

"A Call to Remember and Respond" Statement to Congregation - 8/13/17
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"13 months ago, I stood before you with a response to another horrific week. We had just witnessed the murder of 49 people at the Pulse Nightclub in Orlando, the shooting of two unarmed black men, the murder of five police officers in Dallas, and bombings in Syria, Bangladesh, Turkey and Iraq. We were stunned and deeply grieved. And it has happened again.

This week, violence in Kenya following the elections has led to the deaths of 24 people, including a 10 year old. We have heard growing threats of war between the United States and North Korea. And yesterday, hundreds of neo-Nazi's, white supremacists and skinheads gathered once again in Charlottesville, Virginia to demonstrate and promote racial intolerance and bigotry. Their ideologies and practices are vile, centered in hate and an expression of evil.

Charlottesville was the scene of violence upon violence. The hatred led to a 32-year-old woman dying and 34 injuries yesterday. The constitutional dream of peaceful assembly and freedom of speech turned into arena for hatred by those who believe that because they are white they are superior. We are in another season that has left sensible people numb, grieving, fearful, even in the depths of despair.

So again, what do we do? How do we stop this? What should each of us do in recovering sanity and peace?

As I said last year, we must **First Remember**. The character of a Christian is to be contrary to the violence and hatred we are seeing. It is important to be clear that as a follower of Jesus Christ, we throw off the yoke of hatred and take up the mantle of Christ to become those through whom the reconciling work of Jesus is evident.

Bigotry, racism, hatred are not the gifts of God, rather the fruit of the spirit is, "...love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." (Galatians 5) These are the characteristics of one who follows Jesus.

As I Peter 3:9 clearly reminds us: "Don't repay evil for evil. Don't retaliate with insults when people insult you. Instead, pay them back with a blessing. That is what God has called you to do, and he will bless you for it." Or, as Paul writes in Romans 12:17, "Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable."

So, remember that you are a child of God and that your neighbor is also a child of God. Don't hesitate to be a peacemaker, build bridges of relationship, go the extra

mile, help, heal and forgive. No matter what, don't hate, don't judge and don't hurt. And as Paul wrote to the Church in Philippi, "Whatever happens, dear brothers and sisters, may the Lord give you joy."

Let's pray: Lord, our hearts are heavy for our world is broken and there is such darkness. But you are the light of the world. The darkness cannot overcome you. And you have called us, those who have given our hearts to you, to be your witnesses to the ends of the earth. We are to bring hope, love, healing, forgiveness, mercy, peace, where we work, live, learn and play. Help us to use these gifts wisely, to give of them generously and to do so with thankful hearts. We never do this alone, for you are always with us. In Jesus' name...Amen."