

Greenfield Hill Congregational Church

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Sermon Title: Orlando: June 11, 2016
Pastor: Rev. David Johnson Rowe

America's largest mass murder since 9/11, perpetrated by a lone wolf in Orlando, Florida, with guns he purchased legally. A disturbed Muslim, swearing allegiance to several terrorist organizations that are opposed even to one another, he targeted a gay nightclub, killing mostly Hispanic young adults because he saw two men kissing in Miami. How many social, political, religious hot-button issues all bound up together in one evil act? And tonight, 98 families, a beloved city, a grieving nation, in tears.

A little Bible trivia for you: the shortest verse in the Bible? John 11:35, "Jesus wept." *Jesus wept.* He had just found out that his friend Lazarus had died, which is interesting because he is about to raise Lazarus from the dead! Jesus will walk to the tomb, say a prayer, and the dead Lazarus will come back to life! And yet, at the news of Lazarus's death, "Jesus wept."

We are sitting in a Christian Church, the only ornamentation is an empty cross, signifying Jesus's resurrection. We have friends in here all the time where we boldly preach eternal life and heaven. We believe Jesus was raised from the dead. We believe Lazarus was raised from the dead. We believe we will be raised from the dead. And yet, when death comes, we weep.

This morning I watched a news conference from Orlando. The governor of Florida spoke, the two senators, the FBI head man, the ATF leader, the local sheriff. And we've heard from the president, the candidates for the presidency, a host of experts, critics and pundits, and the families. They all have their jobs to do. The politics of it. The investigation side of it. The sociological, psychological, even military side of it. That's not my expertise. I'm just a pastor of your church.

This is a Christian Church; we are, as St. Peter said, "a peculiar people," a unique people. We are followers of Jesus of Nazareth, we bear his name, "Christians." In here, what he says matters, and we try to take what he says out into our world, however troubled, however awful, however hateful that world is. We try to take something of Jesus out into that world. We call it "Christlikeness."

Tonight, we have a brief service, a simple service. We've got the 23rd Psalm, the centerpiece of the invitation we sent out tonight, that promise to ourselves that "we will not fear evil." We have five verses each on the one trinity we *can* understand: faith, hope, and love. Alida will resurrect a symbol we last used on 9/11, and we will sing just enough of our faith to soothe.

Let me conclude my mini-message with four sentences:

1. We have a choice: to live with God or without God.
2. To come into this Church is a statement of faith. We choose to try, to try as hard as it is, to live with God.
3. To live with God is to try to see things from God's perspective, to imagine what God feels, what God wants; to imagine God is to feel God's joy at creation, God's sorrow at Orlando, San Bernardino, Paris, Brussels, Newtown, Columbine, Virginia Tech, Fort Hood, and all the places, sad to say, I've forgotten. But God has not forgotten and not stopped weeping.
4. My fourth and last sentence: to live with God, to imagine God, to feel what God feels, requires us to put God front and center, *front and center*. Among yourselves, with your friends, in the voting booth, through your activism, on Facebook, put your faith out there to lead the way.

Prayers for Orlando Fear No Evil

Responsive Reading

Psalm 23

Pastor: The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

People: *He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.*

Pastor: He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

People *Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.*

Pastor: Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

People: *Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.*

All *We will fear no evil. We will not fear. We will not fear. Together, one Lord, one faith, one baptism (Ephesians 4:5). Together, one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all. Together, Lord, not quibbling over politics, sexuality, religion, gender or race. Together, in this Church, where faith, hope, and love abide. But the greatest is Love, for God is Love, and Love never ends. Amen*