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We are here together All Saints, in person, and online. Together we gather with broken and anguished hearts, also with fear and anger at unspeakable crimes currently being committed against humanity. Our minds and our senses are saturated with reports and images of brutality. These are circumstances over which we have little immediate control and we are left feeling helpless. In a time like this, as we mourn and seek understanding, it is important to be together, to remind ourselves that we are a people of hope. All Saints, we are a community of intentional prayer and coordinated action. We are people who desire to live into the Christ consciousness of radical empathy. It is good to be together today.

The brutality we are witnessing is unspeakable and yet we must speak. We condemn without qualification the violence committed by Hamas. We condemn without qualification, the genocidal rhetoric and actions directed by the Israeli government, and the ethnic cleansing undergirded by a defense minister who calls other human beings, animals. We do not need more destruction to determine that these actions are wrong. Acts of hate and annihilation are always wrong.

Our community is drawn by the compassion of God to live and breathe out compassion for all people. To do this, we must widen our lens beyond the appalling present moment, not denying its horror, but refusing to let that horror represent all there is to know. We need to absorb the full story as much as we are able. Unfortunately, our media does not help. Israeli violence against Palestinians has been intentionally hidden, slowly and steadily, over time. It has not detailed the horrors that Palestinian people have lived through for decades in the form of bombings, arbitrary attacks, arrests and killings. All of this has been taking place in physical conditions that have been described as an open-air prison—a place of both slow and sudden death. If the humanitarian disaster and loss of life happening in this moment in Gaza, assume a greater moral importance for our media, than the last 70 years of colonial and racist subjugation of Palestinian people by the Israeli government, then we must speak out. Consider that more than [1,500 children](#) in Gaza have been killed and around one-third of Gaza homes have been destroyed or damaged in just two weeks — and this is before what is expected to be a much bloodier ground invasion.

As we speak out against the violent subjugation of Palestinian people by the Israeli government, we must also hold compassion for the people of Israel who have also lived through centuries of hate and annihilation. We are called to hold great complexity and the fullest story we can of

both Jewish and Palestinian siblings—and our country’s own involvement. We need to think and learn in order to be equipped to act and pray in a world that has seemingly little appetite for it. It takes a courageous way of learning and naming to accompany immediate moral condemnation with moral vision.

Can we mourn for the lives lost in Israel as well as those lives in Gaza without qualifications? Perhaps a wider capacity for mourning serves a more substantial ideal of equality, one that encompasses the equal grievability of all lives. This kind of consciousness is critical, not for the purposes of rationalizing existing violence or authorizing further violence, but to seek a third path that neither perpetuates a xenophobic response nor sustains an unjust status quo.

The polarization in our world and our country pulls us to take sides for and narrows true dialogue; to dehumanize those whose views differ from our own; to use whatever ends necessary to push and dominate, rather than collaborate. The rise in hate and hate crimes is not only in the middle east, but our own backyard, and on occasion, on our own front lawn.

Why do we hate?

One reason is the fear of those who are different from us. When we feel threatened by perceived outsiders, we can turn to our in-group, to those like us, to feel safer. That is why God is almost obsessed with hospitality to the stranger, and tells us to remember with empathy that we were or could be the stranger in a strange land. We are instructed not only to empathize and care for the poor and the othered, but also to welcome and value the stranger who is who is different from us. Difference is a gift to be received in trust of God’s treasuring of our unique and different selves.

We also hate because we project unwanted parts of ourselves onto others, such as our own competitiveness or lack of empathy. We develop this method to survive, because any 'badness' in us puts us at risk for being rejected and alone. It’s a fear of our own selves and lack of compassion for ourselves that we see as coming from others. This is why Jesus tells us to love others as we love ourselves, and it is why we are so dependent on God’s love for us, in order to do it. The need for love lies at the very foundation of human existence. Profound interdependence is something we all share. Oh, what a better world it would be, if we could compassionately embrace common need and vulnerability!

Some of us can hate is having being hurt physically or devalued, or having those we love harmed. In these cases, revenge is often a part of hate. Behind revenge is to desire to hurt the person/group as much as we have been hurt by them.

Hate spreads and increases more quickly it’s directed at a group, rather than an individual. When you hate a group, the intensity of hate can grow. Without being confronted with specific persons or contrasting information from the group—hate is based on stereotypes and prejudices. If you hate an individual, your hate may be countered with empathy or a reappraisal of the person when you encounter their positive side or see their vulnerability. In fact, when

people in conflict regions were asked to tell stories in which they hated someone, 80% talked about groups and not individuals. Not only can people hate others based on someone else's experiences, but that hate can be as intense as if they had experienced the event themselves. This is why proximity to each other and to learning each other's stories is so vital. Once you factor in human beings and refuse to capitulate to the idea that the governments are the people, the complexity becomes ever more vast and intricate, just like all of us.

God calls us to radical empathy, to actively engage and consider another person's point of view, even when we strongly disagree, in order to connect more deeply. It involves striving to better understand and share the feelings of others and then allowing our own perspectives to change. We must hold the sacred humanity of every person even when pulled to do something else.

This week I listened to a podcast of three interfaith leaders based in Chicago, a rabbi, an Islamic leader, and Rev. Dr Otis Moss, lead pastor of Trinity Methodist church. This team led a group to Israel and Gaza, seeking understanding and to learn better ways to engage in peace and justice making. The group's departure back to Chicago was the day of the Hamas attack. In the podcast, they each described the surreal moments driving to the airport hearing the first news of the Hamas strikes. As they arrived in the terminal, the intensity of the attack became nearer and clearer, resulting in terror of all those inside. Everyone scrambled together, all in need of the comfort and help from each other. In those moments, people didn't pay any mind to who belonged to what group. They held each other, carried each other's luggage, and assisted each other in finding their way. As in many moments of crisis, the common vulnerability, the common humanity, and the common need for comfort, safety and connection shone above everything else.

We seek God's dream for all people to live together in freedom, non-violence, equality and justice. How do we hang on to our common humanity in the midst of polarities and dehumanization? How can we foster this connection in ourselves and each other? Our gospel reading today has an answer. We must ground ourselves in the deepest reality of all that exists: the never-ending love of God that is at the center of all of creation. It is at the center of each of us and everyone else, no matter how hidden, distorted, and invisible to us it might seem. Sometimes we must use our empathic imagination and our faith to see it. When we cannot, we lean into God who never loses God's vision of anyone.

In this gospel, Jesus is addressing the separated ones. In his time, these were religious leaders whose focus had become determining who was pure and worthy, and who was not. All of us can mistakenly base our identities on the exclusion and devaluation of others. For example, we might call another culture primitive or barbaric, and own or our friends, civilized. This is a false and destructive way of trying to secure ourselves, based on the illusion that that we are in fact separate and better than others. That is a grotesque distortion, and a kind of optical delusion of consciousness. Our task must be to free ourselves from this unholy perception, by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty. God's presence is everywhere and it is God's presence we reverence.

Jesus knew how lost we can be when we separate ourselves from love. That is why responding to the questioners who were pushing him to divide things up by level of importance, Jesus answers with wholeness. Jesus' radical compassion and egalitarian love was an invitation to the separated ones to join the kingdom party, where there is unity across diversity, only and always.

Jesus taught them and us three things-to love God, to love ourselves, and to love each other as we are loved. He knew that we can only love because we are first loved, truly secure in our identity as God's beloved. When we face the fear of being vulnerable and utterly human, it allows us to connect, to feel, and ultimately, to love.

All faith traditions know this truth. In order to make a difference in our world, we must dwell in compassion and absolutely refusal to reduce our complexity or give up on our goodness. Our God who suffers with us calls us to alleviate the suffering of others. We must dig deep, seeing across differences, as we recognize the deepest desire of all human beings to live together in freedom, non-violence, equality and justice. We are a people of hope because nothing is impossible with God. This hope not just something for dreamers and prophets and it is, but it is also for those who know how to organize.

After this service, we will have the opportunity, as we do each week to put our faith into action by donating to Episcopal Relief for Al Ahli Hospital. Ahli hospital has been a sacred sanctuary for all people of Gaza, a beacon of hope, and is deeply respected throughout Gaza for the compassion, attention, and care they offer the most vulnerable.

We will also have the opportunity to sign letters to our state and federal government, asking that our leaders do all that is in their power to de-escalate the violence. They must call for an immediate cease fire and an end to plans for an Israeli ground invasion which would necessarily mean the loss of many more civilian lives. We call for the creation of safe corridors for those seeking to move away from the fighting, and safe zones for those who cannot or will not leave their homes. We need collaboration with international governments and aid organizations to bring much needed food, fuel, water, temporary shelters and other vital supplies to those displaced people in Gaza. Roll up your sleeves ASC! Please also join those in our community who will be traveling to Leo Beck temple this evening, to support our Jewish siblings in their time of trauma and need. Together we will do the work of radical compassion until no child is born into disaster or subjected to such atrocities.

And while you are on the lawn, please enjoy the hospitality offered to all of us by our **Asian American Pacific Islander Ministry**, as we celebrate **Filipino American History Month**. Stay, learn, and listen to the stories you may have never known before.

**It is good to be together today.
Amen**