

## **God Have Mercy**

Thus says the Lord: "A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more. Thus says the Lord: Keep your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears...there is hope for your future." (Jeremiah 3:15-16a, 17b)

In my first month with you I used this scripture and shared thoughts almost identical to those of the following message in response to violence that had erupted in the streets of Charlotte. Now, here we stand again, just one year later and we have just witnessed the largest massacre in US history. And, in the intervening year this is just one more act of unspeakable mayhem added to scores of them in the past year. This year also involved one of the most divisive elections in our history, and the divisiveness has only grown and festered. The KKK and Neo-Nazi's have crawled out of the darkness and feel empowered to sow the seeds of racism and violence even more widely.

By now we are all either numb or in constant despair by the violence that is erupting everywhere. Even Mother Nature is coming with wave after wave of natural disaster. At this point there may be an unraveling of any sense that our world will ever be whole or safe again, or if hope for the future is lost to us forever.

As I said a year ago, I believe what we are experiencing in these present times is a moment in human history that is a flashpoint in our collective consciousness.

A flashpoint is a wakeup call; it is a call to attention. A flashpoint is an event or series of events that comes with such intensity that we ignore it at our peril. A flashpoint also comes with a holy and sacred invitation to return from the bitter barrenness of division and move toward God's life-giving truths of reconciliation, forgiveness, and deep and true love of neighbor.

As I also said, in this reconciliation, in our forgiveness and love of neighbor we need not agree with one another, but I think we are called, as our Baptismal covenant says, to "strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of every human being." Far from being empty words on paper or a forgotten promise on our lips, it is a road map and only one of many such maps that God always provides as a true compass point that can lead us out of cynicism and powerlessness into hope and action.

We cannot be passive. We cannot solve these problems by adding more hatred, fear, division or misunderstanding to the volatile mix.

What we CAN do is be proactively generous, proactively kind. It is easy to get angry, easy to ask why, and to point fingers when something like this happens. These actions can heighten our fear, which is exactly what Evil wants. But we do not have to give in to anger and fear.

Instead, let our response to senseless acts of violence be senseless acts of KINDNESS. Think of one thing you can do today and then the next day and then the next day to be radically kind to someone else. In times like these, kindness makes all the difference. It soothes our fears, it gives us hope, and it binds the wounds that hurt so badly.

Thus says the Lord: "Keep your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears...there is hope for the future".

Today I pray that someday the need for messages such as this one will cease. I pray that we may awaken to the still existing pain of racism and bigotry so that we may become reconcilers. I know that we all pray for the people of Houston, Florida, Puerto Rico, Mexico City and Las Vegas, and we also pray that we may trust in God's hope for the human family, and more than that: that we ourselves might find the strength to act with love and mercy in a fear filled world.

Grace and Peace, Stephanie+