



Mr. Rogers was Right

By The Rev. Jarrett Kerbel (12/19/25)

Fred Rogers left my generation many blessings. One such blessing is his sage counsel to children frightened by any sort of emergency. “Look for the helpers,” Mr. Rogers advised in his gentle, soothing voice of love. After a weekend of horrors served up through every channel of the media, I needed to recall these words from someone I count as a Saint.

Our prayers go up for the Brown University Community, for the people of Sydney, Australia, the Jewish Community world-wide, and for Hollywood as well. In addition to our prayers, the Episcopal Church explicitly and emphatically denounces all Anti-Semitism, all Gun-Violence, all violence of any kind, and continues to work against the conditions that encourage such hatefulness. Jesus taught a non-violent path of faithfulness to God. He carried no weapons, and when his disciples did, he told them to put the swords away.

The wisdom of Elder Fred Rogers - he was an ordained Presbyterian Elder - reminded me to take note of the acts of heroic love that marked the Sydney massacre. The man who tackled one of the shooters and disarmed him, for example. He risked his life to save his neighbors. The Holocaust survivor who shielded his wife from the shooter with his own body. The woman who held a three year old -who became separated from her parents in the chaos - close and shielded the child with her body. Both people gave their lives to save others. This is the highest expression of love.

So we look to the helpers and to the heroes to see all that is good on display, even in the midst of evil. We pray especially for survivors and first responders and emergency medical staff who, although they survive the event, are marked by the trauma. The sickness of violence is endemic - an individual is infected by the culture of violence and then passes on that infection by acting violently. School shooters and other mass shooters are people poisoned by hateful ideologies that dehumanize ‘others’ and, it seems clear, these shooters see murder on a mass scale as a way to ‘fame,’ even if that fame is infamy.

What breaks that cycle of violence? There have been 392 mass casualty shootings in the USA this year so we need to get busy! For followers of Jesus, we see the cycle broken by Jesus who responds to human violence with love and emerges from death with the offering of forgiveness, reconciliation, and transformation in his new creation. Following him, we are called to learn and practice non-violence and to learn and practice de-escalation and reconciliation. The people of faith who marched with Rev. Dr. King, did not just believe in non-violence; they dedicated time to train in it. Life as a disciple is a discipline that calls for training through practice.

Peace is not an accident. Peace is an investment of time, treasure, faith and relationships. Violence is not an accident. Violence is the result of policy, indifference, and sin.

We can be helpers that inspire children to see human virtue in the midst of human evil. For example, have you reached out to your Jewish neighbors with sympathy and reassurance this week? For example, would you like to attend Shabbat services this Friday with me at a local Synagogue as an act of solidarity?

When the Tree of Life Massacre happened in Pittsburgh, PA, my Philadelphia Congregation stood guard around our local synagogue while members filed in for the next Shabbat service. We then joined them for worship.

My heart was deeply moved by the resilience of that Jewish community in the face of anti-semitic hate and violence and by how that resilience flowed from the joy of worship and the gift of the Torah. The sacred Torah scrolls were processed around the sanctuary with joyous singing, dancing, bowing, ringing of bells, and people touching the scrolls with prayer shawls. (BTW - Wouldn't it be a joyful practice to have a Gospel procession like that!) That congregation reinforced in me the truth I know in Jesus: resilience comes from the joy of having our life renewed in God. Responding to God's gift in worship is one way to practice that joy and to grow courageous souls that can face darkness with light.