

Rabbi Laurie Zimmerman
Interfaith Vigil on Pittsburgh Shooting
October 28, 2018

Our hearts are broken, our hearts are raging. We feel fragile, vulnerable, and scared.

We come together tonight to be in community, to comfort each other, to mourn the dead and to pray for the living. We come together because we need each other.

Many of my colleagues have deep connections to the Tree of Life synagogue, as well as to Dor Hadash, the Reconstructionist synagogue that shares space with them. One of them lost a dear friend yesterday, shot multiple times as he was praying.

Some of us were in synagogue when we learned that Robert Bowers murdered 11 Jews who were celebrating Shabbat, welcoming a baby into the covenant of the Jewish people, studying Torah.

The Torah portion we were reading was Vayera. We read the story of Lot, an immigrant who had moved to Sodom and integrated into this new society. He had been welcoming strangers into his home. Rabbinic tradition says that the real sin of the people who lived there was that they hated strangers, they hated anyone who was different. "What's mine is mine, what's yours is yours," they would say. They had no sense of community.

We know that Robert Bowers also hated immigrants. He hated that Jewish communities had been actively welcoming immigrants and refugees. He targeted a community that was active in this work. He pulled the trigger because he saw Jews as a threat to his way of life, to his vision of a nation that would serve, above all, white Christians.

Antisemitism is rising in the United States, and white supremacy is the greatest threat to Jewish safety in this country.

It is tempting to shut our doors, to turn away, to retreat to the privacy of our own home or to the comfort of our own people. But this is the way of Sodom, not the way of Abraham, Lot's uncle, who was known for his hospitality, known for welcoming all who passed by his tent.

We must step across over racial, ethnic, and religious lines, in a real way. In a way that matters. We must fight real and persistent racism, Islamophobia, and antisemitism. We must closely examine our own prejudices and deal with them.

The only way forward is to be in true solidarity with one another, being allies for each other, and showing up for each other.

The only way forward is to cultivate deep, loving community.