

“In Christ there is no longer Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female,” Paul proclaims. (Galatians 3:28) He’s announcing our new identity in Christ Jesus. Each category Paul mentions is a hierarchical one – one half of the pair dominates the other. Writing to a world organized by hierarchy, Paul says that our baptism into Christ ends the world’s divisions. We who have been baptized into Christ Jesus all share the one Spirit, we are one body, and if we follow Jesus as Lord, then the divisions have lost their power.

If Paul were writing today, I believe he would expand those social dividing lines. He would tell us that there is no longer rich or poor, Muslim or Jew, Caucasian or Latino, citizen or immigrant, straight or gay. We are all one, for we are all beloved sons and daughters of our Father, God.

Today, God the Father weeps for his children. On this Father’s Day, 50 fathers of those slain in the Orlando terrorist attack will not be celebrating with their sons and daughters. Instead they are making plans for their funerals. On this Father’s Day, 53 fathers in Orlando are holding their wounded, traumatized children, praying that they will recover their health in mind, body and spirit. On this Father’s day, we are Orlando and we grieve along with them and hold our own children a little closer, and through our tears we wonder, when will the violence ever end? Newtown, Aurora, Charleston, Virginia Tech, Fort Hood, San Bernardino, and now, Orlando, (the deadliest mass shooting in the United States and the deadliest mass shooting within the United States since 9/11) has joined the list – the litany of places where mass shootings have left us shocked and heartbroken, stumbling in the darkness of grief and pain.

The man who committed the Orlando attack on an LGBT nightclub was not first and foremost a religious zealot. The violence he committed started with smaller acts of violence to his family and to himself. He seems to have been tormented by a perverted sense of Islam and an intense struggle for peace with his sexual identity. (Bishop Rob Wright- *For Faith*, June 17, 2016) He was bound and chained by his personal demons much like the demoniac in Luke’s gospel, and his internal turmoil spewed out its poison of terror upon all around him.

Politicians scramble to use this newest tragedy in shoring up their campaigns. Gun advocates rush to defend their Second Amendment rights, blaming hearts without God, schools without prayer, and courts without justice rather than entertaining the possibility that our gun laws are inadequate and our gun culture is out of control. I mean, seriously when a person on the no fly list can easily purchase an assault rifle?

We have suffered through these violent attacks so many times, that sadly we know what the president, and the politicians and the gun lobby will say. It is all too easy to wring our hands in despair and chalk it up to the culture of violence in which we live. But in the midst of this cacophony of name-calling, blame shifting, bombast, weeping, and lamentation, if we listen closely we can hear the prophet’s voice: “A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, the spirit of the Lord shall rest on him...with righteousness he shall judge the poor and decide with equity for the meek of the earth.... The wolf shall

live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid and calf and the lion and the fatling together...and a little child shall lead them.... They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain..." (Isaiah 11:1-9) Isaiah holds out for us a vision of hope of our world filled not with pain and destruction but with righteousness and justice for all, a promised day when a little child shall lead us up to that holy mountain because we are ready, finally, to turn in our damaging ways for the way of the Lord.

What do we who follow this Christ child? What do we do with this lingering prophecy that has yet to be fulfilled? Why is the shoot from the stump of Jesse taking so long to fill the whole world with the knowledge of God? The little child has come to us, two thousand years ago and counting, and we have not yet made it to God's holy mountain. Did we lose our way? Did we simply not follow? Will the night never be followed by the glorious light of the promised day?

Paul tells us that divisions have ended, and hierarchies are overturned in Jesus. He writes about what God has already accomplished, and humanity has yet to realize. It is true that Christ has shattered the barriers, but we who have been baptized into Christ are called to something more than just gazing across the rubble. We are called to love like Jesus, the God made man who came to reconcile us all to our Father God. We are called to love like Jesus, who tore down walls of division and hatred and embraced everyone in his arms of love on Calvary's cross. We who are baptized into Christ have taken solemn vows to serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as ourselves, to work for justice, freedom and peace, among all people and to respect the dignity of every human being. We are called to a new way of seeing and behaving where there is no "other" for we are all beloved sons and daughters of God.

When it comes to this enterprise called faith, just as much as in life and work and all other areas of human endeavor, we are all in this together. That includes Muslim imams and Catholic nuns and Jewish rabbis and Buddhist priests and Hindu monks, along with people of every other stripe and variety. We can no longer look at others as "other." We can no longer look down on "outsiders." When we look at another human being, any and every human being, we must see that person as one whom God has chosen to love every bit as much as you or me.

In her book, The Strength of the Weak, Dorothee Sölle tells the story of a rabbi who asked his students how one could recognize the time when night ends and day begins. "Is it when, from a great distance, you can tell a dog from a sheep?" one student asked. "No," said the rabbi. "Is it when, from a great distance, you can tell a date palm from a fig tree?" another student asked. "No," said the rabbi. "Then when is it?" the students asked. "It is when you look into the face of any human creature and see your brother or your sister there. Until then it will still be night.

Curiously, grief is one of the places where divisions are erased and tears form a common bond. As we mourn with Orlando and tears fall, there is no longer young or old, rich or poor, no straight or LGBT. We are all Orlando. We are all brothers and sisters, beloved by God. At funerals in the coming weeks, we can pray that grieving parents and stunned

friends will find common bonds and that grandparents and drag queens may laugh together over jello at funeral lunches, that pastors will be schooled by young LGBT people and our shared life will be enriched. It doesn't erase this tragedy, nothing ever will. It doesn't begin to balance it out but grace may bubble out of our dividing lines, until we come a step closer to what Paul has in mind.

In Orlando, the Muslim Community has turned out to donate blood in the wake of the terror attack. As the donated blood drips into the veins of those recovering from the attack, they will hold in their bodies the truth that there is no longer Muslim or Christian or atheist, no longer gay or straight, no longer male or female, no longer Latino or Caucasian. May that be one small step toward making it so in our spirits, and in our communities too, for we have much work to do. May the light of Christ within us shine more brightly. A light shines in the darkness and the darkness will not overcome it.

*Deo Gloria.*

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost  
June 19, 2016  
The Rev. Susan Johnson