

# KNOX CHURCH

love faith outreach community justice

In response to  
**the shootings  
in Christchurch**  
on 15 March, 2019



Knox's mission statement states: "We strive to be open to dialogue and shared experiences with people of other faiths."

**So we say "As salam u Alaikum".**

On 15 March 2019, someone (locally having purchased several guns from “Gun City” in Cranford Street) attacked two mosques in Christchurch - the Masjid Al Noor in Deans Avenue and the Linwood Islamic Centre. As the people of those places worshipped their God peacefully, 50 of them were killed. Others were injured grievously in body and spirit. Many others mourn.

At Knox, we were horrified by what had happened, and responded in various ways.

Indicative of that response, the following are presented:

1. A short sermon preached at Knox two days after the shooting
2. Expressions of support gathered from Knox people to our Muslim neighbours within worship on 17 March
3. Expressions of horror offered to God by Knox people on 17 March
4. The Inner-City Ministers’ Association’s expression of support to the Muslim Community of Christchurch
5. The reading that Knox’s minister read at the Inter-faith event at the Peace Bell in the Botanic Gardens on 24 March
6. The PCANZ moderator’s pastoral response
7. The Inner-City Ministers’ Association submission to the parliamentary select committee dealing with Prohibited Firearms, Magazines, and Parts Amendment Bill
8. In the light of public conversation following the shootings, with consideration having been given to the line between free speech and hate speech, a “thought starter” document written by the minister, giving a preliminary Christian critique about the nature of speech.

Within the spirit of Knox’s commitment to peace, we present these things in the hope they will contribute to the making of peace.

Matthew Jack  
Minister of Knox Church, Christchurch



## Sermon Archive 236

Sunday 17 March, 2019

Knox Church, Christchurch

Lessons:       Isaiah 53: 1-6  
                  1 John 4: 7-12

Preacher:      Rev. Dr Matthew Jack



The prophet Isaiah can't believe what he has heard. He has heard of an unjust, senseless crime committed against an innocent man. God had created a human being - and the human being was tender, like a new, green shoot - vulnerable . . . God had watched the human being grow - and although there was no physical majesty, although the human being was in many ways quite like any other human being, God derived great delight in watching him grow. He was something living, something alive, on a landscape that sometimes seemed so dry and dusty. Life seemed to God to be beautiful. So when the dreadful thing happened to him, God didn't want to see. God wanted to look away - but couldn't. God had to look at it, and ask us why. Why had we gone astray? Why had he been despised and held of no account? We might think that we've been asking God "why", but maybe that question is something more properly addressed to us.

Why does our world produce people who hate? Why do we, who speak of our home down here on the bottom of the world as some kind of idyllic sanctuary put up with people owning machine guns? Why do we allow people, made in the sacred image of God, to be despised? Ah we, like sheep, have gone astray - to the cost of the innocent human being who loses his life, her life, their life. Buried in the body of our faith is the perverse mystery of why the servant suffers. It's just not right.

And so the community responds. The police seek out the criminals. The medics tend to the injured. The families receive their dead. The teachers lock down the children. The psychologists talk about how to talk about it. The politicians seek to make the right announcements. The Christians open their doors and write their letters. The Muslims cry. In time the courts will make their judgments and the prison officers will turn the key. And for us all, within, there will be a new kind of sorrow - a new kind of "who has believed what we have heard?"

What then?

Beloved; let us love another - because love is from God.

- Lest the sufferer feel that no one cares, let us love one another.
- Lest we allow the violence to define who we are, let us love one another.
- Lest we become what we hate, let us love one another.
- Lest the redeeming work of God not be done, let us love one another.
- Lest God fade from our landscape, let us love one another.

I feel no need to preach at length just now about the nature of love. We all know what love is - what it does. It greets the other. It weeps with the weeping. Love embraces. Love sits silently with. We know all this.

Later in the service there will be time to untangle some of this. There will be time to frame some words, express our love.

But for now, a moment of quiet.

**During worship on Sunday 17 March, worshippers at Knox wrote notes of support for the people of Al Noor and Linwood.**

- Peace and love be with you at this time
- Compassion
- togetherness
- We grieve with you
- Sorry
- Let peace will you
- They were a community - now they are whanau
- In the face of evil, love alone is the way
- Our love to all immigrant people to NZ
- I'm sorry
- Have courage
- Let's show that love conquers all. We will show that we will not be beaten down by evil - never!
- Our love for you lives on!
- I'm ashamed I didn't know any of you going to the mosque. I am so sorry for what has happened to you
- Let us love each other. Let this unite us and not fill us with hate
- I'm so sorry your were harmed so grievously in your place of prayer. I am here to witness your sorrow, to share it with you and walk with you in faith.

**During worship on Sunday 17 March, worshippers at Knox wrote thoughts to God.**

- Love and prayers to the Japanese students locked in the dark under tables at Hagley College for 4 hours. May they find peace.
- Help
- I'm sorry. Please help us see where we have gone wrong and what we can do to stop this
- Lord, may your teachings of love, forgiveness and tolerance go everywhere to all children. Help us to make it happen.
- Let us learn more about the Muslim faith and interact with them so we can show them love
- Lord, teach us to love, not hate
- Bring peace and dignity amid anguish, grief and sorrow
- Peace becomes with us in our communities in Christchurch and in our suburbs as well as the city as a whole
- I weep with you
- What is it that we need to do to bring peace to this world God
- Thank you for the gift of life. Thank you for a heart that can know you. Help us live from the heart
- Let us love each other. Let this unite people and not let hate take over.
- We are stripped to our barest humanity - to a beating heart, one beating heart in us all, with each other, with all
- What do I do now?

**The Inner-City Ministers' Association wrote a letter of support to the Muslim community of Christchurch.**

Friday, 15 March 2019

**The Christchurch Inner-City Christian Ministers' Association.  
To the Muslim Community of Christchurch.**

In the face of today's horrific shooting, the combined inner-city Christian ministers and their congregations wish to extend our love to the wider Muslim Community of Christchurch and assure them of our friendship and support at this time of great loss.

Be assured of our continuing prayers as our joint city community and people struggle to understand what has happened in the wake of this unconscionable act.

As members of two faith traditions, born out of a shared Abrahamic inheritance, we stand in solidarity with you. Looking, and crying, to God, the source of all.

Peace be with you,  
The Inner-City Churches of Christchurch

---

On behalf of the wider association,

**Oxford Terrace Baptist Church**

The Rev'd Chris Chamberlain

**Holy Trinity, Avonside**

The Rev'd Jill Keir

**St Michael & All Angels**

The Rev'd Christopher Orczy

**Knox Church**

The Rev'd Dr Matthew Jack

**St Mary the Virgin, Addington St Luke's in the City**

The Ven Helen Roud

**St Mary's Pro-Cathedral**

The Rev'd Fr Christopher Friel

**Durham Street Methodist Church**

The Rev'd Philomeno Kibera, The Rev'd Darryn Hickling

**The Salvation Army, Christchurch**

Gordon Daly, Lieutenant Colonel

**Kings Church**

The Rev'd Ken Shelley

**The Christ Church Transitional Cathedral** The Very Rev'd Lawrence Kimberley

The Rev'd Ben Randall The Ven Nicky Lee The Rev'd Alastair Buick The Ven Lynnette Lightfoot

*If any of the matters in this pamphlet raise matters that you would like to talk through, NZ's national helpline is "1737, need to talk". 24 / 7, trained counsellors are available.*

**Knox's minister attended the Inter-faith event at the Peace Bell, in the Botanic Garden, on Sunday 24 March, where various faith communities were given opportunity to pray or speak. This is what he said.**

As salam u Alaikum

In the spirit of prayer, I offer this reading from the Christian scriptures:

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

**Right Rev. Fakaofu Kaio, moderator of the General Assembly of the PCANZ wrote a pastoral letter in response to the shootings.**



## Message from the Moderator

 Presbyterian Church  
of Aotearoa New Zealand

Greetings.

We pray for our Presbyterian Church family in Christchurch as they endure another tremendous shake up to their lives that will test their resilience. The attack on folks at worship is a violation of our whole nation. We stand united in Aotearoa. Kia kaha.

Earlier this week, on Tuesday, I was privileged and honoured to represent the Presbyterian Church family, along with selected religious leaders, as guests of Parliament's Speaker of the House.

The prayers, as well as the debate by leaders of political parties - especially the Prime Minister - were both profound and sombre. The emotions and grief were overwhelming, with weeping of men, women and children. For a moment, we were a family standing together sharing our sorrow.

We uplift and encourage all the good and loving work carried out by our Presbyterian family in this crisis. There are so many giving unselfishly of your resources, time and energy. We think of our chaplains at St Andrews College and Rangi Ruru, of our churches and schools in the area, and our family in Christchurch. You are in our prayers.

I also want to share that we have been touched by prayers and messages of support from ecumenical partners and denominational leaders from the world over. The message over the page, from Pakistan-based Ecumenical Commission for Human Development, is one of many our Church has received expressing condolences for the victims of this terrible tragedy.

May we be ever thankful for the love and power of God throughout the world.



Rt Rev Fakaofu Kaio  
Moderator Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand



Following the shootings, parliament moved quickly to legislate against the kind of weaponry used in the assault. As part of that process, a select committee invited submissions from the public. The Inner-City Ministers' Association made the following submission.

**Submission on the Arms  
(Prohibited Firearms, Magazines, and Parts)  
Amendment Bill**

**By the Inner-City Ministers' Association, Christchurch.**

**4 April 2019**

We are a group of Church leaders of Christian faith communities representing a range of Christian churches in the inner city of Christchurch.

We write to support the proposed gun-law reforms encapsulated in the Arms (Prohibited Firearms, Magazines, and Parts) Amendment Bill, which seeks to:

- prevent the general population of New Zealand from importing, selling, supplying, or possessing most semi-automatic firearms (other than pistols)
- ban pump action shotguns with more than a five shot capacity
- ban semi-automatic shotguns with a capacity to hold a detachable magazine, or with an internal magazine capable of holding more than five cartridges
- exempt some semi-automatic firearms with limited ammunition capacity
- allow an amnesty for prohibited firearms, magazines, and parts that are surrendered to licensed dealers or the Police by 30 September 2019
- introduce tougher penalties and some new offences.

As followers of Christ and consistent with his teaching, we support the promotion of a culture of non-violence that values self-giving love, compassion and justice. We reject violence in all its forms.

We believe that all people in our community should know that they dwell in a safety, in a society in which the slaughter of innocents, whatever their religion or ethnicity, is unthinkable. In the language of one of the best-known parables of Jesus; we believe we must not only be good Samaritans, ministering to the person who was injured and wounded; we must also make safe the road from Jericho to Jerusalem by removing most semi-automatic firearms.

We note the experience of Australia since gun law reforms were introduced in 1996. The University of Sydney, in a 2016 study published in the [Journal of the American Medical Association](#), found Australia hadn't experienced a fatal

mass shooting – one in which five or more people are killed – since the 1996 shooting in that country. In the 18 years prior, 1979-1996, there were 13 fatal mass shootings in Australia.

We believe that a loving and just society should take the necessary steps to end violence against human beings created by God. Accordingly, we stand in support of the Arms (Prohibited Firearms, Magazines, and Parts) Amendment Bill.

The Very Rev'd Lawrence Kimberley  
Dean of Christchurch

Fr Chris Friel  
Administrator of the Roman Catholic Pro Cathedral of St Mary

The Rev'd Chris Chamberlain  
Oxford Terrace Baptist Church

The Rev'd Dr Matthew Jack  
Minister of Knox Presbyterian Church

The Rev'd Ben Randall  
Assistant Priest, Christchurch Transitional Cathedral.

**Following the shootings, and public reflection on how Islamophobia, white supremacism and hate speech may have contributed to what had happened, much of the public discourse clustered around the issue of democracy and freedom of speech.**

**Understanding why, but feeling a bit faith-constrained by how, the public discourse was being framed, and wondering what Christian wisdom might shift the unproductive public discourse, the minister wrote a “thought starting paper”.**



## **A BIBLICAL REFLECTIVE CONTRIBUTION TOWARDS RE-FRAMING THE NATIONAL CONVERSATION ABOUT FREE SPEECH AND HATE SPEECH.**

In Aotearoa New Zealand just now, we're talking a lot about the challenge of balancing "freedom of speech" with what "hate speech" has produced in our community - namely, the death of fifty people in Christchurch. The lines of discussion seem to be being formed around the principle of "speech as a democratic right". It's cast as a struggle between freedom of expression and the social necessity of censorship. Although I understand the importance of conducting a conversation around these dual concerns, and respect the traditions from which these principles come, the debate has long been thus framed and has progressed very little. I have found myself wondering whether the issues couldn't be re-framed to a more productive affect. For the Christian community, I have found myself exploring four Bible stories about speech.

### **The first human being is taught to speak.**

Early in the Biblical narrative, God, having created a human being, becomes concerned that the human being is alone. God says "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner." [Genesis 2:18] God creates all manner of living creatures, then sits with the human being, encouraging "him" to name all the animals. The naming of things, the using of words to describe what is seen, is all part of making the human being less alone. The original gift of language is for the building of community - part of seeking for the human being a suitable companion.

Language, therefore, is presented as a gift from God for the creation of community. Speech is given for the making less alone of the creature who needs company. The dynamic here is not about "human right"; it is about grace (gift, given in concern); and the goal of the gift is communion. To use language in any way that breaks communion fails to use language in its natural, purposeful way. If speech is for "seeking partnership", and hate is about "denial of communion", then "hate speech" becomes an oxymoron. In this story, it's not about "right to speech"; it's about what speech is for.

### **The ambitious find themselves unable to communicate**

The Bible's second significant speech story is about Babel [Genesis 11]. The development of different languages, and the source of miscommunication (to the point of frustration of purpose), is presented as God's response to naked human ambition. If humanity is going to be destructively ambitious, then God will mess up humanity's ability to communicate. The story suggests that whenever language fails to do what it should have done, it is the result of inappropriate human ambition. Again, from a secular democratic standpoint, one might argue that each human being has a right to speak, but when ambition

fuels the speaking, speech won't work. What is speech for? It is for communion. "Ambitious communion" is as much an oxymoron as "hate speech".

### **The withdrawal of speech**

The one occasion where Jesus, called upon to speak, seemed to have chosen not to speak, was when faced by Herod Antipas, [Luke 23]. Infamously corrupt, irrelevant and decadent, Herod received no words from Jesus. Is there a sense here of speech (given for communion) being rather too valuable a gift to be extended to someone who is not open to communion? Speech is affirmed as a sacred gift given solely for use among those who listen. There is a high regard given here to speech, which perhaps provides caution to those who, within their assumed right to speak freely, use speech casually or unworthily.

### **The compulsion of speech**

In Acts 4, Peter and John, having been arrested for speech crimes the day before, were called to give account before the Council in Jerusalem. Peter, said to having been prompted by the Spirit, says what he needs to say. He speaks truth to power, and on this occasion the truth sets him free - the council begrudgingly releases him. This has become one of the paradigms for Christian boldness in speech; bold speech is argued to be the work of the Spirit. The context of the speaking is important though. Peter speaks not into some vague space of un-answerability. He speaks into a space of responsibility and consequence. As he speaks, he is answerable to those who listen and can end his speaking. This story questions any suggestion that you can say whatever you want, and walk away.

-ooOoo-

There are times for free speaking. Those times come not without cost. There are dismissive, un-listening times when speech is better withheld - to maintain the dignity of the gift. There are times when our speech is subverted by our ambition. Most importantly, there is a noble original purpose for which speech was given.

I submit that exploring that original purpose, through the lens of the other cautionary stories, is likely to be more productive to us, in our current trauma, than talking about absolute and easy rights to speech.

Arohanui,

Matthew Jack.  
2 April, 2019.