**5 Pentecost**

**June 19, 2016**

**In the name of the God of all Creation,**

**The God alive in each of us as God was alive in Jesus,**

**And the power of God known in the Spirit.**

**Amen.**

Let me begin this morning by thanking all of you for your thoughts and prayers during and following my surgery. Although I’m not as young as I used to be … and I’m still recovering … I’m feeling better now than I have in months. So thank you for your well-wishes … your cards and emails … and your prayers.

Last Sunday we all woke to the news of the horrific shooting in Orlando. Like you, I was shocked and stunned. Although my plans were to stay home from St. Cyprian’s while recovering from my surgery, I was tempted to show up anyway … to say something to you … to lead you in prayers … to embrace all of you (if only figuratively). But I was still on strong pain killers and knew that for my health I needed to stay home … that you were in good hands with Bob Cowperthwaite here in my stead.

Few details were known early last Sunday morning … only later did we receive an accurate count of the number of victims … those killed and those wounded. And we knew nothing at that point about the shooter and any possible motive. Only that there had been another mass shooting in our nation. This one in Orlando at a gay nightclub.

As the news came in people began to respond … respond in love found in a common grief … respond with gatherings and vigils. One young woman here in St. Augustine couldn’t find a vigil to attend, so she organized her own and on Monday evening, as the sun was setting, people gathered at the Bayfront to mourn those who died and pray for the families and loved ones left behind. Some say there may have been as many as 400 people at the vigil.

As the week went on we began to see the faces of those killed in the shooting at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando. Face after face; beautiful, young, LGBT people, their eyes full of light and life. Lives so precious, unique, fragile, sacred. Each one reflecting the image of their Creator. Each one a beloved son or daughter. Their loss is a gaping wound, a searing pain, an everlasting ache.

It is tempting to be paralyzed by such a monstrously hateful act. It is tempting to despair and one more time to say “it is just the way the world is now.” But I believe that kind of despair is a victory for hate. Hate wants us to be too weak to change anything. These people in Orlando were targeting because of who they love, and there have been outpourings of love around the nation and around the world … love in response to hate. Love does not despair … love makes us strong … love gives us the courage to act … love gives us hope that change is possibly … love allows us to change the end of the story. But, remember that love is a verb, and to love means to do something.

Gay and lesbian persons around the world are feeling the impact of the Orlando shooting deeply. They are mourning the deaths of these people as if they were family, connected somehow by invisible but unbreakable strands. That is because they know. They know what it’s like to be despised for who they are. They have felt the hatred in the cold glances and suspicious stares. They know how it feels to have disapproval and disgust pushed down upon them like a suffocating pillow. They know the pain of being marginalized and disenfranchised and excluded from institutions … such as the church … that they want so much to be a part of. They know what it is like to be ignored as if they didn’t even exist. They have felt the pain of existential death that is subtle, yet just as powerful as an actual physical death.

Politicians from both sides reflected upon the shooting … some to make points for their side, but so did leaders in many faith communities. A Baptist preacher in Sacramento, California told his congregation that the only tragedy of the Orlando nightclub shooting was that “more of them didn’t die.” Pastor Roger Jimenez vilified “sodomites” in his sermon and said their deaths “help society.” Jimenez said Christianity condemns homosexuality and that “the Bible teaches that these people deserve to die.”

My response to Pastor Jimenez is that we cannot pray in love, and live in hate, and still think we are worshipping God.

In our Episcopal Church there have been a variety of response to the shooting in Orlando. The Episcopal Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City held a Requiem Eucharist yesterday for those killed in Orlando. The Diocese of Newark included a list of over 20 churches in the Diocese holding vigils during the week, and Bishop Mark Beckwith, leader of Bishops United Against Gun Violence, spoke at an interfaith service in Morristown. In the Diocese of Ohio the Cathedral in Cleveland sponsored a vigil and Bishop Mark Hollingsworth spoke and prayed for the victims. However, in other diocese nothing was said at all, or, if something was said, the LGBT community was not even mentioned.

But we don’t have to agree on anything or everything to be kind to each other. Yet, we all know people who are not affirming of LGBT people. But even most of them are outraged by this shooting. I know they must feel the anguish and pain of the friends and families of the victims in Orlando, and I hope they are praying for them.

However, when people say that one can “love the sinner, but hate the sin,” or when someone offer condolences with the qualification that they “don’t agree with homosexuality,” I wonder if they realize what they are really doing? To me, they are preventing people from being fully alive. In trying to save people from what they believe is their sin, they continue to oppress them.

Sexuality or gender is not something we can separate ourselves from. As human beings, it is a vital, intentional, beautiful part of who we are. And it comes in many, many glorious colors. The Jesus I know and proclaim said to “love one another” and he didn’t put any qualifiers on it. If love is indeed a verb, then we cannot say that we love another and then passively or intentionally ignore them. Love calls us to act, just as Jesus acted throughout his life and ministry … actions that led him to the cross. And if we are to take seriously what Jesus took seriously then we must turn our love into action. It is the only way things will change.

We human beings are such wonderfully complex creatures, displaying such an array of colors and intricate patterns reflecting the glory of the divine … we are ALL made in the image of God. We are made to love one another, forging relationships and journeying onwards together in peace and joy, reflecting the sacred communal dance of the divine. We were not made to be forced into boxes. We were never meant to all be the same.

In the wake of this horrifying tragedy, let us search our hearts and seek to make a better world, for all people. These people in Orlando were targeting because of who they love, and there have been outpourings of love around the nation and around the world … love in response to hate. Remember, love does not despair … love makes us strong … love gives us the courage to act … love gives us hope that change is possibly … love allows us to change the end of the story. And then remember, love is a verb, and to love means to do something.

I end with portions of two poems. One of them is found in our Prayer Book and is called a Prayer attributed to St. Francis of Assisi. The other is from a sonnet written by the creator and star of the Broadway musical *Hamilton,* Lin-Manuel Mirada, read in his acceptance speech at the Tony Awards on Sunday night, just hours after the shooting in Orlando.

*When senseless acts of tragedy remind us*

*That nothing here is promised, not one day*

*This show is proof that history remembers*

*We live through times when hate and fear seem stronger*

*We rise and fall and light from dying embers*

*Remembrances that hope and love lasts long*

*And love is love is love is love is love is love is love is love is love*

*Cannot be killed or swept aside,*

And the Prayer Attributed to St. Francis is found on page 833 in the Book of Common Prayer. Let us pray this together.

*Lord, make us instruments of your peace.*

*Where there is hatred, let us sow love;*

*where there is injury, pardon;*

*where there is discord, union;*

*where there is doubt, faith;*

*where there is despair, hope;*

*where there is darkness, light;*

 *where there is sadness, joy.*

*Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;*

*to be understood as to understand;*

*to be loved as to love.*

*For it is in giving that we receive;*

*it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;*

*and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.*

*Amen.*

Amen.