



Good Shepherd E-News Extra (5 October 2017)

The Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd in Athens, Ohio, is a diverse, welcoming, growing congregation, committed to seeking and serving Christ in all persons.

Las Vegas

Dear Parishioners and Friends of Church of the Good Shepherd,

Like all of you, I woke up on Monday to the tragic news of the mass shooting in Las Vegas. On Tuesday I listened to a sorority "mom" who is deeply concerned for one of her students who was in Vegas for the event, and left early. I heard her worry for her student, how the young woman couldn't take her eyes off the news reports on the TV and told her this had been a family event, that there were young children, even infants present. For too many people, last Sunday was their worst day, when a stranger took the lives of loved ones, and for most of us, such pain is difficult to imagine. As I listened, my heart broke even more as I realized how widespread the pain of this mass murder is.

What may be even more difficult for us to wrap our minds around is the lack of answers that would help us understand such an unimaginable crime. While we might scour the news for answers to our questions, please let me suggest another way we can respond to the real life horror.

Let us grieve with those who grieve, let's not hold back and hide, let's take a prayerful moment to realize the dead and injured are all someone's child, sister, brother, mother or father, friend, spouse, or ex. While we may or may not know someone personally affected by this loss, we are all beloved children of God, and therefore connected. In that connection is our common grief, and our hope and reminder of the necessity to maintain our relationships with each other and with God.

A few of us might even be able to pray for the soul who committed this terrible crime.

I believe the way forward is to continue to be courageous followers of Christ, to follow him even into the dark and painful places in the

world and enter those places with the love of God. To be vulnerable enough to share sorrows with people and the joys when they come, and express how both remind us of our shared connection to each other and God. We can do what we can to be God's love in this heartbroken world, a world so desperate for healing and reminders of our shared connections.

Below, please find our Bishop's words following the mass shooting. And let this be a renewed commitment for us all to be in the world in all its hurts intentionally embodying the love of God in Christ.

Many Blessings,
Mother Deborah

Diocese of Southern Ohio

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Over the past few days there have been countless expressions of grief over the victims of the Los Vegas massacre and condolence for those who have lost family and friends. I add my own voice to these statements, and am sure I speak for the people of this diocese in praying for strength and courage for everyone touched by this terrible event.

I am also concerned about you, my diocese. I worry about our children, suspended between fear for their lives and the desire to fire back. I am praying for their parents, who are doing their best to teach them about God's protection and mercy. I am anxious for all of us whose faith is shaken. I pray for anyone who is working for a solution to gun violence, and anyone who sees no way forward.

Here is my word to all of you, for what it's worth. Modern technology has amplified the reach of human cruelty and vindictiveness. But human sin is no argument against the abiding presence of God. We may wish that God would shut sin down, but we would all be automatons if that were so. God both risks and takes responsibility for our freedom. That is the biblical witness from beginning to end.

As followers of Christ, we are called to be messengers of hope in the midst of political paralysis, emotional desensitizing, ongoing polarization and pervasive cynicism. How shall we manage this? As I write this on the feast of St. Francis of Assisi, I am reminded of his total identification with Jesus, culminating in his receiving of the stigmata, the wounds of Jesus in his own body. Few of us are called to such a radical identification with our crucified and risen Lord. In fact, it's probably the other way around. Jesus identifies with us, bearing our wounds. In so doing, he demonstrates continually God's existence and God's care for us.

How can we take this in? By taking time each day to sit or run quietly in the presence of Jesus. By reading and struggling with scripture (and thus invoking the presence of Jesus, who is the Word of God). By going to church and seeing the body of Christ there, poised to move out into the wilderness. In any case, it is our inheritance and right as baptized persons to be in union with Jesus. However we open ourselves to that union, it will flow in.

So, back to Las Vegas. True religion is not about closed eyes, still less about hardened hearts. My prayer is that together, as a Christian community, we can make a witness, which, out of our diversity, speaks to the whole church. It my primary prayer is that you are all right.

Blessings,

+Tom Breidenthal