenny Stephens, live in Christ Church. Their grandchildren were on lock down at their schools and their children were on lockdown at their jobs. New Zealand is a place of peace. Those attacked were helpless, defenseless, and paying attention to their worship. They were killed indiscriminately, without regard to age, or threat to the killer.

Nothing stops another fanatic from coming into any place of worship, or education, or gathering and acting out his crazy fantasy of murder. Should we be so afraid we stop coming to church, or going to school, or shopping, or eating at a restaurant, or going out to a club at night? Should we arm ourselves and risk the accidental harm our having weapons at the ready in our homes, and schools? Do we give up our way of life out of fear?

Jesus says no. He didn't run and hide. He rejected the warnings of the Pharisees who told him that Herod was looking for him. He knew the outcome of his journey to Jerusalem. He hoped that there would be some revelation from the people that would stop the crazy persecutions, but he knew that was not likely. He hoped that he as the Son of God could bring the factions of Jerusalem together, like a mother hen gathers her chicks, for protection and for the understanding that they have a common identity.

We as humans share a common identity, and many common challenges, fears, and faith. We here at Trinity share a common identity with other people in faith communities around the world. We enjoy feeling safe, here in our church. We pose no threat to anyone. We are going about our business as Christians quietly. As were the men, women, and children at the Mosques in Christchurch.

Should we find a way to remain unnoticed. Lesson our chances to be called out for our actions?

Let me assure all of you that I have no interest in painting a target on the front of the church so we can join the army of martyrs. No indeed. I do not have any desire to face that kind of danger. But do I feel I should remain very quiet, find a hiding place and wait for the risk of today's challenges to blow over? I don't think that is how I have been called to live.

I believe we are called to love the "other," the one different from us. We are a nation of people who came here for a chance to live a better life. In that chance, we aren't guaranteed a life without challenge, or threat. As Christians we are called to reach out to those in need, not just of material things, but to people who need emotional and physical support, guidance, and just plain love and acceptance.

Would you help the Vestry and me identify those in this community you are willing to show that kind of caring? The Vestry is beginning our journey of discernment. We are working toward identifying the mission we will pursue over the next several years. In that mission, we will be looking at how we need to care for our church building, and how we may want to make changes in the building.

Grand Ledge has many who are in need. We know there are around 250 young children who qualify for the Backpacks of Love program. This work provides weekend meals for children who participate in the free lunch programs at the schools. What can be done to move them out of poverty and food insecurity?

We know there are those in our community who are alienated because of their sexual identity, race, marital status, or just because they are or feel different. What if anything is our role with those people? Do we want to invite these folks to join us and our community?

There is some newsprint on the wall in the undercroft. Please, take a moment and put your ideas of what you see our mission here at Trinity to be. Who have we helped in the past, who do we identify with, who do you see us working with to make a difference?

Abram and Sari were sent among the strangers, to a strange land, far away from all they knew so they could be the foundation of a new nation. We are their spiritual decedents. We embrace the teachings of the God that sent them, and His Son Jesus, and the Spirit that gives all of us our inspiration and energy. They were wayfarers, who settled in a homeland given to them by God. Our homeland isn't a place. Its our way of life. A way of hope, and love, and peace.

Today we celebrate St. Patrick's Day. Its meaning has changed over the years from just celebrating a saint, to celebrating being Irish. Some say there are just two kinds of people on March 17, those that are Irish, and those that wish they were. It seems like everyone wears green, drinks green beer, and tries out their fake brogue. But not that long ago, there were signs every where that said "Irish and dogs not welcome," signs next to Help Wanted – Irish need not apply. In bars, Irish not served. Times change. Our understanding of who we are, and who is like us changes. We need to apply the understanding that the least of these, whether Muslim, or Black, or Hispanic, or LGBTQ, or Irish, are beloved of God.

Let us reach out and embrace those who we think are different from us, so we can learn how much alike we are. Love is stronger than evil. As long as we love, we win.