Guest column: This Memorial Day, faith should help us build a country worth fighting for

This Memorial Day weekend, our hearts are breaking.

As we remember and honor the lives of those who died in military service, their memories live alongside those we have lost to the many other struggles that have become part of our daily life: our loved ones lost to COVID-19, to addiction, to gun violence, to mental health crisis and suicide, and so much more.

This week, I got a message from a friend in Texas with four words: “Oh no. Another shooting.”

My heart seized as it did 10 days prior when a friend from Buffalo sent this terrifying reassurance: “Don’t know if you’ve seen the news. But we’re safe.”

Our nation is ripped open again in grief in the hours and days since these shootings have occurred. We have meanwhile passed a milestone that feels impossible to wrap one’s head around: 1 million deaths from COVID-19. That’s 1 million Americans: 1 million mothers, fathers, Pop Pop’s, Nanas, aunts, uncles, children, co-workers and friends. In Berks and Montgomery counties alone, we have lost over 3,800 people to COVID-19.

It is easy to become numb to such loss. But Memorial Day reminds us of the importance and power of memory. On Memorial Day, we refuse to let the lives of soldiers who died in wars become invisible. They too were fathers, brothers, sisters, mothers, and beloved friends. To honor their memory, we have the responsibility to work together to create a country and society that is worth fighting for.

As a Christian pastor, I serve communion on the first Sunday of the month. Every time we do communion, we remember Jesus' broken body. In making Jesus' body visible, we make all broken bodies visible. We refuse to forget the consequences of human violence: those lost because of our inaction, or because of our desire for power, control, and greed. In times like these, faith and spirituality give us the capacity to feel the pain of our world while refusing to accept unjust suffering as the norm.

We need a faith that gives us courage to act because the reality is that we are hurting. We are grieving, no matter how much that grief might be buried under the stuff of our daily lives.

None of us want to live in a county, state, or country where we have to fear losing our lives to so many causes to which there are solutions, even when we disagree about those solutions. Faith should not lead us to put our heads in the sand or sit in our own partisan bubbles. It should equip us for action and for complex conversations across our differences of how, through both policy changes and individual changes, we can make the world a better place.

And so we will not forget. We will not forget our loved ones lost to war. We will not forget our loved ones lost to COVID-19. We will not forget the victims of gun violence in Uvalde, in Buffalo, in Parkland, and in our own neighborhoods.

No matter who you voted for or no matter what your beliefs are about solutions to violence, to the pandemic, and beyond, may our patriotism this year be the kind that gives us the faith to work together for a country worth living in. A country we are proud of — where we all are safe, where we all are well, and where truly each one of us, even with our differences, can thrive.

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