

Words of Welcome for Solidarity Shabbat
Rabbi Joe Rooks Rapport
November 2, 2018

Thank you for joining us for this Shabbat to honor the lives and to help shape the legacy of those who died in the attack in Pittsburgh at the Tree of Life Synagogue, simply because they were Jews, and closer to home, here in Louisville, those who just days before were lost at last week's Kroger shooting simply because they were black.

This Candle is in memory of Maurice E. Stallard, who was shot last week, going to Kroger with his grandson, a target of hate simply because of the color of his skin.

For the members of our congregation who celebrate Shabbat here in this sanctuary regularly, I know that coming here tonight takes on special meaning as we think of our brothers and sisters in Pittsburgh, their regular Shabbos crowd, as they worship in their sanctuary tonight feeling not nearly so safe as the word Sanctuary is meant to represent. Thank you for being here, this week, just like every week – for not giving in to fear, to anger, or to hate.

And it is nice to see so many other members of our congregation and community, who perhaps come to services less often, but made a special effort to be here tonight, to lend support, to be supported, as we face these acts of violence and hate – stronger together, because we stand together as one.

And, for our many guests here tonight, our friends and neighbors who have joined us in worship this Shabbat as an act of love and support in these most difficult times; for the overflowing crowds which have filled the many community commemorations and services, flooded us with calls and letters, sent us flowers and well wishes, I cannot begin to express what a blessing you are in our lives and the moral strength you represent in our compassionate community of Louisville, in our nation, and in our world.

Thank you all for joining us for this special Sabbath evening service.
Let us begin with a song of welcome: *Hinei mah tov u'mah naim, shevet amim gam yachad.*
Behold, How beautiful and how pleasant when a community can gather as one.

This Candle, we light for Vickie Lee Jones who was a grandmother, just trying to get home from the grocery, when she was killed in the parking lot, in an act of hate, by someone she never met.

This Shabbat cannot be like any other Shabbat. It is the Sabbath of the week of *shivah* as we mourn the loss of our eleven brothers and sisters who were brutally murdered as they joined together in a synagogue just like this one to pray, to celebrate our Jewish tradition, to be together with our people. And yet it is still Shabbat and it must be. For now more than ever we need these moments of Sabbath peace, we need this reminder of God's creative and redemptive power in our lives, we need this promise of a better world yet to be. And so we begin our Sabbath Prayers with the kindling of light and the blessing of wine to remind us of the light which brightens all darkness and the sweetness which can lead us toward a world of peace.

Standing Together Against Bigotry and Hate
A Sermon In Remembrance of Lives Lost in Pittsburgh
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First Candle: This light is for Rose Malinger, Rose was 97. She went to services at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh with her daughter Andrea every Shabbat. Andrea was wounded, but survived the attack. Her family remembers their Bubbe as a spry, vibrant woman who was always full of life.

This week we commemorate the 80th Anniversary of Kristallnacht, the Night of Broken Glass, which marked the beginning of Nazi Germany's physical attacks against the Jews. 267 synagogues throughout Germany, Austria, and the Sudetenland were burned to the ground, 7500 Jewish shops and businesses were vandalized, 91 Jews were killed, 30,000 Jewish men were rounded up and sent to concentration camps. This was the beginning of the Holocaust.

Second Candle: This light is for Melvin Wax, Mel was 88. He got to services early every week, leaving his car down the street, to make room for the "old folks" who needed the spaces in the parking lot.

There is a world of difference between what happened in Germany 80 years ago and what happened in Pittsburgh last Saturday. Germany was a broken nation after its disastrous defeat in the First World War. The economy lay in ruin, the people were demoralized, and the new government was weak and ineffectual at steering any course out of the chaos which had all but consumed what was once the greatest and most powerful nation in Europe. Germany was fertile ground for Nazi hate.

Third and Fourth Candles: These two candles are for Sylvan & Bernice Simon, they married at Tree of Life synagogue 60 years ago, their neighbors called them "the sweetest people you could ever imagine."

The America of today is not the Germany of the 1930's and the act of this single deranged madman will not be remembered as an American Kristallnacht – as the beginning of an end. And, the clearest example of that difference is you, and the people sitting next to you, filling this congregation and the many other memorials which have stood strongly against this moment of hate. Imagine how different Kristallnacht might be remembered if the very next Sabbath, Jews could have gathered in their synagogues across the nation surrounded by friends and neighbors of all faith, clergy and lay people alike, to stand up against such acts of hate and to make a stand for the rights of all people to practice their faith in freedom and safety from harassment or attack. That never have happened in Hitler's Germany and it is happening here tonight and in hundreds of synagogues all across America this Shabbat.

Fifth Candle: Joyce Fienberg, was 75, a retired research specialist from the University of Pittsburgh, she was a tiny woman who lit up the room with her huge personality.

Kristallnacht was different, and yet this week in Pittsburgh we crossed a line in this country from vandalism, and harassment, and the rare but occasional attack of a Jew walking down

the street, to the murder of eleven Jews worshipping in their Synagogue for no reason, simply because they were Jews.

The ADL tracks acts of violence, vandalism, and harassment against Jews in America and issues a report on their number every year. Antisemitic acts in all these categories have been rising dramatically in this country over the past two and a half years, after literally decades of decline. We have faced such spikes before, but usually they are associated with times of severe economic distress, times of war, or in times when the sheer numbers of Jewish and Catholic immigration threatened the religious and ethnic balance of the nation.

Sixth Candle: Daniel Stein, was 71. He was a simple guy who went to services every week, he had a great sense of humor and everyone loved him.

Deborah Lipstadt, America's great scholar of the Holocaust and Holocaust Denial wrote a particularly powerful response to the attack on the Pittsburgh Synagogue for this week's Time Magazine. In it she said:

“There is an irony about this tragedy. Now is, arguably, a golden age for American Jews. Universities, that once had quotas for Jewish students, have presidents who are Jews. Resorts, that once forbade Jews from coming there, host Passover retreats. Law firms, that once rejected Jewish applicants out of hand, now ensure that kosher food is available at partners' meetings because attendees need it. Structural antisemitism, the kind of antisemitism practiced by governments and institutions, is at an unprecedented low. But that is only half the story. Acts of antisemitism have increased exponentially in recent years.”

Lipstadt is driving a deeper point, which she gets to at the end of the article, where she says:

“Do not think that this attack is only about Jews. It may start with the Jews, but it never ends there. And conversely, it may start with others – Muslims, African Americans, LGBTQ identifying folks – but it will ultimately reach Jews. Lost in the legitimate media attention to the pipe bomber and the Pittsburgh murderer was the fact a few days earlier in Kentucky two African Americans were murdered outside a supermarket by a white nationalist. He had tried to gain access to a predominantly African American church but found the doors locked. Instead, he went to the nearby mall to find some Blacks to kill. And he did.”

Seventh Candle: Irving Younger, was 69. He was the guy who would greet you at the door with a big smile, hand you a prayer book, and welcome you in.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel once said: “The opposite of good is not evil, the opposite of good is indifference.” As poignant as the coincidence of timing may appear, Kristallnacht is not the same as this sad moment in our nation's history, and yet there are lessons from the Holocaust which we might learn and first among them is the power of good people standing together against bigotry and hate.

Heschel understood something about bigotry and hate, having escaped death in Hitler's Germany and having marched with Martin Luther King many times for the cause of Civil

Rights in this land. And a deeper understanding of lessons of this day can be found, in Heschel's words when he said:

“Seen from God, the good is identical with life and organic to the world; wickedness is a disease, and evil identical with death. For evil is divergence, confusion, that which alienates people from people, people from God, while good is convergence, togetherness, union. Evil is division, contest, lack of unity, and as the unity of all being is prior to the plurality of all things, so is the good prior to evil.”

Eighth Candle: Jerry Rabinowitz was a doctor who treated patients with HIV in the early days of the AIDS epidemic. His family said he would want to be remembered through “a message of love, unity, and of the strength and resilience of the Jewish people.”

Hate doesn't happen in a vacuum, and neither does peace. Peace will not come simply because we will it to be so, pray for it to be so, or wait for others to make it so for us to enjoy the blessings of peace. It will come when we build it, step by step, when we recognize the common humanity of us all, when we share each other's joys and sorrows, when compassion is the “identity politics” which all of us can share. When we take personally each and every act of violence directed against another simply because they were seen as an “other”. When any attack on “them” is an attack against “us”, because we are all one human family.

Ninth Candle: Richard Gottfried, 65 was a dentist with a big smile who gave his time and talent to the children of the local school district and volunteered to welcome interfaith families into the community.

The vandalism of my friends mosque is an attack against my friend and my home. When someone kills my neighbors because of the color of their skin, it is an attack against everything I believe in as a Jew. And when Jews are killed celebrating the Sabbath in their own synagogue for nothing more than being Jews, it is all our sanctuaries that have been violated and all our families who have suffered this loss. We need to care about this enough to take this personally, to show the kind of heartfelt compassion which make our city great, in order to come together and make the kind of difference that will lead to change in our lives and in our world.

And we can pray for that change as we pray for the souls of those whose lives were lost this weekend amidst their prayers in Pittsburgh, but when the prayers are done and the songs are sung we must work together in all their names to build a world of peace. So, what can we do? Well, I am going to light these last two candles for...

Tenth Candle and Eleventh Candle: Cecil and David Rosenthal. They were brothers and best friends all their lives, they were inseparable, always sitting in the back of the Shul greeting people as they came in.

We can light 13 candles amidst the darkness and be bearers of light in a darkened world. Together we can mourn the loss of all their lives and the loss of an America where we could once say, such things as synagogue shootings have never happened here. We light a candle

tonight for each of their souls and then we can rekindle a flame in our hearts to build a better world.

Lipstadt ends her Time magazine article with a lesson for all of us to hear:

“In Jewish tradition, upon mourning the dead, we say: May their memory be for a blessing. Today, we should say may the memory of all those killed and the suffering of those who have been wounded be for a blessing and for a lesson, a lesson we ignore at our personal, national, and moral risk.”

And, as a beginning for that lesson:

“Love your neighbor as yourself.” ואהבת לרעך כמוך

These words find their roots in the Torah, Leviticus 19:18, in the scrolls within this ark. And among those scrolls this evening, is a Holocaust Scroll, one saved from the destruction of those dark times now 80 years ago. Ben chose it to read from when he becomes a Bar Mitzvah tomorrow morning, practicing from it long before any of this week’s sadness would come to be. It has been through deep darkness and it bears the marks of soot and smoke from those harrowing days, but the words within it remain bright and they will be read again this Sabbath of remembrance as the clearest symbol that the Jewish people live on.

“Love your neighbor as yourself.” ואהבת לרעך כמוך

Love is the answer, but so is learning. We need to love one another and that means seeing the divine spark within us all, the basic humanity of us all, our common beliefs and values which make us one. But it also means respecting one another’s differences and seeing them as a national strength. *E pluribus unum*, out of many, one. This is our great American motto, that we are better together for all the many parts that make up one. And respecting our differences means coming to know them, coming to know each other, our values and our beliefs. The more we know each other, the less ignorance can divide us. The more we know each other, the better our commitment to our separate values can unite us. I don’t agree with everything my friends of other faiths or political opinions might believe, but I can come to respect their well meaning ideals and their long standing faith just as they can come to respect my own. So let us together stand up for the good, bringing light to the darkness, bringing honor to those whose lives were lost, by building a better nation in their memory.

When evil darkens our world, let us be the bearers of light.

When fists are clenched in self-righteous rage, let our hands be open for the sake of peace.

When pain and loss assail us, let us bring comfort and compassion to all who are in need.

When evil darkens our world, let us be the bearers of light. Amen.