

Being in Cleveland Heights, we live around a fair number of synagogues. Not to mention, just up the road from us is the Jewish Education Center of Cleveland, the Cleveland Chesed Kosher Food Bank Center, the Berkowitz-Kumin-Bookatz funeral home, the Hebrew Academy of Cleveland, and the Torah Life Center. And yet, no matter how many of our Jewish sisters and brothers live around Cleveland, University and Shaker Heights, I wonder how often they're treated as a novelty item, in a sense: people snickering about yarmulkes, or my wife and I driving around Saturday nights, seeing many walking to and from their synagogues for worship, and trying to figure out what exactly the Orthodox Jews, especially, can or cannot do at their homes on their Shabbat.

Unfortunately, within the last month alone, however, there have been many attacks on people of the Jewish faith, especially around New York. The one that was by far the most horrifying of all to me, was at a rabbi's home on the second-to-last night of Hanukkah. Again, another part of the Jewish tradition that can be made into another novelty for the rest of us with those special sections in the greeting card aisle or

menorahs on flags, even on top of cars nowadays; but for our Jewish sisters and brothers, it is a solemn remembrance of a time in their history when faith and group resilience helped them persevere through a time of absolute despair. And so, there they were celebrating the night of Saturday, December 28, three weeks ago yesterday, at the residence of Rabbi Chaim Rottenberg in Mosney, New York, when a man with a machete came in and started swinging, yelling “I’ll get you!” all while the candles of hope burned on the menorah. Yet again, the Jewish people brutally attacked for simply being Jewish.

And I bring them up because the first reading we heard this morning cannot be overlooked in light of what continues to happen to them. As Isaiah reminds us the story of God speaking to Israel, “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.” It, evidently, wasn’t enough that they needed to save themselves surrounded by empires set on wiping them out. They had to set the stage for us to have hope, too.

Nevertheless, we Christians have a rather easy tendency to push them off to the side, to treat them as a novelty item of complacent curiosity. When it comes to Scripture, we refer to them as people of Old, *old* Testament times, before the true and perfect New Testament in Jesus Christ came along and made all of them completely meaningless in comparison to us. We, quite honestly, don't need them anymore. So, as long as we Christians are taken care of; that's really all that matters.

Except, the truth is, we *desperately* need them. We need them just as much now as ever before. The case in point was just over ten days after the attack, when Rabbi Rottenberg delivered his first public comments since the incident in his very own home, where his own son was injured as well. He could have very well have taken the opportunity to unleash an outrage over the recent anti-Semitic attacks, as Nazi flags and swastikas are still proudly displayed in far too many places. Instead, as the Rabbi stood at the podium with his long peyots (those sidelocks of hair), the longer beard, and the big black Borsalino hat, looking like a Hasidic Jew that many people make fun of or ask questions about behind their backs; Rabbi Rottenberg delivered what we all desperately needed

to hear from a man who witnessed hate come alive yet again, even in his very own home. He said, “Although we, the Hasidic people of Rockland and across New York state, may look different, dress differently, speak a different language and choose to educate our children according to our traditions...we, like many diverse people of Rockland County, are all created in the image of God...I stand here before you stretching out my hand for peace and unity. Let us put our differences aside and bigotry behind us and work side by side to eradicate hatred.”

Rabbi, still means teacher, not just for those who wear yarmulkes and walk to synagogues on Saturday nights. Lest we forget, Jesus was, also, considered a rabbi. And we have had our fair share of teachers and shapers of the Christian tradition from the Jewish faith with Peter and Paul and plenty of the apostles. We needed them at the very start. We still need them now. We need the insistent teachers of peace, those resilient with hope in God. We need a man who saw his own son be injured by another, who was determined to kill him and many others, eerily similar to a Father and Son who faced unspeakable brutality on a Calvary hillside; and both times there was a response of mind-boggling

grace in spite of the most heinous evil. This time, the rabbi prayed for all of us: “Father in heaven, creator of the universe, please help us eradicate evil and hate. Help us to lift and promote the banner of brotherhood and peace.”

So, regardless of who God works through in this world, regardless of what they wear, what language they speak: we desperately need the reassurance of Great News applying across the universal board, not only for our own life, but for the sake of the whole world God still, somehow, someway, loves beyond any human reasoning at all. In the end, the candles may not burn forever on any menorah or any Christ candle, for that matter, but the light of God’s most fervent passion for this world still remains just as bright as when a tomb of was completely shattered open for us all. And for that Greatest News, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!