

Rabbi's Column

These are the Rabbi's opening remarks at the Anti-Hate service held last week at the Synagogue.

Bruchim HaBa'im.

Welcome to this Interfaith Anti-Hate and Memorial Event.

Thank you all for coming today.

I hope nobody minds if I say that I would be perfectly happy to never have another event like this again. We have plenty of other reasons to gather together, and we should make use of each one.

There are 13 candles lit below me. Each candle represents one of the lives, one of the worlds destroyed by hate within the past seven days. There are probably more, somewhere in the country, but these are the ones of which I know. Their names will be mentioned specifically later on.

The Anti-Defamation League has indicated that the massacre in Pittsburgh this past Shabbat was the single largest death toll of Jews in America from an anti-Semitic act. We are here in solidarity with their suffering – yet we are not here only for them.

We are here because of the racially motivated murders in Kentucky last week. Had the murderer chosen another day to try to kill people in one of the local AME Churches, he might have caught people gathered in prayer and killed them, as has happened before. The church door was locked, so he went to a local store and killed two people whom he thought might have belonged to that church, based simply upon the color of their skin.

We are here because another person spray painted the outside of Trinity Episcopal Church in Lander with cruel anti-gay graffiti.

We are here because these people showed their denial of God when they demeaned the underlying reality that we are all created in God's image.

Approximately ten days ago, many Jewish congregations in America commemorated Refugee Shabbat, a program sponsored by HIAS, the Hebrew Immigration Aid Society. Their motto used to be, "We help the immigrants because they are Jewish." Now their motto is, "We help the immigrants because we are Jewish." The Pittsburgh shooter did not like the concept of being nice to the stranger, so he decided to do something about it. He decided to kill the source of such a strange belief, by killing the Jews who approved of the message.

When the congregation in Rhode Island wrote George Washington, they were hoping he would reply that America was different from Europe. Their letter to him was wishful thinking. His reply to them cemented the difference. He wrote: It is now no more that toleration is spoken of as if it were the indulgence of one class of people that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights, for, happily, the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance, requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens in giving it on all occasions their effectual support.

Had this been another country in another century, something else might have also happened this past Shabbat. Any first responders who might have been sympathetic would have been told to enable the

shooter. Not only that, but there would have been planned murders or destruction enabled by local governments across the entire country, so instead of 11 dead the total might have reached into the hundreds or thousands.

I am not so naïve as to think that there has not been anti-semitism in America all along. The difference is that in many other countries, anti-semitism is backed, or at least approved of, by many who run the country.

However, this is America in the 21st century, so the first responders were among the wounded, as they attempted to protect Jews. Perpetrators in these three incidents have been arrested or are being sought out.

This is America.

Mr. Rogers grew up in greater Pittsburgh. When he was young, so the story goes, he asked his mother where God was when evil things happened. She told him to look for the helpful responses – that is where God is.

This, today, and similar gatherings worldwide – this and these are where God is.