

## **Hinde Street Methodist Church**

Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> March 2019

10am Rev Peter Cornick

Shock and bewilderment are etched onto the faces of those who mourn or have been affected by the atrocity in Christchurch, New Zealand. That people going about the peaceful business of worshipping God, should be gunned down, is beyond comprehension. In New Zealand of all places – there is, it would seem, nowhere immune from an extremist with evil intent.

What makes this monstrous attack even more shocking, is the people targeted. Some of them, refugees. They had fled the horrors of war in places such as Syria, to find peace and stability. Others were migrants to New Zealand from places such as Pakistan or Bangladesh. They have been targeted because of their religion, their skin colour; young children; women; men; the subject of racism.

We as Christians, will clearly be shocked at the scale of the murder. But we must also condemn this racism and Islamophobia and name it for what it is. This week's tragedy was, it seems, perpetrated by one extreme individual. But how often do we hear casual comments in our daily lives, which amount to discrimination; how often do we read in the press, stories designed to scare us into suspicion and caution about those unlike ourselves. Islam has been a subject for this for some years now. How often do we challenge these comments, or write to the editor to put a different view?

Inderjit Bhogal, in his Hugh Price Hughes lecture, spoke of creating churches of sanctuary. Places of sanctuary where refugees could feel safe, tell their story, receive help. Fundamental to his concept, is trust and respect for the stranger and the refugee.

I was in conversation with a gentleman, who is a Muslim. The conversation was around what it means to fast and to pray. We were listening to each other's stories carefully, honouring the culture of each. I don't know the man's history, but the church was providing this man sanctuary from homelessness. It seems to me, offering

sanctuary, to our neighbour, practical assistance, compassion and by simply listening to their story, is a way of countering the rise of religious intolerance.

Jesus faces the threat of death, for his own compassion towards people. This time, it is the state, Herod, who is seeking to make this teacher 'disappear.' It is some Pharisees who warn Jesus of this. Or, of course, it may be that the Pharisees, feeling threatened by Jesus' teaching, are using Herod as a foil; trying to frighten Jesus into silence. The result is the same. Jesus is not for retreating. His path is to Jerusalem. 'How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings'. Jesus has compassion for a people who, he believes, have lost sight of God's commandments. Jesus realises Jerusalem will not listen to his word. He will ride into Jerusalem when the crowd sing: "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord." Yet, Jerusalem is a city that 'kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it!' Jesus will be the next one.

In the face of intolerance, from within his own religious community, from crowds seeking scapegoats, from nervous Roman authorities, Jesus has a message of peace and tolerance. He is on his way to face this in Jerusalem. 'And on the third day I finish my work.'