

Sermon 091017 Hate
Scripture Matthew 5: 43-48
Sermon Title The Choice

In order to be approved for ordination in the UCC, you have to write a 'faith statement' and appear before a group called The Committee on Church and Ministry. I wrote my faith statement and appeared before the committee to defend it. I was turned down on my first try.

The reason I was turned down was that I said in the faith statement and to the committee that I had no intention of being a political preacher. They didn't like that so they told me to rewrite my faith statement and I could return for another try with the committee.

Well, guess what. I didn't change a word of my statement and went back in taking the same stand and they passed me on the second try. The reason I gave for not preaching politics is that most churches a range of political views among the members. If I preach politics someone will say, "I didn't come to church to listen to that crap."

I have carefully kept to that commitment in my ten plus years as a pastor. Proof of that is that you don't know if I belong to a political party. I have a keen interest in politics, by the way, and I've never missed an election.

I'm keeping the no political preaching today but I feel compelled to address events that took place last month. I speak specifically of

events in Charlottesville, VA last month and the two times the Boston Holocaust Memorial was vandalized this summer.

Those acts were not about politics. They were about hate and bigotry. As a pastor and an American, I am morally bound to take a stand and speak out.

Let me be clear, as repugnant as I find the KKK, Neo-Nazis, Alt-Right, and white supremacists, they have every right to express their views and peaceably assemble in the public square. Those rights are for all of us. I also have the right to reject their views and speak out against them.

However, what happened in Charlottesville and Boston were not peaceful, but acts of terrorism. Those people were armed to the teeth with helmets and body armor. They are terrorists. Terrorism is insidious. It creates a sense of fear and loathing. The saving grace is that no shots were fired. If one shot had been fired it would have been a massacre.

My friend Mona, who many of you have met, has a son, Eli, who is now a college graduate. She told me a story a long time ago, when she brought Eli to a playground in Brookline. There were three moms and three children in the story. The children were having a blast playing together and laughing. The three moms were in conversation.

Mona is a Jew. One mother was a Muslim, wearing the hijab, the head scarf. The other mother was Christian. The women remarked about how their children had much to teach adults about how to get along with people who are different from you.

Make no mistake, hatred and bigotry are learned. Psychological studies have shown that. I remember my own dad trying to help me out and prepare me for life by trying to teach me about African Americans and Jews, but he didn't use those terms.

A few days after the Charlottesville incident, I read a heartbreaking letter from a dad whose youngest son is a white supremacist. The dad said that his son did not learn the hatred at home. He renounced his son publicly and declared his son not welcome back home until he renounces his beliefs.

He wrote that his son joked, "We fascists don't believe in free speech. We just throw those people in the ovens." It is hideous that this sort of thing is getting air time in this country.

It is time to stand up and to be heard. It is well documented that so many were silent as the Nazis gained power in 1930's Germany. We cannot allow what happened there and then happen here and now in our country.

I am aware that there are teenagers here. I would think that this sermon is making them uncomfortable. I expect it is making everyone

uncomfortable. I don't think we are doing our jobs as parents and leaders if we try to shield our young people from the realities of this world. We are obliged to make them aware of this stuff and show them another way.

Our young people need to know that hatred, bigotry, and antisemitism exist in this country, that does not in any way define who we are as a country. We are a nation of immigrants which has largely been a strength. Scientists have shown over and over again that the different skin colors and ethnic variances are miniscule compared to how similar all humans are to each other.

It is about tolerance. Our diversity as a nation is to be celebrated. It contributes to the richness of American culture. This includes the gay community. Religious freedom is a bedrock American value. Anyone who denies that is not a true American.

Some of the footage out of Charlottesville was so disturbing. I heard one ignorant white supremacist say that God is on their side and that the Bible backs them up. Well, that is not our God and definitely not our Bible.

Jesus says it simply and well in Matthew 5: 44, "But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." That is our God and our Bible.

That is the truth. You cannot answer hate with hate. That only makes things worse. You can only answer hate with love. Love is the answer, even when it is people that you find it impossible to love.

I look at it like this. My answer to the hate that is raging in our country these days is this. I recommit myself to being the best husband, pastor, friend, sibling, and American that I can be. If I love those whom I have contact with, I'm making my corner of the country a little bit better. That's all I can do. That's all any of us can do.

Actually, I've added another thing since Charlottesville. When I see people of color, or someone who is clearly a Jew, or Muslim, I make an effort to reach out and be friendly to them. I have even had a few conversations about Charlottesville and the Holocaust Memorial vandalism with them. Making a point to say, "That is not us. We need to stick together, now." I figure if I don't do that, they might wonder if I'm a hater, too. All my experiences doing that have been very positive.

South Africa's Nelson Mandela knew a lot about white supremacists and their hateful ways. He said, "No one was born hating a person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite."

Only a fool would think that hate will disappear if we love one another. Hate, bigotry, racism, homophobia, sexism, antisemitism, and the like will always be there. Each one of us gets choose. We can choose to be a hateful person or a loving person. The only thing that depends on that decision is the future. Which do you choose? AMEN