

This morning we hear the plea of the Psalmist, “One thing I ask of the Lord; one thing I seek; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life; to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek God in the temple.” When the Psalmist wrote such a beautiful, majestic verse, surely the thought must have been not just about a closer connection to God, but that such a place would be a safe-haven, of sorts, an actual *sanctuary* amidst a not-so-perfect world.

Scores of people in Christchurch, New Zealand, thought the same thing Friday. They were under the impression their house of worship would be a safe-haven for their stresses of daily life, a sanctuary amidst a world filled with a not-so-perfect consensus on their faith tradition. They coveted such a place for them to gather in peace with beauty and majesty filling the space not because of the architecture, but because of the faces of tried-and-true elders and brightest-of-smiles children. Instead, those precious faces were shot upon by a man armed with weapons of a different kind of mass destruction, violating the basic human dignity meant for the whole world that God still loves.

This isn't an easy for us Christians to consider. We do not agree on much of anything across the universal church, and that includes how we view our Muslim sisters and brothers. We didn't even agree before 2001, and when a certain day in September came along that year, it forever altered our perspective: an entrenched-grudge and a deep-hearted wound that many of us will never recover from in this lifetime. Some of us may never be able to control the knee-jerk reaction to any woman, for example, wearing a hijab whether that be on an airplane or on city streets. It is a human psychological reality that we, still, must face decades after a tragedy forever altered our national landscape. And yet, the spiritual landscape, designed by God long before any organized religion came about, remains all about love and compassion and mercy, whether we humans decide to carry out such basics of decency or not.

Oddly enough, when the gunman approached the house of worship on Friday, all while he was broadcasting his despicable rampage over the internet, the, supposedly, religiously superior gunman was met by a more Christ-like human being than him, when the worshiper simply, but beautifully, said, "Hello, brother." The first words from the soon-to-be

victim were not expletive-laced screams, not even any words of fear at all, in spite of the bullets that were about to tear their house of worship apart. Instead, just words of mind-boggling hospitality and respect and the most basic love. Eerily similar to a man who met a fare share of resistance in Nazareth and all over Galilee and Jerusalem, including when he was thrown onto the heinous violence of a cross, and just responded with, “Father, forgive them,” for they have no idea in your holy name what the heck they think they’re doing for the good of their empirical order. That same man was about to show the narrow-minded arrogance that they did not get to determine what they thought was pure in the world. Only God gets to decide that, including laying the foundation of God’s eternal house not through any work of ours, but through a love and compassion and mercy holy combination meant for all of God’s world, without any universal church committee’s approval.

All of this made me wonder if we should sing a different Hymn of the Day than the one that was chosen for this morning. I wasn’t so sure if *The Church’s One Foundation* was going to be appropriate, to somehow proclaim beautiful harmonies and majestic words about God’s

universal house, when a house of worship was turned into a firing range. Nevertheless, I was reminded of something: whether it be our respective church building or any, what we consider to be, sacred space; the ultimate foundation is not laid by contractors or architects or pastors or congregational leadership, but by a man who went up to Canaanites and Samaritans, many of such groups would never recognize Him to be any kind of Messiah or Savior of any world. And yet, Jesus responded with the same love and compassion and mercy as He did for His own Jewish sisters and brothers. Evidently, no organized religion fine-print for Him, no exceptions, no limits to where God's love in the sacred flesh would extend, well beyond what we humans would dare allow.

This, of course, is not just an issue in Christchurch, New Zealand, this weekend. The epidemic of hate is alive and well across the earthly board. But, in *this* house of God, regardless of any differences we may have on the surrounding world religions or the, comparatively, miniscule budget priorities, we cling to the God Who still shows *us* love and compassion and mercy, even when we choose not to do the same. We cling to the God Who's already set up an eternal house that is not based

on what we say, but on the Gospel that has already been unleashed upon the whole world that God loved, then, on the cross and still, beyond any comprehension of ours, still loves this broken world. Who knows?

Maybe the greeting at God's Kingdom house will be just as simple and beautiful as "Hello, brother. Hello, sister. Greetings, child of God!

Welcome into the true safe-haven that the world could not give you, into the real sanctuary for your tired-but-true soul, all prepared just for you, for your eternal precious life." So let it be, o God, not according to us, but to your ultimate word of the peace that still far surpasses our understanding. So let it be, o God, for all your precious children. Amen!