

SHABBAT SERMON, MAY 4, 2019: WE MUST NOT CONTINUE TO BE THE WORLD'S SCAPEGOAT

A mere six months ago we crowded into this sanctuary as part of a world wide-solidarity Shabbat in support of the 11 Jews killed and seven injured at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh and today, once again, throughout North America synagogues are affirming another 'solidarity' Shabbat in honour of the Poway congregation where worshipper Lori Gilbert Kaye was killed and three other individuals wounded.

Two days ago, was Yom HaShoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day – a day where we commemorate the lives and heroism of Jewish people who died in the Holocaust between 1933 and 1945.

And less than two weeks ago, we celebrated the festival of Passover, Pesach where we sang the following:

וְהִיא שְׁעֵמֻדָּה לְאַבְוֹתֵינוּ וְלָנוּ. שְׁלֹא אָחָד בְּלִבָּד, עָמַד עָלֵינוּ לְכַלּוֹתֵנוּ. אֲלֵא
שְׁבִכָּל דּוֹר וָדוֹר, עוֹמְדִים עָלֵינוּ לְכַלּוֹתֵנוּ

What do these words mean? Allow me to take some liberties in translation - as the meaning of these sentences exemplifies one of the core themes of Pesach – it is a refrain we repeat every year at our Seders - simply put it is that this was the reality of our ancestors and is our reality as well - the unwavering knowledge that in every generation they rise up against us intent upon destroying us and yet somehow, some would say by the grace of the Divine, we break free from their grip and are saved.

Is this what we must truly acknowledge every year over the ages? That no matter how many solidarity Shabbats we have, no matter how many

interdenominational rings of peace we participate in, no matter how many Holocaust education days and weeks we have, no matter how many Yad Vashem memorials and Washington Holocaust memorials and Berlin memorials to the murdered Jews of Europe that we have erected, this is nonetheless the certainty – that they will continue to rise up to annihilate us.

City shul's Rabbi Elyse Goldstein wrote in her message regarding the Poway, California. deaths that she felt a sort of Ring of Peace "fatigue syndrome" and I thought when I read her words that, yes, that is so succinctly put – we are fatigued – it is enough already!

And yet what are we to do?

This Shabbat's portion talks about the scapegoat that is sent to the wilderness, to the desert, by Aaron to expiate and carry away the sins of the community.

Is that who we as Jews are in this world? We, who make up about .5% of the world's population. Scapegoats – the nation upon whom the sins of the world are inflicted – is that who we are constantly destined to be? Scapegoats who are burdened with the fears and loneliness and hollowness and weakness of sad people who feel somehow disenfranchised, who have a burning need to be consumed with hatred in order to feel alive and worthwhile. Scapegoats upon whom the sins of bigotry, of religious intolerance are inflicted?

We talk about education.

We talk about interfaith dialogue.

We enact hate laws and prosecute those who disseminate hatred.

And yet it seems to no avail.

In 2018 there were more than 100 cases of violence perpetrated against Jews in the United States alone and in Germany, in Germany for heavens sake, there was a 70 per cent increase in anti-Semitic violence.

What are we to do?

I hate to admit that I really do not have many ideas or suggestions. But what I can admit, what I do know, is that I do not want to calmly watch as every 50 years or so we as Jews are destroyed only to have to rise again like the phoenix and rejuvenate.

And what I do know is that I will not allow this rise in antisemitism to silence me or to fill me with fear or, even worse, defeat.

What I do know is that I will teach my children and grandchildren to stand up to all forms of hatred – to be proud of their heritage, to not stand by or be bystanders to antisemitism, homophobia, islamophobia, xenophobia, to work against all forms of oppression, to vote for leaders who are conscious and conscientious, honest and empathetic, to not succumb to apathy or indifference.

And what I do know is that I will not be alone, that there are many who will join me in teaching this new, promising, hope-filled generation - the Audrey's and Alberta's, the Leif's and Ethan's and Charlee's and Ever's and on and on, that we are not the world's scapegoats – and that 'never again' is not merely a phrase to be repeated, but a value to live by and a call to action.

- Finis -