

# HOMILY – TRAGEDY IN ORLANDO

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The news Sunday morning was shocking, confusing, and unspeakably tragic. Orlando now has the horrific distinction of forever being mentioned alongside Virginia Tech, Aurora, Sandy Hook, Boston and countless others.

What in God's name is happening?

There is so much pain, suffering and loss of human lives.

Social media is flooded with updates, heated comments, Pulse Night Club logos – everyone is crying, confused, and angry.

Parents, committed partners, husbands, wives, children and random bystanders just keep crying on the news, echoing our shared horror that people we love are now, somehow, dead?

Critically injured? How can this be?

How can this be?

We are in an uncharted crisis. Yet beneath my personal sorrow, a deep nervousness is brewing. I am not nervous for the men and women of the LGBTQ community. We have known fear countless times before and have marched, oh so bravely, into the storms of oppression. We will thrive, even as we mourn.

We have discovered through lived experience that “darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that”. “Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that”.

The families of the victims murdered will bury their dead, care for each other, seek change where change can be sought, and live to see another day.

Our prayer tonight is also for those who have been seriously injured. We pray for their healing knowing all too well that their lives will never be the same.

What makes me anxious is the church --- collective Christianity. It's standing at the crossroads of an unprecedented decision. And what path chosen will not only define people of faith, but also eternity.

When we look at the life of Jesus, there are themes in his teachings that continually establish who he is and who he hopes we will be.

Many times, as believers, we find ourselves arguing about what Jesus was really about – but at the end of each day, there are some bottom lines.

Most of them are found in the Sermon on the Mount: a guide for Christian life that is free from oppression and hypocrisy; yet full of love and grace, full of wisdom and discernment.

It's about loving enemies, not killing people, valuing life, not seeking revenge, looking out for the people who are truly in need and respond to them.

In short, we are challenged daily to love one another as we have been loved by God. Period, nothing more – nothing less.

A Pastor once said, *“You’ve never looked eyes with anyone who doesn’t matter deeply to God!”*

The entire message of Scripture, we witness how Jesus goes out of his way to make sure that everyone knows that every person, every life, every soul – truly matters.

Yet when these truths about the sanctity of human life were stirring in my heart after hearing about the devastation of human life and love, I wondered – will the church heed the words of Jesus in the same way?

I don't really know but I have never given up on the gift of hope. However, wrapped up in this country's largest mass murder, there is a minefield of human judgment. Priests, ministers, pastors and other church leaders are going to be conflicted because of their views on homosexuality, assault rifles, ISIS, politics and the list goes on...

Yet I fear at times that the church may forget that it's not really about any of these things. It's about LOVING GOD'S PEOPLE. So we pray the Church will throw open her doors. Mourn with those who mourn – without even the slightest hint of personal agenda blinding the Christian message.

We are commanded, not requested by Jesus, to do our very best with the life which has been created by God. This is the time to be the hands, feet and mouth of Jesus.

We, the Church, the People of God, must declare from the depth of our soul that nothing like this can ever happen again. There is no justification in Jesus' words for such atrocities, hate and terror. And there is no justification for the Church to be anything other than the most loving, warm and welcoming place for all peoples.

We live in a world of diversity and the Church must reach out to those who have been marginalized and injured by ignorance and indifference.

I believe that in time with the grace of God, healing will take place and for that healing to be effective, we are called to be an inclusive society by not alienating people that may be different than you are. So what!

This is a story of human tragedy and suffering and this time the target of hate was pointed at the LGBTQ community. We are your neighbors, we sit next to you in church and on the T. We must be vigilant to be united in this tragedy and not run away or hide in fear. This is not the time for moments of silence but rather a time to scream out loud, that all of us are sons and daughters of God and no one, absolutely no one should ever be discounted, devalued, excluded or dismissed.

For the love of Jesus Christ, the People of God, which is the church, now is the time for each one of us to do our job.

**Be who Jesus hoped we would be!**