

*A Word from the Christian Community at an Interfaith Gathering after the
Orlando Shooting*

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Henry David Thoreau, the poet and philosopher, once wrote these words: “The gods we worship write their names on our faces; be sure of that. [We] will worship something ... Therefore it behooves us to be careful what we worship, for what we are worshipping we are becoming.”

I think Thoreau intended those words as a cautionary tale. If what we worship is what we hold most precious, what we dedicate ourselves to most fully, what we practice most diligently – that will shape who we become. And so if we make gods of money or fame or power, they will write their names on our faces, and we will be readily recognized as greedy, or vain, or domineering. That will be written all over us. And so, Thoreau is right, we should be careful what and whom we worship.

But tonight, as I look out upon your faces, I don't see any of those distortions of identity. Instead, I look out at our gathering and I see qualities that I recognize as reflections of a very different, sacred dimension.

Something beautiful and blessed is written upon our faces tonight, because I see shock and pain at the senseless death of brothers and sisters we did not have the privilege to know – yet can all claim kinship to. I see compassion for survivors and for the devastated, grieving families of the victims. I see a broken-heartedness that comes of our assumptions for our safety and our fondest dreams for freedoms laid waste by hatred and violence. And I see courage to face this tragedy with others who may differ from ourselves in a variety of perspectives, but whom we nevertheless deeply respect and whom we can even acknowledge tonight in a profound way, that we need. And that implies, to me, that what we worship is nothing trivial or weak or self-serving or small. There is love in our midst. A bedrock of it, I think.

At a gathering several of us attended yesterday, a story was shared that I want to share with you. One person said she had participated Monday night in a vigil in Orlando for the victims and found herself angry and tearful and hopeless. Turning to go, she was followed by a woman who clearly wanted to comfort her, though comfort seemed impossible just then. But the two talked a bit about the unthinkable act in the Pulse Nightclub and how someone could have been brought to do such a thing, and the comforter said this. “Well, honey, I think that shooter lost his love.”

Yes, I think so, too. But here is the hope to which we may cling: we don't have to lose ours. Love is more powerful than hatred. Love is deeper than anger. Love is more penetrating and wiser than any schemes for harm. Love wins.

And that is why our tears are not shed in vain. If they are tears of loss and also of love, then they are tears of hope for love's capacity to change everything.

And so let us go from here tonight with love written all over our faces. Let that be what we show to the aching, worried, weary world. Let us reflect all that we hold dearest, all that we most worthily worship, all that we love, and let us be bearers of healing and hope.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Amen.