

Remarks of Rabbi Shoshana Feferman, Temple Israel of Valparaiso at Interfaith Prayer Rally – 6.4.2020

On May 25th, our country witnessed a despicable act of violence: the murder of an innocent black man, George Floyd, by a brutal white police officer who brought dishonor to his badge and uniform.

It was very difficult to watch without feeling pain and anger. We heard George Floyd saying, “I can’t breathe,” and none of the other policemen who stood by tried to stop this cruelty and save the man’s life.

Evidently, none of them knew what the passage in the Bible in the book of Leviticus 19 says, “Do not stand idly by while your brother bleeds.” In the Jewish faith, this commandment is at the center of our holiness code that we read on our holiest day, Yom Kippur.

According to Jewish belief, we are all brothers and sisters who were created in the image of God. According to our belief, when G-d created Adam, He took clay from all 4 corners of the world and mixed it. Therefore, we must all be treated the same: with respect, equality and dignity.

Yet, in the face of this tragedy, I can see hope. I see it here tonight in front of my eyes. I see how we have all come together: black and white, Christians, Muslims, Jews and others to reject hatred, violence and this senseless act of murder. Tonight, we are not standing idly by.

And let us not forget that the vast majority of our police officers are good and decent men and women who risk their lives to protect all of us. They protect our places of worship, and when G-d forbid there is a school shooting, they are the first to rush into the line of fire. I am sure that the vast majority of the 800,000 police officers in our country were as disgusted and heartbroken by this senseless act of violence as we are.

So in these difficult times, we should stand up and speak out against evil, just as we are doing tonight, but let us also not ignore the good that we see in our country.

Let me conclude with a prayer found in our prayer book:

“Eternal G-d, we face the morrow with hope made stronger by the vision of Your kingdom, a world where poverty and war are banished, where injustice and hate are gone. Teach us more and more to share the pain of others, to heed Your call for justice, to pursue the blessing of peace. Help us O, G-d, to gain victory over evil, to bring nearer the day when the world shall be one, and all at last shall live in freedom.” Amen.