

Remarks given at an interfaith service mourning the terrorist attacks on the United States

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The poet Wislawa Szymborska wrote these words about hatred at the end of the last century:

See how efficient it still is,
How it keeps itself in shape-
Our century's hatred.
How easily it vaults the tallest obstacles.
How rapidly it pounces, tracks us down.

It's not like other feelings.
At once both older and younger.
It gives birth itself to the reasons v That give it life.
When it sleeps, it's never eternal rest.
And sleeplessness won't sap its strength; it feeds it.

The kind of hatred that could propel someone to hijack an airplane and crash it into a building full of thousands of people takes my breath away. The terrible crime we witnessed today leaves me horrified and I can't understand it, I can't make sense of it, I can't see God in it, I can't lift up any kernel of potential goodness that will come out from this. Even my relief that my brother who works in Manhattan and my brother who works in the foreign service in Washington are okay gets quickly crowded out by the knowledge that other families will not be so lucky. At this moment, all I can do is witness to the horror of what happened. All I can do is lament. All I can do is keep those who are in pain and mourning in my thoughts and prayers.

It is so easy to respond to such a despicable act of hatred with more hatred. It's a thing we humans have done forever. So here's something else I can do: not respond to this with more hatred. That's something all of us can do-right here in our own city, in right here in our own neighborhood.

I have already heard today from some of my Muslim brothers and sisters right here in the Fox Cities that they have been targeted with hateful words and threats. In tonight's service, we hear from people with many different beliefs and understandings. In what I am about to say, though, we are all united. I speak for each person up here: Christian and Jew and Muslim alike. We as individuals and as a community cannot, must not participate in or condone attacks against our Muslim neighbors. Our Muslim neighbors did not perpetrate this attack. Anti-Muslim hatred? Not in our town. We will not accept it. The hatred stops here-in our hearts, in our town.

And here is one other thing you and I who are not Muslim can do: we can stand in solidarity with our Muslim sisters and brothers, saying if you attack them, you attack us.

Martin Luther King, Jr., said:

We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny...Hatred and bitterness can never cure the disease of fear, only love can. One day we must come to see that peace is not merely a distant goal that we seek but a means by which we arrive at that goal. We must pursue peaceful ends through peaceful means. We shall hew out of the mountain of despair, a mountain of hope.²

1. Wislawa Szymborska, *view with a grain of sand* (San Diego: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1993), p. 181-183.

2. A responsive reading by Martin Luther King, Jr., in *Singing the Living Tradition* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993).