



**Ebenezer Baptist Election Eve Prayer Rally
November 5, 2018
Rabbi Sharon Brous**

Last week in Pittsburgh the sanctity of the Sabbath was shattered when a White Nationalist burst through the doors of Tree of Life synagogue and murdered eleven Jews who had gathered to pray. This was the most violent anti-Semitic attack in our nation's history.

This attack came only three days after another white supremacist in another American city tried to barge into a church in Louisville, KY to shoot some black folks, and when he couldn't get in, shot and killed two African Americans in a nearby shopping center.

These events did not happen in a vacuum—they are the inevitable outcome of racialized hatred and anti-Semitism being fed, fueled and funded by those with a political agenda that literally puts our lives on the line.

I ask that we start tonight with a moment of silence for those who have lost their lives to racial terror, to anti-Semitic hatred and to gun violence.

...

May their memories be a blessing.

Tonight, I want to tell you a story.

I have a friend, a mother of four beautiful little children. She was suffering last year from a terrible, inexplicable abdominal pain. For months, she tried to ignore it; she's one of those women who can endure anything, without even a complaint. But every day it grew worse and worse until she could barely work and care for her children. Eventually, she dragged herself to the doctor, who took one look at her and rushed her to the emergency room.

In the ER they put her through all manner of tests, and they discovered that the real problem had nothing to do with her abdomen. She had a tumor, wrapped around her spine. Nobody had ever seen anything like it. They rushed her into surgery and through a combination of medical ingenuity and God's grace, my friend's life was saved.

And about that pain? They never figured out exactly what it was. They wouldn't say it was unrelated, but they were clear that the thing that was hurting her was not the thing that nearly killed her. Instead, that pain awakened her to the cancerous growth that could and would have taken her life.

The pain in the gut that plagues America today is real. With every tweet, with every racist lie and anti-Semitic canard issued from the Oval Office, we are nearly brought to our knees with the pain.

But that pain is not what's killing us.

Yes, the fires burning around the country have been fueled by a Promulgator-of-Hate-in-Chief. Eleven Jews last week were shot dead because his vicious lies are taken seriously by far too many people. Racist robo-calls and voter intimidation and blatant, shameless voter suppression abound today because they have implied consent from the very top. Seething hatred toward a caravan of poor folks fleeing violence and poverty and looking for a better life issues daily from the Oval Office. If the President were in middle school he'd have been expelled long ago for bullying, cheating and lying.

The violations of norms are so egregious, it's tempting to think that it's all about him. But it's only once we take an honest look at the whole body that we're able to diagnose the bigger sickness afflicting the system. And it's only then that we'll have a fighting chance at rebuilding the body and soul of this nation.

We are in the ER, friends. The body of our nation is on the table, and the soul doctors—many of whom are in this room, including Pastor Raphael Warnock, Bishop William Barber, Rev. Jesse Jackson, Rev. Traci Blackmon and Rep. John Lewis himself—are offering the diagnosis: there is a cancer wrapped around the spine of our nation. It is the cancer of white supremacy married to the cancer of patriarchy. These are the diseases that have festered and metastasized at the heart of our nation from its founding, that have demonized, dehumanized, demoralized and disenfranchised millions of people over hundreds of years. Its toxicity knows no bounds. If these illnesses are left unchecked, no one is safe.

But there is hope. There is always hope.

Because today, we can finally see it. Today, millions have taken to the streets in protest. Today, people who never thought their voices mattered are showing up to canvas and vote and make their voices heard. Today, white folks in the suburbs are talking about voter suppression as the grave injustice it is. We now *finally* have the opportunity to treat the disease that plagues America.

What's happening here, right now, in this state, is not just about making history, it's about making JUSTICE. That's why I answered the call to come to Georgia; I took my kids out of school and brought them here because our faith tells us we've got to do whatever we can to help make justice happen.

I tell my children: the Bible is an inherently political document. The story of slaves rising up before the most powerful, tyrannical ruler in ancient world to demand freedom and dignity for all people is an inherently political message. And our sacred texts and traditions, our FAITH, did not survive thousands of years only to be muted precisely at the moment their eternal message matters most. We make a mockery of faith when we suggest that the way we live in human society, the way we treat one another, the way we care for—or neglect to care for—the least among us is outside the scope of religion.

So here we stand tonight, in this holy place, this church that has held both the pain and the glory, to remind one another that religion means nothing if it's not a response to the great moral crises of our day. If it's not a reminder for us in tumultuous times to bring a commitment to equity, equality, justice and dignity into our homes and classrooms, our synagogues and churches, and to manifest that just vision at the polls tomorrow.

We're here to remind the country that 'neutrality' is not a moral category when human lives are on the line, and especially when those most vulnerable are targeted.

We're here because I know and believe with all my heart: we either work to dismantle oppressive systems, or our inaction becomes the mortar that sustains them.

Our friend, African-American Zen Buddhist priest Rev. angel Kyodo Williams, declares that it's time to build a new America. Because America was not built for many of the people who now call it home. It was built by—but not for—black folks. It wasn't built for Muslims, Asians, Latinos or Jews. It wasn't built for LGBTQ folks, for feminists, for African-American Zen Buddhist priests or women rabbis. It wasn't built for so many of us.

What we need is not to return to a time of mythical greatness. We need to build America anew, equipped to hold us in all our beauty, diversity and complexity.

Yes, the body of our nation is unwell. But we are naming and extracting the tumor wrapped around the spine, and we are building a new America.

It's happening right here in Georgia. And in Florida. And around this country where an unprecedented number of people have registered and waited on line to vote—and millions more will tomorrow.

Many in this room have been fighting our whole lives for the New America. And though the road is long and the challenges great, we can see that new America ahead, and we continue to fight with love. With creativity and imagination and guts beyond what we think we can muster. Resilience. Heart. We draw spiritual strength from those who marched before us, and those marching beside us.

Because we can see the new America being born, and it is fierce, gorgeous and fair. It is built on justice and mercy, and it makes room for everyone. We will rebuild this nation with love. And a new light of hope and possibility will shine across this nation, from neighbor to neighbor, from parent to child, from sea to shining sea.

Amen.