

VIEW FROM THE HEIGHTS

May 2019

Greetings,

Lent and Easter were tough times for churches. Three black Baptist churches in Louisiana were deliberately incinerated; Notre Dame de Paris experienced severe damage from a nine-hour conflagration; and, on Easter Sunday, three Sri Lankan churches were destroyed by explosive devices. Hundreds of worshippers were killed or injured in the bombings.

The loss of beloved sacred spaces and the extensive damage to a magnificent cultural and religious heritage site are both tragic. The willful extinction of life suggests pure evil.

The Sri Lankan bombings and the Southern US burnings continue this new horror of attacking places of worship – and their worshippers. The Christchurch massacre occurred just six weeks ago; the Pittsburgh shootings at the Tree of Life synagogue only last October; with yet another synagogue attack this past Saturday.

The damage or destruction of holy places is distressing but all that is harmed is bricks and mortar, tradition and memories. Although they are humanly precious, they are only symbols of God. The Divine is present everywhere and is often more authentically encountered in Nature - God's own design masterpiece.

There is, however, something deeply depraved about attacking men and women at prayer. Houses of worship are places where we should feel most safe and most free to be real. In the sanctuaries of our own faith, each of us can meet our Creator in the fullness of who we are. Before the One who loves us with a cosmic passion, race, gender, sexuality and economic standing neither diminish nor exalt our status. Offenses cannot bar access, nor pain and suffering unlock secret doors to Grace. When we kneel before our Heavenly Parent, we are in God and God is in us AS WE TRULY ARE.

To challenge or confront a person who prays because of who they are or how they strive to follow God is to critique the One who waits on that path for them. An attack on a person at prayer is an attack on the Divine Essence within us at its purest and holiest point.

*Eternal God whose image lies in the hearts of all people,
We live among peoples whose ways are different from ours,
whose faiths are foreign to us,
whose tongues are unintelligible to us.
Help us to remember that you love all people with your great love,
that all religion is an attempt to respond to you,
that the yearnings of other hearts are much like our own
and are known to you.
Help us to recognize you in the words of truth,
the things of beauty,
the actions of love about us.ⁱ*

Peace, Salaam, Shalom,
Brenda

ⁱ "God's Love for All People", World Council of Churches, Vancouver Assembly, 1983