

Sunday, November 4, 2018

Ruth 1:1-18

Hebrews 9:11-14

Mark 12:28-34

Loving All

Many people around the world responded with shock, sympathy, wonder and prayers for healing when it was learned that a lone gunman went into the Tre of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh while prayers were being shared. The result was that 11 people were killed with several injured. The individual charged on several accounts gave the reason for this attack was that he hated Jews. This was a targeted attack on a faith community while they were together sharing in prayer. As more information is shared about what occurred that night, it was learned that a baby boy was being welcomed into the faith family through a briss celebration just as the gunfire started. A woman was praying beside her daughter wrapped in her prayer shawl. She was 97 and had attended this synagogue for many years. A faith family which had gathered to worship and to pray and praise God. Eleven killed several injured because one person had hate.

This is difficult for us to understand in light of the stories we read and heard today. A story of love within a family and a commitment of faith. Naomi and her husband Elimelech moved from Judah to Moab because there was a famine in the land. They had two sons who in time married two Moabite women- Orpah and Ruth. In time, Naomi's husband and both of her sons died. Naomi heard that the Lord had come to help the people in Judah and so decided to return to her family there. Ruth and Orpah were given the choice to move to Judah with Naomi their mother-in-law or to stay in Moab, the land of their birth. Orpah decided to stay but Ruth made a commitment to her. "Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me." Ruth and Naomi were family and for them to go to Moab was necessary because they held no property or possessions- they had nothing. By going to Moab, they would be able to reconnect to Naomi's husband's family for support and to receive the basic necessities of life and a place where they would be loved. Naomi knew she had to go back to Judah, Naomi chose to remain with her mother-in-law. And if we continue to read this story we learn that because she left her parents and homeland and came to live with the people in Judah whom she did not know God would repay her. Out of love for her mother-in-law, Ruth would be supported and loved in return.

Family rules led Naomi to ask Orpah and Ruth to go back to their own families as she had nothing to offer them for at that time men owned land and property and with her husband and sons all dead, she had nothing. But Ruth did not see it this way. She loved Naomi and the family that once was loving and caring. She also wanted to make sure that Naomi was cared for in her homeland because they had a special relationship. We are not told the depth of this relationship but it was probably Naomi who taught Ruth the foundations of the Jewish faith and how to establish and live by the laws which had been passed down for generations. They truly cared for each other and lived co-dependently and with love and respect for all. If we continue to read Ruth's story, we learn that she falls in love with Boaz a part of Elimelech's family and they marry. And when this marriage begins, all are cared for because of the strong bond of love which was experienced.

In Mark 12, one of the teachers of the law heard the debates that were going on in the synagogue where Jesus was teaching. One of the teachers asked Jesus, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important." They were trying to trip him up in his teachings and the commandments given by God. Jesus quotes Leviticus 19:18 "Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbour as yourself. I am the Lord. " But he also adds what is necessary and gives two== Love God with heart, soul, mind and strength.

He states, "the most important one is this—Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God , the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this," Love your neighbour as yourself. There is no greater commandment than these."

Love is a foundational teaching of all the major faiths. And so when a person hates one group of people and kills them for who they profess to be, it is wrong and an attack on all faith groups who believe in God and that what we are to do in common is to love.

This was the message shared at Temple Beth-El on Tuesday October 30 where I and several faith leaders shared in prayer, poetry, lamentations and song as we remembered those who died for their faith, and how hatred which was so strong in those moments of gunfire were replaced with love. In this service people from the synagogue shared their thoughts and feelings of violation as faith leaders spoke of the need of lifting each other in prayer. Leaders were from the Anglican Church, the Windsor Mosque, the Sikh community, a Shaman from the Cree nation, a priest from the Roman Catholic church, myself and with a call to protect and service, Chief of Police Al Frederick spoke of our need to serve in love.

From the words of a hymn which was sung that evening we prayed, “God, teach us all to love- and may we understand that hatred cannot have a place in this good land, and guns cannot secure the peace we pray will be. May we, together, build a true community.”

How do we love others? What does this mean? Jesus said to truly love means to do so with heart, soul, mind and strength. This means our whole being is to love—not half heartedly or with a little physical effort, but to put our full self in for the sake of life.

Frederick Buechner in his book, The Magnificent Defeat wrote this about love:

The love for equals is a human thing--of friend for friend, brother for brother. It is to love what is loving and lovely. The world smiles.

The love for the less fortunate is a beautiful thing--the love for those who suffer, for those who are poor, the sick, the failures, the unlovely. This is compassion, and it touches the heart of the world.

The love for the more fortunate is a rare thing--to love those who succeed where we fail, to rejoice without envy with those who rejoice, the love of the poor for the rich, of the black man for the white man. The world is always bewildered by its saints.

And then there is the love for the enemy--love for the one who does not love you but mocks, threatens, and inflicts pain. The love of the tortured for the torturer. This is God's love. It conquers the world.

As Christians we believe in Jesus, who taught us the value and wonder of love. But how do we love others when there is an enemy who hates others for no more reason than because they are different in how they reach out to God. To love in this way, we have to have hope a strong unshakeable hope made possible for us as Christians in Jesus who died and rose again. Hope in Jesus is for us because Jesus showed us what to do when others are hurting, or in need. Respond to the need- basics of life and then share hope that all will be well.

In the poem entitled “Tree of Life” written for the people of the synagogue in Pittsburgh. I shared these words “Tree of Life, Redeemer of Israel, Enliven this moment with healing, Enliven this moment with hope. Oh, Rock of Israel, Forget not the Jews of Pittsburgh, Let your love flow in the days ahead for justice and peace everlasting.”

Ruth and Naomi loved each other as family and trusted God to meet their needs when they returned to Judah. Through love, Ruth married again and gave birth to her son and through the generations which followed, love was strong and grew stronger because they believed in God who had saved them.

We too need to love others. Sometimes it is difficult due to stress, demands at work, or even inability to do so because of words stated in anger, words that hurt and words that tear people apart. Unless these words are shared and forgiven, this might turn to hate. And when there is hate, no one can control it except God. So we are called to pray for healing, for reconciliation, for wholeness and the ability to state what is felt in and through love. And then we must let go of the rest. For where there is love, there is hope.

Let us pray for love to flow from family member to family member, from colleagues at work, or friends at leisure, from one faith group to another, from young to old, and all the differences between people which disappear when we truly and fully love. We are called to love as Christ's followers and people of faith. Jesus taught us to love- God with heart, soul, mind and strength and to love others as we love ourselves so let us love one another in faith and with hope.

PRAYER

God of love, we pray in love and for love to be shared without reserve. Open up dialogue between all people who serve you and believe in you so that we might be comforted and cared for.

Show us your way to love as Jesus taught. Hear these our prayers. Amen.