

**Jon Hauerwas – November 4, 2018 – “Philos”**  
**Mark 12:28-34 and Psalm 146:1-10**

I grew up in Aiken, South Carolina, on the western side of the state where my parents still live. In 2015, when my wife was still pregnant with Nathan, she and I and Liam moved from Washington state to Ohio where I had just been called to serve as the pastor of this congregation. Following that move, it became much easier to visit family in the Southeast. It didn't take long to begin a new tradition, and we now drive to meet them at the coast each summer with all of the gear that we can manage.

When the time comes, we return to the same seaside town where our children splash in the water and build castles in the sand. Then, after several days at the beach, we plan an educational trip to Charleston, where we expose the children to the architecture and history there. To date, this has always included a visit to one of many slave plantations. We do this because it is important to us that they learn about many of the unspoken realities of American life.

As the tour guides remind us, 40 – 60% of enslaved people entered this country through the port of Charleston. As a result of the slave trade, Charleston was the fourth largest city in colonial America. It was also the wealthiest. So began an ugly history of vastly unequal outcomes.

Today, America is a both a cultural melting pot and a nation of intense tribal loyalties. We celebrate the diversity and freedoms that our people enjoy amid countless stories of individuals who have provided a better life for their families in this land. But there is another story, as well. Of how settlers pushed native people further and further west. Of how immigrants have long been viewed with suspicion. And how, during World War II, Japanese citizens were placed in internment camps. Following the election of our first black President, African-Americans are still imprisoned at a higher rate than whites and typically earn less money in the workforce than their Caucasian counterparts.

And, we live in a nation where some are quick to welcome while others are prone to vilify. In 2015, a white supremacist entered the Emanuel AME Church in downtown Charleston, long known for its role in community organizing and civil rights. He opened fire on those gathered for a Bible study, killing nine people and wounding three others. The stated intention of the gunman was to start a race war. Thankfully, he did not succeed. And, quite the contrary, confederate monuments began to come down all across the country.

Last weekend, hate was again on full display. This time, it was not the African-American community that was targeted, but people of Jewish faith. At the

Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, 11 people were killed for nothing more than turning to God in prayer. Now, the collective Jewish community is grieving along with all people of good will. In Akron 500 participants gathered for a vigil this past Thursday in memory of those who had died.

It is exceedingly difficult for me to understand what can lead someone to hate another human being that they have never met. To feel so threatened and so enraged that they believe that they must act in the most despicable ways possible. How can this be? And what is the appropriate response?

Like many others in this room, our family has a membership at the Jewish Community Center. Our two-year-old son goes to school there daily. Our eight-year-old is a third grader at King CLC. But, when the final bell rings at his Akron Public School, he boards a bus for after school care at the JCC. It is there that I retrieve both of the boys when the workday ends.

When I arrive, Liam is often playing joyfully with other children in the gymnasium. Several staff members are present under the direction and guidance of a young, Jewish man named Adam. Adam and I are building a rapport. He is intelligent and thoughtful. Adam tells me that he originally planned to work in

Washington, D.C. But, he came to realize that he could have a direct, tangible impact on other people through his work on the local level. In essence, he feels called to what he does.

And, as I have told him on multiple occasions, he is very good at it. I watch him interact with the students, treat them with respect, make them laugh, referee disputes, attend to injuries, set clear guidelines, and discipline, as needed. Adam's presence is a gift to my son. And, he's also a gift to me. Adam knows that I am a Christian pastor. We share an interest in religion, tolerance, and the world. The conversations are easy and natural.

Following the synagogue shooting, Adam told me how he would be responding. "The shooter," he said, "hopes to make me feel afraid and ashamed to be Jewish. But I'm not going to allow him to make me feel that way. I'm going to continue to wear the Kippah (kee-pah)," he says, gesturing to the skullcap on his head. "I will show him and others that I am proud of who I am."

"Adam," I responded, "what you've just said is exactly what I plan to preach about this Sunday. I would like to quote you, though I won't use your name, of course." I could tell that he appreciated my desire to tell the modern Jewish story in

the context of a Christian worship service. Our bond was growing stronger. “Oh,” he said without hesitation, “you are welcome to use my name.”

In our first lesson this morning, we hear these words of Jesus, “you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength” and ““You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”” Friends, wherever you find yourself on the spectrum of opinions regarding geopolitical matters or – to put it more bluntly – whatever you feel about the ongoing tensions between Israel and Palestine, our words, our actions, and our relationships matter.

It is my opinion that places like the Jewish Community Center were founded for such a time as this. Such centers aim to keep mistrust and violence at bay by providing a place of welcome, inclusion, and dialogue. And, when minority communities like these feel that they are under attack, they can readily find support among their neighbors. Among people who know them.

On Tuesday, Americans will go to the polls to select representatives who will govern on our behalf. As we do so, I hope and pray that we will vote as the Spirit leads us, with the recognition that we are all in this together. As Christ has taught us,

there is no need to vilify for the greatest calling is love. May it be so, and all thanks  
be to God both now and forever. Amen.