

Where is there a place that can hold this grief? How can it be that 11 people, gathered in three separate small congregations under one roof, could be murdered in the very place we go to seek respite from the world’s woes, and to find the strength to face our imperfect world with renewed strength? How can it be that three floors of a synagogue are soaked in blood? The grief in ALL our hearts is enormous- for my fellow clergy who sit here, this hits too close to home, because we know the names of those in our own congregations, the ones who are with us every sabbath morning, to pray and sing, and lift up the human spirit. Our denial is stripped away- it could be any of our houses of worship, for hatred knows no bounds. It can be a church, a mosque, a temple a synagogue, a pre-school , a nightclub, a high school—and it has been all these-- because hate, crouching at the door, when fanned and emboldened, steps across the threshold into violence. And when hate speech and fear mongering become our American political discourse, then we have opened the door for evil.

My people is a people acquainted with Anti -Semitism. I am asked, why do people hate Jews, and I can only respond, why do people hate? We know the traditional stereotypes of Jews plied by anti-Semites. But our contemporary political world coupled with social media has fanned anti-Semitism, from a radical left bent on delegitimizing Israel’s right to exist, to right-wing nationalists who see Jews as foreign invaders. Our college campuses are exactly where alt-right groups go to recruit young people and spread hateful ideology. We have watched the internet become a cesspool of filth, with language and visuals that are so repugnant that we can’t even describe them. There were almost 3 million anti-Semitic tweets on in the year before the last election. Statistics tells us the facts of this growing hate and the violence it begets: anti-Semitic incidents rose almost 60% in 2016, more than any other religious minority. Bit We are not the only victims of hatred and racism- Anti-Muslim crimes are up 19%, and in racially motivated hate crimes, African Americans were targeted in about half of the reported race crimes in 2016. (3,489). The neo-Nazi march in Charlottesville in August 2017 didn’t come from nowhere. It was the expression of this hate: chants of Jews will not replace us, the beating of a black man DeAndre Harris, the plowing of a car into civilians, taking the life of Heather Heyer. There are almost 1,000 hate groups that exist in America, and many that describe themselves as militias. Fear, and inflammatory speech, coupled with high powered assault weapons. Is this our vision of our beloved country? Our years of complacency must be over.

I am left feeling sick, and angry, in my grief. It is enough to lose 11 sweet souls for being in prayer on Shabbat. It is incomprehensible that Vicki Jones and Maurice Stallard should go to their Kentucky Kroger’s to buy food for their families and be murdered for being black. I am left with no words that a prayer service at Mother Emanuel AME (African Methodist Episcopal) Church, Mother Emanuel in Charleston should have welcomed a

white racist three years ago into their circle and then have 9 members including the pastor murdered by him, in his hopes of starting a race war. And the list goes on and on.

So where is the place that can hold my grief? My faith in Torah, my faith in God, my faith in you- every one of you. For in that way that God seems to bring light into darkness, last week's killer left the pages of Torah portion *Vayera* open for us to find comfort. Last Shabbat we read of our patriarch Abraham sitting at the entrance to his tent, ready to welcome strangers. We Jews take this as a teaching of radical hospitality, of opening our doors to all – just as we have done today. We will not be overcome with fear of hatred or of weapons; we live as Jews, our home open to all of good faith. And I find courage from Abraham who stands up to the greatest authority, the greatest power, to God, because he perceives that injustice is about to be done! God is not dismayed. It was for this very moment that God chose Abraham to be a leader- "I have singled him out that he may instruct his children by doing what is right and just, *l'asot tzedakah u'mishpat*..." "We are to stand up for what is right and for what is just, that is our heritage and that is the legacy of last week's massacre of innocent people.

These words bring comfort in our grief, in our pain. our backs may be bent, bent in grief, bent as we place earth over the bodies of 11 innocent and precious bodies, but they are not broken. We mourn, and then we stand, stand before a pernicious hate, to affirm a more powerful love, a love for others and a love for the ideals of American equality, and for the values of democracy.

We sit together through these days of shiva, but when they conclude, we stand. Elie Wiesel taught, "the opposite of love is not hate; it is indifference." We cannot afford indifference or complacency, or we risk losing the values we cherish. And so we stand, and then we walk together. Martin Luther King taught us that whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. Every act of racist violence diminishes every one of us. The great African-American abolitionist Frederick Douglass wrote "I prayed for 20 years but received no answer until I prayed with my legs." So friends, let us sit, then stand, then walk together, lifting our voices *l'asot tzedekah u'mishpat*, for a country that can affirm what is right, and what is just, the repudiation of racism, the lifting up of tolerance, the rejection of anti-Semitism, the embracing of respect for all. Only in our deeds can we bring meaning to the deaths of those we mourn today. *Hamakom yinechem etchem b'tok avlei tzion v'yereushalayim*- may God bring comfort to all those who mourn across the country of ours and in Zion and Jerusalem, and may the memory of the deceased be a blessing. Amen.