

Crossing cultural, religious, and racial lines in an effort to discover who are our neighbors.

Rise & Shine, April 7th

Luke 10:29

But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" (For context, read 10:25-37.)

In the News

'They Are Us,' New Zealand PM Says of Mosque Shooting Victims

On March 15, a 28-year-old armed Australian man walked into Al Noor Mosque in Christchurch, New Zealand, where hundreds of people were gathered for Friday Prayer, and opened fire. In nine minutes, he killed 42 people and wounded many others. He then drove about three miles to the Linwood Islamic Centre where he killed seven more worshipers. One other victim died later in the hospital, bringing the number killed to 50. The perpetrator left after a few minutes, when a mosque member began to fight back, using what he could find at hand. Police captured the killer about 36 minutes after he started his rampage.

The mass murder was the deadliest in modern New Zealand history. The ages of those killed ranged from 2 to 71.

Many more were seriously injured, with 36 being treated for gunshot wounds, and two of those in serious condition. Using a camera affixed to his helmet, the killer live-streamed the first of the attacks on Facebook Live, from which some Internet users reposted it. Online sites have since taken the videos down.

The perpetrator is described in media reports as an alt-right affiliated white supremacist and a terrorist, though in his manifesto the perpetrator described himself as an "eco-fascist" who is opposing what he sees as a "genocide" against his culture, race and ethnicity. He specifically mentioned attacking Muslims in "revenge" for the Muslim invasions of Europe over the centuries, the Muslim enslavement of kidnapped Europeans, as well as other conflicts. In particular, he stated that he sought revenge for Ebba Akerlund, an 11-year-old Swedish schoolgirl killed by a jihadi attacker in 2017. He describes the girl as "young, innocent, and dead" -- and the trigger for his political beliefs.

Strong condemnation of the attack as well as statements of support and solidarity with the New Zealand Muslim community as well as with local

Islamic groups have flowed in from around the world, coming from political figures, leaders from several religions and many other people.

The Jewish community in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, recalling the support from Muslim communities last year after a gunman killed 11 people at a Pittsburgh synagogue, set up a fund to aid the New Zealand victims and their' families. Following the killings at the synagogue, "Muslims Unite for Pittsburgh Synagogue" used a crowdfunding campaign to raise more than \$200,000 to help the shooting victims. Now the Jewish community in Pittsburgh is reciprocating the kindness, "paying it forward" to the New Zealand Islamic community.

Among Christian groups, leaders as varied as the president of the Southern Baptist Convention, the archbishop of Canterbury and the pope of the Roman Catholic Church have expressed support for and solidarity with the Muslim community, using terms like "neighbors" and "brothers and sisters" and others to indicate the sharing of a common humanity.

As the news of the shooting was coming in, New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern broadcast a short speech to the nation. Here is part of her remarks:

Clearly, what has happened here is an extraordinary and unprecedented act of violence.

Many of those who will have been directly affected by this shooting may be migrants to New Zealand, they may even be refugees here. They have chosen to make New Zealand their home, and it is their home.

They are us. The person who has perpetrated this violence against us is not. They have no place in New Zealand. There is no place in New Zealand for such acts of extreme and unprecedented violence, which it is clear this act was.

For now, my thoughts, and I'm sure the thoughts of all New Zealanders, are with those who have been affected, and also with their families.

Here is a Bible verse and question outline to guide our discussion:

Acts 17:26

From one ancestor [God] made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live ... (For context, read 17:22-34.)

This is from the apostle Paul's Mars Hill sermon to Athenian Greeks. In it, he links all humankind together while acknowledging that they are also different peoples, living in various times and places.

Throughout history, "different peoples" are usually seen as different races, ethnicities or tribes. In the United States, a significant premise -- although never fully realized -- has been that tribal differences are of less importance than a declaration of ideals that all "are created equal" and have equal value and rights. The nation and community exist not via common biological descent, but by the adoption of values.

A famous example is Abraham Lincoln's "House Divided" speech, where he notes that immigrants from non-English countries can and should still claim relationship to those Englishmen in America who declared the rights of equality under the law in the Declaration of Independence. In contradiction to Stephen Douglas, he noted that this same relationship can be claimed by those then in slavery -- and that claim should be recognized.

In contrast, the Christchurch murderer claimed that people should be categorized and judged based upon race or ethnicity or the "intersection" of identification with various sorts of tribes. Paul, while acknowledging differences, instead notes the interrelationship of all people, declaring that all are "God's offspring" (v. 29).

Questions:

- What are the differences between judging and dividing people based upon race or ethnicity and, on the other hand, stressing the commonality people have as human beings of equal intrinsic value?
- Discuss the temptation to categorize and divide people based upon a "tribal" affiliation, in ways that are divisive rather than unifying.
- Why is it vital to recognize our common humanity with people who are different from us? Is "one of us" an acceptable synonym for "neighbor"? Why or why not?

- Who have you thought of as "Samaritans," outsiders toward whom you felt distrust and dislike? What has your experience taught you about those you first thought about in such ways?

Prayer for the Human Family (*BCP p.815*)

O God, you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son: Look with compassion on the whole human family; take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts; break down the walls that separate us; unite us in bonds of love; and work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish your purposes on earth; that, in your good time, all nations and races may serve you in harmony around your heavenly throne; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*