

July 15, 2019

[The lawyer] answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." And [Jesus] said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live." But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:27-29)



For the last year, the Synod of the Trinity, a regional governing body of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has been focusing on the growing prevalence of hate and hate behavior, as demonstrated in places such as Charlottesville and Pittsburgh, Orlando and others on a list that has become much too long! Even more painful at times, is the semi-legitimization of the ideas expressed.

Recent meetings sponsored by the Synod for its constituents in Pennsylvania, Ohio and West Virginia were titled "Silence is the Welcome Mat for Hate." Indeed, we learned that among the groups of people who make hate behavior possible are the *Spectators*, those who do not know, or do not want to know, how to get involved when they see acts of hate, bigotry and incivility.

So convicted was the Synod's Governing Commission by its learnings, that they told Moderator John Bolt and Transitional Executive Susan Faye Wonderland to speak up and speak out in the face of hateful speech and actions- lest we live into the "silence" that breeds "more."

And so, we will not be silent.

On the very day that Luke's story of the Good Samaritan was read in many churches around this nation, the President of the United States attacked duly elected members of the U.S. House of Representatives, three of whom were born and reared in this country, telling them to "go back and help fix the totally broken and crime infested places from which they came."

While he didn't name them, there's no mystery to whom he was referring: Rep Ayanna Pressley, D-Mass.; Rep. Ilhan Omar, D-MN; Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-NY; and Rep. Rashida Tlaib, D-MI. All of them are women of color who have stood against this administration's policies as they represent their constituencies.

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The comments, delivered as usual via social media, are clearly and unequivocally hate filled. They imply that the United States is not the country of these women-yet three were born in the United States and one became a citizen in her teens! The four would not be a part of the U.S. House of U.S. Representatives if that were not true! Whatever the intent, the comments disrespect and misrepresent the women and are derogatory towards other nations.

Not only are the words themselves offensive, but they echo the worst days of this nation's racist history and, many would suggest, our present.

As Christians seeking to understand and live into Christ's teachings, it is hard enough to hear these words, let alone to hear them and not respond. We cannot in good conscience remain quiet in the face of such a heinous display of hatred and bigotry as the President engaged in on Sunday, even if the intent was to poke at the struggles among House Democrats.

This is not a question of being partisan.

This is not a question of supporting or opposing policies and parties.

This is not a question of advocating for or against any of the tense issues of the day.

This is simply about, in the words of the old hymn, "standing up for Jesus."

Silence IS the welcome mat for hate, regardless of who is doing the speaking, or why.

And hate must be named, challenged and condemned.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John A. Bolt". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Ruling Elder John Bolt, Synod Moderator

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Susan Faye Wonderland". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Teaching Elder Susan Faye Wonderland, Synod Transitional Executive