

Something to Think About

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Picture this: Tomorrow you wake up and discover that the infamous, yet to be convicted James Alex Fields, the man arrested for death of the heroic Heather Healy and the injuring of 19 others in Charlottesville, Va., has been moved onto your cell block; what do you do?

What if to make matters worse, you're told that he's going to be your new cellie (or for my non-incarcerated brothers/sisters, your next door neighbor); he's still spouting the same ideology and you are a member of one of the groups that he wants to see killed - Blacks, homo/transsexuals, Jews, immigrants.... What do you do?

It seems to me that there are a few options available to us:

1. We can ignore him, acting as if he doesn't exist no matter how closely his and our worlds may intersect.
2. We can beat him up either alone or by participating as others do, so, or
3. We can sit back and watch, receiving some kind of vicarious thrill/satisfaction, as others commence to make of his life a living hell, doing to him the things that we may have thought about and felt like doing.

The anger, maybe even hatred, many of us may feel towards Mr. Fields (and his ideological kith and kin) is understandable. Also understandable is the urge to strike back, to cause him to feel the kind of pain he has caused; especially if we are a member of a group that he's specifically targeted for physical harm/death.

However, I would like to propose a fourth, much more difficult, but I would argue much better, alternative for dealing with Mr. Fields and those like him:

4. We can be compassionate; we can love him.

WHAT!?

"But he did ...," yes, I know - love him.

"And he said...," yes, I know. Love him.

Loving Mr. Fields (and those, who like him are vociferous advocates of hate and proponents of violence) does not mean that we condone his beliefs, his actions or the suffering he's caused or is currently causing. In fact, it is our duty to stand against such beliefs and actions whenever and wherever we may encounter them. However, loving him does mean that while we are standing against him and are empathizing with and seeking to provide succor to his victims, we also remain cognizant of one inescapable fact -- he is suffering too.

Of course the suffering I am referencing has nothing whatsoever to do with the legal consequences of his criminal acts. I am speaking of the suffering that comes from the spiritual, mental, and emotional

wounds he has (even if unacknowledged), wounds that are at the root of his abhorrent beliefs and consequent behaviors.

My brothers and sisters, it is my firm belief that it is this kind of invisible suffering that we, regardless of our faith tradition(s) are most strongly called to "heal". The only thing that we can accomplish by ostracizing, ignoring, or physically assaulting Mr. Fields is to confirm and strengthen those very beliefs that we find to be so repugnant, thereby increasing his, and potentially others suffering.

Finally, and this is directed primarily towards my fellow incarcerated brothers and sisters, consider:

- How many victims have we created with the crime(s) for which we are incarcerated?
- How many people have been traumatized because of the lives we've taken, the stores/banks we've robbed, the drugs we've sold, the persons we've physically/sexually assaulted, or whatever other harmful, criminal act(s) we have committed?
- Is my crime any less horrible because it was committed with a gun instead of a car, because there was only one legally recognized victim instead of twenty? Should I be ostracized by other inmates or suffer "daily" beatings at their hands for my crime? Should you for yours?

The point I am trying to make is that the way we treat the Mr. Fields of the world is the way that we are proclaiming that we, ourselves ought to be treated. Mr. Fields is no more, nor any less worthy and just as undeserving of the love, forgiveness, respect, and recognition of his humanity as any of us on this side of the walls are. If we can't extend these to him then whatever faith tradition we profess to follow is meaningless and hollow; if we can't extend these to him then we ought to forego any hope of anyone else (incarcerated or free) ever graciously, and just as undeservingly, bestowing the same upon us.

Just a little something to think about.