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You Will Never Regret Being Too Kind

Leviticus 19:1-2, 15-18

There he stood with his large banners on long poles from both arms in full color. It looked a lot like the type of sign that people who stand on street corners advertising mattress sales hold in statue of liberty costumes. This banner yelled in all capital letters, "GOD HATES..." I also believe that the word "ABOMINATION" were somewhere in the mix. It was hard to miss the Biblical references though. One of which came from the book of Leviticus.

This middle aged man was, however, not alone. He had next to him a man in a trench coat holding a bullhorn to this "preacher's" mouth.

"You are all going straight to hell!" he unnecessarily yelled into the bullhorn.

As I looked closer, he was yelling this to a group of about 20 African American men and women in their 20's and 30's.

A little background is in order. I had been asked, as a clergy of a Justice and Peace Center, to attend a rally in Nashville that promised to bring a large amount of White supremacists and Ku Klux Klan. There were also a large contingent of activists, especially African American, who wanted to make sure that they made the statement that they were not going to be ignored and that their humanity would not be diminished.

I must admit I was unprepared for the raw emotions and sometimes physical struggles that broke out during the evening. In my clergy shirt, I attempted to stand physically between conflicts in the hopes that a peaceful witness could possibly help in such a volatile situation.

Unfortunately, the event taking place above was at the end. Most people had gone home. This pastor had decided to preach damnation to a group of African Americans. They were already revved up, ready to yell, chant, and move forward.

To every response the pastor continued his words, "God hates you and the way you live. It doesn't matter who you are, you are condemned. You are full of unrighteousness."

That is when I remembered that my friend Maddie was holding the bread and juice for Mercy Junction's communion that evening. As a new worshipping community, we were approved by the Presbytery to have communion for our community.

I grabbed the bread and stood directly in front of the bullhorn proclaiming, "Who wants to partake in the joyful feast of the people of God?"

I could see confusion at first, but my hunch that at least some African Americans in Nashville would know the opening words to the Lord's Supper would be recognized. Immediately I was mobbed by people saying, "I want to take part in the Lord's Supper, I want to take part in the Lords Supper, I want to take part in the Lord's Supper!"

So, we did the Lord's Supper right then and there. My community was ecstatic to do communion as well. When I turned to offer the bread and juice to the pastor he was backing away from me and looked quite afraid. Finally, he said "I will not partake in the Devil's feast!"

I responded, "Suit yourself, you are always welcome."

"Come on let's go!" his friend said and they jumped in a van and left.

I am beyond weary of the zealous using a few thousand year old book, written for the one God calls (Leviticus) to manipulate people's fears of damnation in the fiery pits of their hell (that by the way don't exist in those same Hebrew texts). They are the weak, meat sacrificed to idols, white washed walled legalists that God loves, but make it difficult for anyone else to be around. As we used to say in Chattanooga, "Bless their hearts." Sometimes I want to take a bullhorn and preach back. Enough! Enough misuse of the texts for "personal" faith from civic codes given during the building of the tabernacle before the trek from Sinai. Enough ignoring the whole text to subterfuge an agenda that looks more like American rugged individualism than the covenant with a creator whom desires a relationship with the community that God has called.

19:1 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying:

19:2 Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them: You

shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.

19:15 You shall not render an unjust judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great: with justice you shall judge your neighbor.

19:16 You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not profit by the blood of your neighbor: I am the LORD.

19:17 You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin; you shall reprove your neighbor, or you will incur guilt yourself.

19:18 You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.