

BROCK'S BANTER: Making Room for Love

By Brock Weir

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Eleven men and women of disparate backgrounds, separated in age by 43 years, all united by faith, were on the minds of so many this past weekend as the world came to grips with yet another unspeakable tragedy that unfolded not far from the other side of our southern border.

The mass shooting at Pittsburgh's Tree of Life Synagogue on Saturday, October 27, during morning services, came at the end of what was a very difficult week for our neighbours. Aside from this terrible shooting, pipe bombs were sent out to supposed adversaries of the country's administration, blame was being batted around like a surreal and macabre ping pong ball, and heated rhetoric left people wondering what could possibly come next.

Sadly, this was it, and people are still left pondering the same question.

In the days that followed, even here at home, the stories and the legacies of the eleven victims of the Pittsburgh shooting loomed large.

Like those eleven men and women, part of my weekend was spent attending a service of faith.

While I am not a religious person by nature and do not subscribe to any singular faith group, I had the pleasure of attending a special service to mark the bicentennial of Aurora United Church, a local church body which works diligently to reach all corners of our community, regardless of faith or background.

While Sunday's event was meant to be one of celebration, there was added poignancy with multiple mentions of Saturday's tragedy, not the least of which was provided by Nora Sanders, Secretary of the United Church of Canada's General Council.

Reading from the Book of Job, Ms. Sanders drew parallels between what is going on in the world today with Job's own struggle and his anger at God.

?He is struggling with something we all struggle with sometimes, looking at the world we live in today and what a horrible example we had yesterday with that shooting in the synagogue and people in their places of worship,? said Ms. Sanders. ?When we think of those kinds of things, which of us doesn't struggle with how, if God really loves us and loves the world, how do things like this happen? How can so much hardship, violence and injustice exist? On one level, I know that that is kind of maybe a shallow understanding of God, but I am human and I know my understanding of God is so limited. We still wonder, we try to make sense of it, and sometimes, like Job, we call God out on it. Job was living in an unjust world. The world is still unjust. Maybe like Job, we don't always remember that when things are good for us, it starts to feel like our due; maybe no more than we deserve, but when our luck turns to the worse, it is easier to see the injustice. When we think beyond ourselves to the experiences of others in the world, the injustice is always apparent.?

I'm sure many of us really do struggle with the issue of if God (or whatever higher power you believe in, if you do indeed believe in one) loves us, how he or she could let it happen, and how she or he can allow so much hardship, violence and injustice exist. But, how many of us actually set out in the world to do something about it?

Those in the United States who have decided to take a partisan approach to ascribing or deflecting blame for Saturday's horror have midterm elections coming up next week. If they genuinely believe that the state of their government is to blame for tragedies like this, or at least responsible for turning up the heat to create an environment to allow something like this to happen, they have their chance to do something about it by marking a ballot.

In fact, we all do. When I think about the chance Americans have this week to help right the ship, as it were, if they do indeed believe there needs to be a change of course, I can't help but think of the disappointingly low voter turnout we experienced just last week.

Thousands of individuals had the right to have their democratic say in how they are governed over the next four years, how issues that happen right in their own back yard are addressed, and how their very community takes shape. Yet, little more than a third of individuals able to have their say actually exercised the right to do so, abdicating their rights, giving up their agency, allowing others to make decisions on their behalf.

Regardless of whether or not you're happy with the way the vote turned out, it is hard to deny there is a whiff of complacency in the air.

What struck me most about what Ms. Sanders said was, ?Maybe, like Job, we don't always remember that when things are good for us, it starts to feel like our due; maybe no more than we deserve, but when our luck turns to the worse, it is easier to see the injustice.?

I think this is true. We trust things to be as they are, that little will change ? until it actually does. We often forget that we need to do our part to maintain what is dear to us and exercise every opportunity to do so.

So often, like the tragedy in Pittsburgh, things are out of our control, but that is not always the case.

In this, the start of Holocaust Education Week, I am reminded by the words Holocaust survivor Faigie Libman left this very congregation with last year at the beginning of the 2017 commemorations: ?My motto is: If there is hatred in your heart there is no room for love.?

In these challenging times, this is a philosophy everyone should hold close. It's simple, but hopefully it can help turn the page on an increasingly dark chapter in our world.