

Let us pray,

Lord, remind us that every human life matters to you. Work in us that we may see the worth in every human life and all of your creation.

Amen.

With the recent assassination of Charlie Kirk, a political activist.
And ANOTHER school shooting in Colorado.

There are a lot of emotions I am witnessing across social media
and just talking with people in our community.

As well with in my own heart.

I have been seeing a lot of people trying to rationalize their
feelings, telling other people how they should or should not feel,
and just a lot of advice on why someone would want to take
another persons life and whether or not that life mattered.

I do not bring these recent events up to choose a political side or to tell you how you should or should not be feeling about these recent events.

I do however, think it is important that we are reminded on what Jesus tells us we should be doing in these situations and in life in general.

I have heard other religious leaders making the claim that it is ok to pray for the death of another human being based on the harm that they have done to others.

That after a determined amount of time that we decide is long enough, for praying for their conversion, whatever we think their conversation should be, that it is ok to start to pray for their death.

I want you to know, that in the reading and praying of scripture and our Lutheran Theology, I cannot and will not stand by this assumption that it is ever ok to pray for the death of someone.

As Christians, if we come across someone that we feel is not living a very Gospel centered life, we should be praying for their conversion to be more loving and merciful and repentful, never their deaths.

And when I say conversion, I mean a life centered around Christ and what he represented,
not to our own understanding of how we think life should be.

When we start to justify evil acts to counter other evil acts, even praying to God that he will kill someone for us, we are running down a road that is not Christ like, and ultimately harmful, not only physically but spiritually.

Our Gospel today includes the self righteous religious folks yelling at Jesus for eating with sinners and tax collectors.

The religious self righteous were claiming that they are more righteous than those people, and therefore, should not have to

deal with them, and should even be allowed to shun them and push them away.

Ultimately saying that the sinner and the tax collectors life is less than.

It is a way of creating the other, a way of dehumanizing, a way to justify evil for evil.

Jesus reminds us, that the way of the Cross is not the way of the world.

Jesus reminds us, that if we are to be followers of him, we must be willing to eat and dine and befriend those who we consider to be “sinners.”

The vagueness of what sin is, I think is intentional.

Because for Jesus the quote “sin”, doesn’t matter.

What matters is how religious people choose to act to those they deem as “not-in-my-group” or morally bankrupt in their eyes.

If I took a survey and asked all of you to let me know of the worst sins that us humans do on earth today, I know that each one of you would give vastly different answers.

So whose sins do we use?

Who do we condemn?

The answer is no one.

Jesus wants us to stop condemning one another, and to start promoting love, peace, grace, mercy, forgiveness and justice.

Jesus wants a mindset shift.

One that removes our desire to be God, to be the judge.

And replaces it with one who is a sheep who follows the good shepherd.

The shepherd who eats and dines and befriends sinners.

The shepherd who comes to save the world, not destroy it.

The shepherd who chose to forgive, rather than retaliate.

The shepherd who chose mercy, over vengeance and resentment.

The shepherd who gives, rather than takes away.

Jesus tells us to pray for those who persecute us, pray for our enemies, pray, pray, pray, for their conversion to love and peace and mercy for all people.

In no world do I see our God condoning prayer for the death of another human being.

In no world do I see our God condoning prayer for the death or excommunication of groups of people.

In no world do I see our God wanting to take away the chance for any person or group of people to experience the life changing presence of Jesus Christ through love of God and neighbor.

I know that this is hard to hear and even harder to do.

I know it goes against everything that we feel inside.

Many of us have a sense of self righteousness, and understanding of what we think is good and bad, and we often think the world needs to live by those standards.

But here is the thing that Jesus wants us to hear, the world we want will never bring peace, if it doesn't include the other.

We must stop pointing fingers, and instead continue to redirect our gaze and the worlds gaze to the life that Jesus calls us into.

The one where we pray and learn to love our enemies.

The one where we reach out our hand to the immigrant, outcast, poor and marginalized.

The one where we stand between the ones throwing the rocks and say, those who have not signed, throw the first rock.

Ive always said that if Jesus came back today he would be the great equalizer, because both sides would not like Jesus very much.

What Jesus asks of us is not easy and I recognize that.

However, Jesus reminds us that we cannot fight fire with fire, we cannot fight violence with violence.

Jesus showed us this on the cross.

On his dying breath, Jesus didn't wish harm on those who put him there, he asked God to forgive them.

He prayed for his enemy.

So why do we always want to retaliate violence with violence.

Why do we always go straight to vengeance, instead of mercy.

True strength comes not from the one who can punch the hardest.

But from the one who can get punched, and pray for mercy for the one who punched them.

My heart hurts for our country.

There is so much pain and resentment for each other.

So much division.

So much dehumanization of the "other".

So many of us are lost sheep.

But as Christians we have a shepherd who we can trust and who will lead us to life,

So no matter what side of the political isle you find yourself on,
please follow the life of Christ and not the world.

Jesus begs us to learn how to love our enemy, rather than hate
them.

To love those different from us, and call them friend.

Because if we all can learn this lesson.

Maybe one day, our enemies will become our friends.

And maybe one day, we will learn to stop trying to be God, and
to be followers of God, to live life with love, compassion, and
mercy, first and foremost, always.

Amen.