

Sanctuary

June 19, 2016

There's a contemporary Christian song – well, if you can call something that was written in the early '90s contemporary – called “Sanctuary.” The chorus goes:

*Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary
Pure and holy, tried and true
With thanksgiving, I'll be a living
Sanctuary for You*

Sanctuary. I've been reading a lot about sanctuary this week. Not about glorious buildings like ours that have had millions of pages of ink spilled about them, but about the sanctuary and the function of night clubs in the LGBTQ community. For the LGBTQ community, night clubs hold a special place. For many, it's the first place that people got to hold hands with someone that they cared about. It's the first place where many people were able to dress the way that felt right to them. It's the first place where many people didn't have to play the pronoun game anymore, didn't have to talk about that person that they had a crush on as 'they' instead of 'he' or 'she.' The night club had a special place in the LGBTQ community for decades because the night club was somewhere that people were safe. They could be themselves.

And then, of course, last Sunday morning happened, and that sanctuary was violated.

Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary

Sanctuaries have always served the purpose of helping people to be able to be safe from the outside forces. Not just from judgment, but truly safe in body and in spirit. Along with the number of people who were massacred on Sunday, that a sanctuary was violated has made this hurt even more.

Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary

In this week of reading about the power of the night club in the LGBTQ community, I've also been reading about the lieutenant governor of Utah – Spencer Cox. Have any of you heard his story? It's really remarkable. He's the Republican lieutenant governor of Utah who has been famously anti-LGBTQ, and this week he said that Orlando has changed his mind. It changed his mind because he came to understand that everyone – everyone – needs a safe place to be. Everyone needs a safe place to be.

He started sharing this at a rally where he was speaking that was not about Orlando to start with, and so there was a very mixed crowd. We have to imagine that most of the people who were standing with him – well, we don't know whether they were gay, straight. Who knows where they fell on the spectrum. He asked the crowd that was gathered on Monday a question. Actually, he asked them two questions. The first question he asked was “What was on your heart when you heard first that 20 and then that 50 people had died in Orlando?” And then the second question that he asked was – and remember this was not necessarily a group who were already together to remember Orlando – the second question he asked was, “Did what was on

your heart change when you learned that it was an LGBTQ community that had been targeted and that it was 2 a.m. at a night club?”

He then went on to say if your heart changed – and I will add a caveat here, he’s not talking about those of us who changed and became more empathic – if your heart changed, we’re doing something wrong. If the lives lost mean less to you, if there is more judgment, if there is less compassion because this was an LGBTQ community that was targeted, we’re doing something wrong.

That is the message we have to share with everyone: that people are people, that these were people with dreams and lives, each and everyone of the people who were killed. Every single one – all 50, not 49 – all 50 had been babies who had been loved, and cherished, and whose parents had dreams for them.

Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary

We didn’t read the lectionary texts today. We read two different Gospels. The reason that I picked those two is very important. When Jesus was walking past the temple with his friends, he pointed out the building, the sanctuary and he said, not one stone is going to be left on stone. Our sanctuaries are not going to last. Our sanctuaries are human constructs, and so what does last? What will last? That assurance of pardon that I offered from Romans. What will last is that you cannot be separated from the love of God in Christ Jesus. That is the eternal! You cannot be separated from God’s love. Period. And that, that is what needs to inspire us to become sanctuaries ourselves.

This congregation has been wonderful at being a sanctuary to LGBTQ people over the years. We have been a great sanctuary to numerous communities and ideas. I’ve been told that in the ‘60s Union is where the people came the night Martin Luther King was shot. This is a place that has been a sanctuary for decades if not for more than a hundred years. But the way that we are going to transform the world is first by becoming sanctuaries ourselves, by becoming a people who perpetuate love over hate.

I pulled out Martin Luther King, Jr.’s six principles of nonviolence today because I think that these can give us some insight in to how it is that we are going to be a witness in the world. The first principle of nonviolence is that nonviolence is a way of life for courageous people. Being a sanctuary of God’s love is a way of life. It’s not something that we put on and take off. This is a way of life. It needs to permeate the way that we deal with our families and our spouses, the way that we engage people in our workplaces, our children, our neighbors, our government. Being about sanctuary is a way of life.

Secondly, Martin Luther King lifts up that nonviolence seeks to win friendship and understanding. We’re about making relationships and community, and that again is critical in how it is that we are going to make a difference in this world.

Number three: nonviolence seeks to defeat injustice, not people. We need to be about the issue while still affirming the humanity of every person that we meet.

Fourth, nonviolence holds that suffering can educate and transform. This doesn't mean that we seek out suffering. This doesn't mean that we choose to be martyrs, but rather that when we encounter terror, and hate, and violence, and bigotry – which we will – we need to seek to find a way that that can somehow be transformed into beauty, and love, and grace. At every turn we need to turn that grain of sand into a pearl.

Fifth, nonviolence chooses love instead of hate. Being a person of sanctuary, means that we don't sink to the level of the hater. We find a way to quiet ourselves, to orient ourselves to our true north who is Jesus Christ, to do everything that we can to be about what he was about, and that is love.

And last, nonviolence believes that the universe is on the side of justice. As Martin Luther King famously said, "I have been to the mountaintop. You may not get there with me, but we will get there." We believe, and we need to believe as a people of sanctuary that good will win. And we need to be all in – every fiber of our being: good will win; love is stronger than hate.

Spencer Cox, that lieutenant governor from Utah, after he had asked people whether their hearts had changed, when they learned that the victims were LGBTQ, went on to point out that the Greatest Generation – you know, the veterans of World War II and that era that have been called the Greatest Generation – that they got to be called the Greatest Generation because of how they responded to the terror of their day. We have an opportunity to be great today, to become the greatest because of how we respond to this terror.

Prepare me to be a sanctuary

We are, as a Christian people, a people of the resurrection. And what the resurrection tells us is that, even though they killed the Lord of the Dance, the dance went on. Even though his pulse stopped, he pulses through us. The Lord of the Dance will live on through all of us. And so my wish for all of you today is that you will continue our dance party, that you will live on and Christ will live on through you, and the God of Love and Peace and Hope and Justice will be more present in the world because of you. May it be so.

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