

TRINITY B - 2018

Canticle 13

Isaiah 6: 1-8

Psalm 29

Romans 8: 12-17

John 3: 1-17

I received this flyer from several places, online and in person, encouraging me to celebrate Memorial Day Weekend with a “Love Your Neighbor” message from the pulpit. I’ll read it to you:

Stand up against hatred.

Stand up against racism.

Stand up against Anti-Semitism.

Pray and work for peace in your neighborhood and on social media. Let us commit to loving our neighbor this Memorial Day Weekend.

Love thy neighbor. Memorial Day Weekend, May 25-27, 2018 in places of worship across Ocean and Monmouth. The pictures are of a Sikh man, a rabbi, a white Christian pastor, a Black Christian pastor, a Muslim iman, a Hindu, a Roman Catholic priest, and a Buddhist monk. (Note: All are men.)

Who do you suppose might be encouraging us to participate in such an event for Monmouth and Ocean County???

[Take Answers!!!]

I think you will be surprised. I was surprised. This event is sponsored by the Ocean County Prosecutor's Office. According to the Asbury Park Press, *"Diverse religions across Ocean County will try to speak with one voice this weekend — that's the goal behind the "Love Thy Neighbor" message, an effort by the Ocean County Prosecutor's Office and local religious leaders to stand up against hatred."* Joseph Coronato, the Ocean County Prosecutor, is best known for his very active role in fighting opioid addiction. Last week, at a press conference to promote this event, he said: *"The law enforcement objective is to be proactive so we're not having swastikas painted on religious items or having people calling people names...Eliminating crime before the crime begins. Understanding cultures, understanding we're all part of the human race."...There have been bias incidents across the Jersey Shore, from a*

swastika spray-painted at a Lakewood synagogue to anti-Semitic and racist flyers posted in Asbury Park. Intolerance is up statewide, reversing a downward trend, according to the latest numbers from the Attorney General's Office.ⁱ

I first heard about this at the Ministerium meeting when one of the Assembly of God pastors took time off work to come and promote this event. I got another notice from my anti-racism training partner, Deacon Ted Moore, who serves in northern Monmouth County. On Friday, we even received encouragement and more flyers from Officer Sean Crotty of the local police department.

All these various sources want us to love our neighbors. Since Jesus also wants us to love our neighbors, this seemed like an idea we could get behind today. It is Memorial Day Weekend, when we celebrate those members of our national family who died defending their neighbors in war.

Today is Trinity Sunday on our church calendar. After Pentecost, when those hundreds of thousands of new people sought

to follow Jesus, the apostles tried to explain Jesus and his relationship to God, as well as explaining the experiences of the Spirit which continued after that first blast of fire and wind and strange languages which energized the disciples to tell the story. Some ideas were rejected and others accepted. The orthodox view came to be that God is Three – Father, Son and Holy Spirit; and yet One God.

Only some of the people on this flyer would agree with that specific view of God. Only the Christians pictured here would find common ground with us. Yet, we are called to join with them in love and prayer, that we may live together peacefully in safe communities. We join with them to pray and work for peace in our neighborhoods and on social media. We do this because hate, racism and anti-Semitism are common in our community and the communities around us.

Some of these things are quite divisive in our congregation. This coming Tuesday night, Deacon Moore and I are leading an anti-racism workshop for the search committee and vestry of Holy Innocents' in Beach Haven. You all will have the same

workshop further on into the priest search process. When I mentioned the training a few weeks back, I heard and saw the reactions of several of you. I am a proud anti-racist and I see way too much hatred in our community, even without being connected to social media. I understand hatred of our neighbors, racism and anti-Semitism to be sin and against the will of God. We each promise, in the baptismal covenant, to respect the freedom and dignity of every human being. That is what Joseph Coronato is asking of our communities this weekend.

We all have an image of God which is shaped by our own upbringing and experience. Psychologists say that by age 5, children already have an image of God. Six years ago, Celeste Seruya drew a picture of God for our bulletin cover, representing her first communion class. On that day, I read you a lovely book for very small children...a simplified version of What Is God's Name? by Rabbi Sandy Eisenberg Sasso.

Do you have a favorite name or image of God? [Listen and affirm responses.]

All these images help us to understand God. Over the years, we've used different metaphors and images to show God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. [Three-in-one oil, shamrocks, triangles, dancers, apples] But, there is not much point in understanding the theory unless we have an experience of God. **God loves us and wants our love in return.** Everything we understand about God feeds into that fundamental experience of God's love for us and for the world. Anything I might explain about the Trinity and the nature of God, is no substitute for the experience of loving and being loved by God directly and seeing his love in yourself and the world around you.

God is involved with the whole world and all its people. Jesus told Nicodemus in today's Gospel: **God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.**

We have our part in saving the world. Our part is spreading love and light. God is always trying to draw us into the life of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit enters our very

bodies and draws us toward God, teaching us to speak, to cry out in the language of God.

When we choose to judge others, shun others, speak harshly to or about others – that is the work of forces of evil.

A few years ago, I told you about Frederick Buechner, who used an interesting image of the Trinity: *God beyond us (the Father), God beside us (Jesus), and God within us (the Holy Spirit)*. If we focus only on a God beyond us, feeling left to our own devices here, we may feel judged, abandoned and alone. If we focus on a God beside us, we may feel comforted, but not protected against the problems that will inevitably find us. If we focus only on a God within us, we may be misled by our own desires, masquerading as God within. By learning the language of God and practicing it; we can begin to understand the true, triune God who is manifested in our lives and we can experience more fully the abundant life God has planned for us. We need to know the God beyond us, powerfully fulfilling his creative purpose in all of the world, in all

of his people. We need to know Jesus, the Son, as our companion, teaching us and sharing our struggles; and the Spirit, God within us, transforming us and making us holy. The fullness and richness of our God is something that we will not know in its depths until we are eternally worshipping in heaven. Yet, here on earth, we can learn and stretch our experience and grow into the people we were intended to be. We can love our neighbors and work within our community to build tolerance and peace. **AMEN.**

ⁱ <https://www.app.com/story/news/local/ocean-county/2018/05/24/ocean-county-prosecutors-office-says-love-thy-neighbor/642575002/>