

SERMON P132 FOR FEBRUARY 5, 2017

We call this room a sanctuary, a safe place where we can come as we are and find the holy. This is sanctuary where we can weep our sorrows or deepen our joys, where we can tremble with fear and find inner strength, where we can release our shame and regret and begin again.

About a week ago, the Muslim community in Quebec City headed for its sanctuary, its mosque. They went to seek the sanctuary of prayer and community. What they met there was violence and death. Their sanctuary became a killing field.

What did we feel? Shock? Horror? Disbelief? Fear? Six dead and more wounded in the true north, strong and free. And here we are in the aftermath, choosing how to carry on, how to put fear aside and make a safer future for the children we love, how to speak up for what we know is true: unity, respect, healing, and compassion.

One thing is certain. We cannot be silent. This is a moment to take a stand for what we believe and what following Jesus requires of us. The world is a more chaotic and cruel place than it was just a few weeks ago. We are watching and listening to fear shape our priorities. We are witnessing the legitimization of xenophobia, misogyny, racism, and homophobia. This is our context now.

We cannot be silent. After all, we are the people who fly the rainbow flag of inclusion. We are the people who are called to love our neighbours as we

love ourselves. We are the people who believe in the future, that the light of love has shone in the shadows and the shadows have not overcome the light. We must counter the rhetoric of hate and fear with the sound of love and justice.

As we witness what is happening in the United States and as we witness our own Canadian capacity for intolerance and violence, we know we must speak up, show up, and take a stand against the chaos that is shaping attitudes, opinions, and actions. It is not easy because we are not immune from fear. Quebec City is, after all, not in the land of the free and the home of the brave. It is in the land we pray will be glorious and free. We have a responsibility here.

I believe much will be required of us in the coming days. We need to figure out what that “much” will be. We can start today with the letter to our Prime Minister and with the lawn signs.

As well as choosing what to do, I know we need to get clear about how, in heaven’s name we are going to have the courage to act and speak. Now we turn to scripture, to that amazing story of Jesus’ stilling the storm on Galilee. I don’t want to focus on Jesus so much as on Peter.

Peter, when he saw Jesus coming toward the boatful of disciples, trusted the storm-stiller. It seems as though Peter was flooded with confidence and courage. He wanted to join Jesus and trusted that even in the bad weather, he would be sustained, held up, empowered to walk on water.

Well, as T S Eliot wrote, “between the idea and the reality falls the shadow.” When Peter got out of the boat and into the water, his buoyancy

failed him. He became afraid and fear sank him. Down he went, powerless over the power of the waves. That is when Jesus reached for him and lifted him up to safety and assurance.

We take in this story and take from it the truth that love empowers. Faith strengthens. Right in the middle of the worst storms, the most awful violence, the deepest chaos, the most evil wrongs, we are promised courage and hope to make a difference. We see the wrongs and are given strength to make things right. When we actually let go of fear, love lifts us up.

Times like ours, when a sanctuary can become a killing field, when power is used against the least, when chaos is the goal of governing, when decisions that affect many seem arbitrary and unilateral, we need to speak justice and compassion, and trust that the ancient story of Peter out on Galilee will be our story. Love saves. We can take a stand for right relationship because love saves.

So, for every Peter in the Parkminster sanctuary, Rise up. Love is our wholeness and our hope.