

A message from Rabbi Liben

Adonai is my light and my help. Whom shall I fear? (Psalm 27)

Our hearts are heavy with shock and with grief. A gunman entered congregation Tree of Life- Or L' Simcha in Pittsburgh and opened fire shortly after Shabbat morning services began this morning. *Or L'simcha*: Light of Joy. What a beautiful name for a congregation; I am heartsick at the irony of it.

This evening, I am feeling a mixture of grief, sorrow, rage and fear. Grief for the eleven victims and their families; our hearts go out to them. Sorrow that racism and anti-Semitism, two inextricably linked sicknesses, continue to exist in the United States, even among a minority of our fellow citizens. Rage at the sporadic outbursts of this kind of evil, which seem so random, and thus so difficult to predict or guard against. Fear that when such incidents hit home, as this one surely does, our sense of safety, belonging and security may be irreparably undermined.

We must not let that fear gain the upper hand. As Jews, we rarely have. Twenty five hundred years ago, the prophet Zechariah wrote, "Not by might, not by power, but by My Spirit." Trust, even in the face of radical uncertainty, is the ultimate antidote to fear.

We cannot promise that tragedy will never touch our loved ones or us. Yet, we know that to live in the shadow of fear is to live a stunted life. It is to cede victory to the crazed gunman.

In the short term, we will do the prudent things that need to be done: There will be a police presence at the Temple tomorrow during Religious School, and Monday morning, during Nursery School. Our leadership has spoken to the Natick police, who are confident that there is no immediate threat. We will continue to clarify our emergency plans for every foreseeable contingency, a process that has already been underway for some time, and we will continue to explore all of our security options going forward.

And yet, I am convinced that our greatest strength and security comes from our willingness to live our lives together fully, and unafraid. Let me share with you one story: Last year, after a rash of synagogue bomb threats, we approached the Hartford Presbyterian Church down the street with a request. We wanted to know if we could use their building as an evacuation location for our school students, should it ever become necessary. A few days later, Pastor Eric Markman walked over to the Temple to give us a key to his building. At a meeting the night before, the leadership of the Church expressed concern that their building might be closed when we needed them, and wanted to make sure that in an emergency, our students and teachers could always find refuge there. That act of concern and generosity continues to touch my heart and to fuel my courage.

We have also decided to hold a memorial service so that we can share our prayers for the bereaved, and process our own sense of loss at this time. **Please join us for minyan at the Temple tomorrow evening (Sunday) at 7:30pm, which will include a brief memorial for the victims of Tree of life-Or'L'simcha.**

B'Shalom,

Rabbi Dan Liben