

BROCK'S BANTER: Phoenix from the Ashes

By Brock Weir

Their words left a lasting impression, regardless of our respective backgrounds, on each and every one of us who had come together to mourn.

Whether we saw the images in a newspaper, on a news channel, or in a news feed, they left a lasting impression.

The tragedies were senseless and unprovoked, they stirred debate over safety, and, thankfully, it prompted many people to be their best selves, springing into action to help their fellow man, woman and child amidst bloodshed ? or simply doing what they could to bring comfort to communities further away where individuals may have felt helpless watching the devastation unfold.

?Neighbour is the other person, every single person,? said one religious leader. ?Sometimes it is a very different other person who travels down the same road and sometimes falters and falls, is unjustly tricked, or even cruelly beaten down. Being in God's company is to know, and even show love and mercy.?

They were sentiments that echoed around the room, offered in varying ways from leaders of equally various faiths.

?The Canada I know and the communities I have grown up in have always been secure and strong enough to both accommodate and honour our differences: differences of opinions, beliefs, expressions and thoughts because, at our core, I believe what we share in common ? our hopes, our dreams, and especially our vulnerabilities ? can be used for a greater purpose and that is to bring us and bind us together in a spirit not of competition, but compassion,? offered another.

And they just kept on coming.

?We stand with our brothers and sisters of faiths in denouncing these senseless acts of violence and pray that our Muslim brothers and sisters continue to feel secure and safe to practice their faith in their sacred spaces,? said the last speaker. ?We need to give thanks to God for the safety and security we enjoy in this country and for the freedom to live lives of faith. But, we appreciate what a violation this event has been to that sense of safety and security and pray for the Muslim community that it can in time, be restored. A hatred of diversity simply doesn't reflect a love for the one who created it. We should celebrate the differences we have because of their beauty, but firstly because they are the work of God.?

We left feeling buoyed that although we

had all been touched by tragedy ? as, indeed, unspeakable events like these are an attack on all of us ? resolve had been strengthened, as had the sense of community, and, like a phoenix rising from the ashes, so too was hope.

If you had the chance to attend any vigils held across the country this past weekend in remembrance of the over-50 individuals murdered while attending Friday prayers at two Mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, these words might sound familiar.

Indeed, the sentiments expressed above are universal, but the fact of the matter is they were uttered just over two years ago when communities came together in the face of yet another tragedy: the Quebec City-area Mosque Shooting in January 2017.

Many communities across the country, regardless of faith, sprang quickly into action in the aftermath of the tragedy to once again offer a safe space, a healing place, for residents to come together, mourn and, perhaps most importantly, send a message of solidarity in the face of extremists around the globe who now seem more emboldened than ever before to not only share their racist bile, but, sadly, act upon it.

For those who attended such gatherings in 2017 and, like me, left feeling uplifted by these all-too-rare feelings of fellowship, I wonder who still carried this feeling as they walked into their nearest vigil.

If there were such people, I, sadly, was not one of them.

The sheer number of people now feeling emboldened to spout hate has been both alarming and horrific, and one doesn't have to look all that far to locate the bellows working overtime to fan the flames of hatred. If others are not necessarily emboldened in their hatred, others still have become more complacent to it, having been bombarded with such messages and somehow, inexplicably accepting it as some kind of new normal.

And yet ? being a part of yet another community gathering imparted that familiar sense of hope once again, with calls for unity, community, and understanding, particularly the understanding and acceptance that an attack on one is an attack on all, imparted that familiar sense of hope once again.

Speaking from a personal perspective, I find another source of that hope to be New Zealand itself, which seems to be a country not prepared to settle for just words; they're putting their grief into action.

In the days following the shooting, police in New Zealand are reporting gun owners turning up at their local stations looking to hand in their semi-automatic rifles to be destroyed. In addition,

the New Zealand government has been a leader in stepping up to cover the costs of victims' funerals, regardless of their citizenship status within the island nation and, perhaps most importantly of all, their young Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern, announced her government's intention to take firm and lasting action.

In the aftermath, the Prime Minister announced her cabinet had agreed 'in principle' to tighten gun control laws in an effort to make her country safer.

'We're unified [and] there are simply details to work through' she said, acknowledging the complex nature of such laws. 'The clear lesson from history around the world is that to make our community safer the time to act is now.'

'I think what the public are rightly asking is why it, and how it is that [you're] currently able to buy semi-automatic military-style weapons in New Zealand?' and that's the right question to ask.'

It is always the right question to ask, and should be asked in any country where a week without a mass shooting with these or any other kinds of weapons are exceptions rather than the rules.

In my opinion, we should all be cautiously optimistic about the action our fellow member of the Commonwealth is taking in the aftermath of unspeakable tragedy. The devil will, of course, be in the details slated to be announced this week, but one can only hope it sparks a trend: a trend that leads to international leaders being responsive to what needs to be done and making it so for the betterment of our world.