

This week in my life, I've been surrounded by a lot of hate. I've been surrounded by a lot of anger, and it's surrounded by a lot of just terrible, terrible things. And no matter how hard I try, I find myself becoming a part of it, becoming a part of the problem and not becoming part of the solution. When you have so much hate thrown at you, it's hard to remember the beauty of God's love. It's especially hard when you have people throwing this hate at you in God's name. It really starts to wear on you. It really starts to take you down and develop doubt, at least in me.

There was somebody this week, and more than one somebody, and they were telling me that our church is wrong. Our church is wrong because we believe in helping everyone. We believe in caring for people. We believe that we are all God's children, and I was told that was wrong. I was told that I was wrong because there are faiths in the world that believe not everyone should be helped. Not everyone should be taken care of. Not everyone is equal, and they threw scripture at me telling me these things. And one of these people was the president of a group within the UCC. The group's called faithful and welcoming, and he and I are talking about how he feels that his group in the UCC is persecuted, how people want them out of the UCC because they view life differently than the majority of the UCC.

And I asked him what makes you so different? Why do you feel you're being persecuted against? He's like, that's easy. We are opposed, and he listed off a lot of things. He listed off a lot of things, saying they are certain. He's said most people are not as good as the people who lead his churches. So, if you're not a white man, in his eyes, you're pretty much worthless. And I asked him, how is that welcoming? If you only think that white men are the important people? First, how are you in the UCC, but how do you believe that you are a welcoming Faith? How do you believe that you are a welcoming people?

I get called a lot of things, and I probably deserve half. The one thing is, I am willing to listen to everyone. I might not agree with you. I openly do not agree with a lot of people, which is why I get called a lot of things, but either way, I still believe that you have the right to talk about it in a manner that we can have a general discussion and not have to be hateful.

Today's reading from Matthew, Matthew was writing about the Jews who are following Jesus at this time. All of these people were being thrown out of the synagogues. They weren't being allowed to celebrate. But Jesus had room for them. They weren't being allowed to be a part of God's great gifts. When he talks about the sheep being lost with no Shepherd, he's talking about everybody that's just wandering around out in the world. The people that don't have a place that they belong. People who don't have an opportunity to come together and feel safe no matter who they are, no matter where they are. These people are not safe, and they're not safe in this case because of their religious beliefs.

But in today's world, how many people are not safe anywhere? They're not safe because of their identity. They're not safe because of their race, because of their gender, because of their religious beliefs. I heard some of the most horrific things this week about people in this community from people in this community because their faith was different. I heard horrible things feuded about us by these same people because our faith does not follow their faith. And it made me angry. I'm still angry. My anger got bigger and bigger all week long until last night.

Last night at Harvest Home, I got to look out and see God's plan in action. I got to see people from different faiths coming together and sitting at a table and having fellowship together. Setting aside the hate and the anger of the outside world and just having a meal. And not just having a meal because we did a great job raising money for Greater Love.

Last night, we got a phone call at about 7: 50 last night, asking for more food. So, Alyssa and I put together a plate, and we ran it off to this person because it meant so much. She was upset that she couldn't be here for it. She didn't get back in town in time, but that fellowship and knowing that Saint Paul's will help. We'll go out of our way to share God's love in any way we can. And last night was probably the best I've slept in two weeks because I know that even though there are more people out there that hate, there's still a number of people that love. And they know that they feel safe enough to call us and that we'll help them in any way we can. So, the hate doesn't matter as much as a little bit of love now. That a little bit of love is what gets you through and what gets me through each and every day. Let us pray.