



## **Imagining All Houses of God...Safe**

August 2008

Dear Friends,

Growing up in the Catholic church, I was taught about the holiness of the "House of God." Certain behaviors were allowed, others were not, when you entered this sacred building. A church was a temple, dedicated to all that was sacred – a place you could go to open your heart – a safe and healing place where you could collaborate with the Divine Source. I still feel this way each time I enter a sacred place-no matter its religious orientation.

Which brings me to the shocking fact that today, in my adult life, it seems that churches are not necessarily safe. You may or may not know that there was a shooting at a Unitarian Universalist Church in Tennessee recently. Less than a year ago, in Colorado Springs, there was a shooting at the New Life Church. In both places, life was lost and communities were shattered by grief and injury. All of this is so far from what seems possible to me in a "House of God," that I can hardly imagine it.

Imagining became easier last weekend.

On Sunday, I had the pleasure of speaking at a church here in my hometown. When I arrived at the church, the gentleman who was assisting with the service let me know that the office had received an "unusual call" and that they were taking some extra security precautions that morning. He explained that they were asking for local police to patrol and assigning extra ushers to watch for anything out of the ordinary. He didn't say much more. He didn't need to. That was enough to set my imagination in motion.

Until that moment, there was something about the above-mentioned church shootings that was outside my own reality. While I definitely felt compassion for those who were killed or injured, for the families, and for the communities who were so deeply affected – and even though I held them in my prayers – there was a distance between "them" and me. This Sunday, that distance was as close as my own breath.

As I sat in the front of the church waiting for the service to begin, I wondered how we (humanity) came to such desperation. How did we come to believe violence would fix things? I wondered for how many years and decades and centuries we have struck out at one another when we feel disempowered, angry and fearful. Sure, we can make this about one individual who was described as "distraught" – but, in truth, it is about all of us and the state of our society. It is about our beliefs and

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our values. Whether it is the person who “goes postal,” the man who attacks a church congregation, or a woman who throws a fist at a spouse, lover or child – it is about the violence we have grown so accustomed to in our world and our justifications for using violence to resolve our differences.

I began thinking about my children who so enjoy their video games – and how many of those games are all about fighting “the bad guy.” There is no thought to it. Winning is all about eye-hand coordination and speed. The bad guy is determined by the game, not by the child. How often do we let the opinion of others determine the “bad guys” in our lives.

I thought about the movies we watch and the media’s way of glorifying carnage – and wondered why we watch, over and over, paying good money to become more and more desensitized.

I considered whether I should say something to friends who came to share sacred space with me that morning – or should tell my sweet husband who was in the building with our darling little boy.

I wondered what I would do if someone came forward firing a gun. The whole scene played before my eyes and I ran several options through my mind. In the end, I sat, in the stillness of that “House of God”, and opened my heart to the Divine. Call it faith. Call it guidance. Whatever it was, I felt completely peaceful and calm, ready to share the message Spirit would call forth from me. I recalled the phrase “There, but by the Grace of God, go I” and I thought of all the ministers I have come to know and love from so many different faith paths. I offered a short prayer for all of them, and for myself, and the service began.

I am happy to say that, with the exception of a stubborn CD that refused to play the right song, the service was uneventful. Nothing but smiling faces looking back at me. Message delivered. Hearts connected. Laughter shared. When it was over, I hugged my family and gave thanks for the Grace that blessed us with safety.

Now you might think that, after Sunday’s experience, I would have given up my childhood notions about the “House of God” but the reality is, I have not. Each of us has a responsibility to envision the world we desire to live in – and to live from that vision, allowing our vision to direct our choices and actions.

Last Sunday, I stood in the possibility of fear and violence. It is not what I desire. I clearly see a world where each Church and Temple is safe and sacred. I will live differently, in order to manifest that vision. Can you see it? Hold that vision strong. Together, we are creating our reality.

Blessed be,

*Ahriana Platten*