



Within a few miles of our homebase are several synagogues; and so, Saturday mornings are more heavily trafficked in certain neighborhoods, on the streets and the sidewalks, too. Some dressed like anyone else in the area going shopping or catching up on errands. Others with attire more to the Orthodox standards. And so, along with that, differing interpretations and applications of Torah and the Hebrew Scriptures. Much similar to all the Christians making their way to church buildings this morning. And amidst all the differences among the Protestants and the

Catholics and the non-denominational, let alone with our Jewish siblings of God, I wonder if, in the end, we all make the spiritual trek with, at least, a couple desires in common: wanting to catch a glimpse of a peace beyond our understanding and yearning for the God who doesn't condemn, but provides an eternal safety net of grace that we cannot seem to find anywhere else.

Except, around this time a few years ago, a certain group of individuals insisted on voicing their differences against those who would be making the spiritual trek on a Saturday morning. Perhaps they were just doing so for attention, a publicity stunt, the typical wanting to go viral on social media, or simply desiring to stoke fear and intimidation on a group of people they didn't appreciate. Nevertheless, they advertised the title as a Day of Hate, specifically aimed at our Jewish siblings of God. They weren't exactly planning for acts of violence, necessarily, but you never know what might ensue when the spark of hate is lit. Understandably so, many Jewish individuals around this country were frightened that particular weekend, including those in neighborhoods close to our homebase. And it's not that they were scared for their own life, but the problem is some of the life on those streets and on those sidewalks every Saturday morning are the youngest of children, and you cannot risk those precious souls no matter where they go to worship God.

Nevertheless, it so happened that the very day that whatever random group of individuals attempted to stoke a Day of Hate, they also, unbeknownst to them, managed to unleash a fire of hope and love, setting the stage for a moment that was far more captivating than any ill will towards a portion of humanity. So, I want to tell you about Temple Emanu-El on the Upper East Side of New York City. Back in the 1840's, when Manhattan was becoming a home to waves of immigrants from Europe, it was also there in the second-floor room of a loft building, that 33 Jewish siblings of God started a ministry that would significantly impact the neighborhood and beyond for generations. Over a couple decades later, they built what was the largest synagogue in America. Eventually, as the Big Apple grew, so did their community of faith, leading them to construct what was the largest synagogue in the world. To this day, with over 175 years of history, including as the first reformed Jewish congregation with the further inclusion of modern music and women in leadership, Temple Emanu-El still stands at the corner of Fifth Avenue and 65th Street in New York City.

And perhaps one of the most pivotal moments in their impactful story was that weekend a few years ago, when a few tried to stoke fear and intimidation, Temple Emanu-El decided to host what they proclaimed as a "Day of Resolve." They not only still worshiped in spite of worries what other people might try to do to them; they praised and sang to God in front of their main entrance on the street in one of the busiest cities in the entire world.

And even though the individuals who attempted to stoke whatever ill will towards a certain group of humanity based on their own interpretation of Scripture, other Christians

continue to be captivated with the idea of God not coming to condemn the world, but to offer a safety net of compassion and mercy that seems to be coming more and more difficult to find for all those making their spiritual treks in this world. And so, joining the singled-out Jewish children of God that morning were local Presbyterians and Episcopalians, among others, trying somehow, some way to provide a glimpse of a peace that surpasses all human understanding.

Temple Emanu-El also does its part in trying to provide some semblance of peace during the week to lives who are seemingly overrun by different day-to-day fears and worries. They serve free meals for lunch on Sundays. They make prom dresses for local high school seniors who cannot afford them otherwise. They put hygiene packs together for the homeless. They too are under this holy impression that God has no interest whatsoever in condemning the world, but to instill hope, instead.

We Christians may never agree on many aspects of Scripture interpretation and application in this lifetime, but I like to think our Lutheran spin on this is that, through our baptism, every day is meant to be a Day of Resolve. That every day believing God has set us free from sin and death, we are resolved to bring a glimpse of the Divine love and mercy and compassion and grace and hope to all those in our midst. We are not here to condemn the world, but to be the living embodiment of a grace-filled safety net to all those who seriously wonder if any of it can be found anymore. And we insist it is more than possible, because we have seen it for ourselves, and we cannot help ourselves but share it with the world that God still for some reason beyond comprehension still loves. So, for that Greatest News for all of us, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!