

MESSAGE FROM THE BISHOP: June 14, 2016

Thoughts from the Bishop after the tragedy in Orlando

Aloha,

It has not been easy to write something after the tragedy in Orlando. The emotions of frustration, anger and sadness merge. As I have pondered and prayed through the past couple of days, I come away with a few thoughts.

As a nation today, the United States is violent and frightened. The culture of violence is deep in our soul. Our nation was formed by slavery and expansionism that displaced (and obliterated) the original people of the land. It continues in our obsession with guns and a jingoistic notion of being “the greatest.” All of this masks a fear of being marginalized and powerless. This is driven by a fear that there is not “enough” (wealth, power, life) to go around, and the fear of the other and those who are different. Isn’t fear often the cause of sin? I think fear drives our collective sin as a nation. Fear drives individual acts of violence. We just now have the means to do great harm.

This stands in stark contrast to the Gospel and to the very picture of the Commonwealth of God presented by Jesus. I think of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) and Matthew 25. Jesus is telling us, his followers, how to live in the world. The Commonwealth of God is founded on very different assumptions: “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you that you must not oppose those who want to hurt you. If people slap you on your right cheek, you must turn the left cheek to them as well.... I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who harass you.”

In the end, we will continue to work in the world as it is. As citizens of the United States, we must fight for better gun laws, build a just and equitable civil society, welcome the refugee, and stand up to prejudice. I am increasingly convinced, however, that those who claim to be citizens in the Commonwealth of God – to be Christians – have other responsibilities as well. There is no room for guns in our homes. I think that includes the hobby hunter or the collector. It is time to find a new hobby. I know there are those whose livelihoods depend on guns (the farmer facing predators and some who yet live a subsistence life). That is not true of most of us. As Christians, we should not have guns for protection or for the sport of shooting. The gun has become a symbol of that which destroys and carries death. It does not belong in the households of the Commonwealth of God.

Likewise, there is no room for the rhetoric of being the greatest nation in the Commonwealth of God. We are the children of God – the one that Jesus called “Abba” (“Daddy”). Our nation struggles to live as best as possible, but we will fall short. As Christians, we realize that the “City on the Hill” is a metaphor and an aspiration. It must never be confused with the actual historical United States – past, present or future. We know that there are no strangers and no outcasts in the Commonwealth of God. We begin to get a sense of the possibilities when we

hear Paul's words from the Letter to the Galatians: "There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor free; nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." We now add that there is neither straight nor LGBT. We know there is a place for the atheist and the one with questions, for the Buddhist and the Muslim. That is the only way to live the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:36-40).

I am struck also by the depth of pain in the loss of so many lives. As I looked at the photographs of those who were murdered in Orlando and prayed for each them by name, I could not but notice that many of the young men looked very much like my own sons. Jesus gives us a promise (Matthew 5:2): "Happy are people who grieve, because they will be made glad." The senseless violence can only be given meaning by the way we, the living, carry on. As the followers of Jesus Christ, that has special meaning and responsibilities. The promise of "gladness" lives in the possibility of the Commonwealth of God, but today there is only sadness in the grief.

This past week, Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendell died. In the mid-1980s, I heard her speak at Trinity Church, Wall Street, with her husband Jürgen Moltmann. Though speaking specifically to women as a feminist liberation theologian, her words cut to my core. She called us to understand that we are each "good," "whole" and "beautiful" by the very will of God. She said, "God needs us as ones who have accepted themselves as good and whole and thus enabled to renew through themselves the disturbed and destroyed creation. God needs us as ones who are beautiful and who can break through the vicious cycle of self-hate and contempt of others." Her words brought me some comfort as the news from Orlando has come out. We have our calling to "break through the vicious cycle of self-hate and contempt of others." That comes not by fear and isolation, but with love and engagement, and by meeting violence with peace. In God's Commonwealth, there are no outcasts.

Aloha ma o Iesu Kristo, ko makou Haku,
+Bob

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