

Faith Without Fear—An Invitation to Love Over Violence

“I don’t know any religion that promotes violence. It is the adherents of whatever religion who choose that path.” -The Rev. Desmond Tutu, South African Anglican Archbishop and Theologian

That truth rang loudly this past week when we witnessed something both heartbreaking and sadly unsurprising. A local minister chose to weaponize his platform not to spread the love of God, but to stir fear and hate, especially toward our LGBTQIA+ siblings.

In a recent message, this minister used stock photos of people smiling at a Pride Festival. It is important to recognize that many who attend Pride events have experienced deep harm at the hands of religious institutions. Members of the LGBTQIA+ community have often been exiled from churches, rejected by families, and alienated from faith traditions. As a result, many now feel little desire, or find no safe space, to engage with organized religion.

And then, as if to further underscore a harmful narrative, the minister included a disturbing image: a man pointing a gun at a clergy member leading worship at the altar. This was all part of his Sunday message.

Instead of preaching grace, mercy, or the radical, unconditional love of Christ, the minister chose the language of fear and violence. Rather than elevating Christ’s call to peace, he aligned himself with the toxic ideology of Christian Nationalism, a growing movement that dangerously fuses political identity with religious dominance.

Let us be clear: Christian Nationalism is not Christianity. It is the prioritization of power over compassion, of political identity over the teachings of Jesus. Its adherents often champion "God and country," but neglect the actual words of Jesus who said, “Love one another as I have loved you.”

That love is not conditional. That love is not political. That love does not come with terms, litmus tests, or violence.

Christian nationalism seeks cultural control, not compassionate care. And in that pursuit, it abandons the very values Jesus embodied: mercy, humility, forgiveness, and the sacred dignity of every human life.

What came next from this minister was equally disturbing: he claimed he was now living in fear due to backlash. And yes, we pray for his safety. No one deserves to live in fear.

The problem in the end is that this minister is choosing to be the victim of a “cancel culture”, claiming he has faced pushback and fears for his life—despite having been the one who initiated harm against others. As followers of Christ, we are not called to deflect accountability, but to humbly repent for the harm we’ve caused and seek forgiveness. That is the path of true humility and reconciliation.

Here's the thing: the minister's words created that exact fear for others. For LGBTQIA+ people in our own community, his message wasn't just offensive, it was terrifying. It only takes one “true believer” with a distorted sense of justice to act on that kind of rhetoric. That's what hate speech does. It doesn't stay in the sanctuary. It infects minds and fuels actions.

Each time we fuse faith with fear, or with violence, we walk away from Jesus.

Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” Not the power-seekers. Not the fear-mongers. Not the ones who stir division under the guise of “truth.”

Mr. Minister, we offer you a prayer. The prayer is not one of condemnation, but of liberation. We pray you will come to know a faith that frees you, not one that frightens others. We pray you encounter the Jesus who sat with the outcasts, who welcomed the excluded, and who reserved his harshest words not for “sinners” but for the self-righteous who used religion to marginalize others.

Some of the clergy who have signed this open letter are veterans and former military chaplains. We have joined together as veterans and non-veterans to collectively honor those who gave their lives in service to uphold our nation's freedoms, especially the freedoms of religion and speech. But with freedom comes responsibility. And within sacred spaces, that responsibility should be even greater.

Free speech is not a license to cause harm.

It should never be wielded as a weapon from the pulpit.

Faith leaders are called to speak not only truth, but truth spoken in love.

Not only with conviction, but with humility.

Not to claim victimhood, but to repent and seek forgiveness when harm has been done placing neighbor against neighbor.

These are the ways of Jesus.

To our neighbor minister, we offer an invitation. A place not to debate, but to break bread. Come meet with our congregations. Sit with us. Hear our stories. Listen, not with the intent to argue, but to understand. To learn how your words land on ears that have already been told by too many churches that they are unworthy of love. We don't want you to live in fear. Because so many of us including LGBTQIA+ folks, allies, people of color, women in leadership, immigrants, and others, have walked those roads of fear for far too long.

What we desire is this: for you to thrive. To become the fullest, truest, best version of the person God created you to be. To know a love that has nothing to do with guns or exclusion, but everything to do with grace.

To know love minus any violence.

"There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love." 1 John: 4-18

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