

**Let's Go Deeper**  
**Wednesday, May 24, 2017**  
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Looking back on Sunday's worship service, I left something out of my sermon I ought to have included and I included something in my prayer that I'm glad I did.

Those thoughts came to me Tuesday morning as I held the overnight news of the terrorist bombing of the pop concert in Manchester, England in my prayers. According to news reports, the Islamic State (ISIS) claimed responsibility for the atrocity that killed 22 people, including an eight-year-old girl. In addition, 59 people are being treated for life-threatening injuries, 12 under the age of sixteen.

The passage that came to mind this morning as I held that horrific scene in my prayers is from Matthew's gospel, chapter 2, verses 16-18:

When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah:

"A voice was heard in Ramah,  
wailing and loud lamentation,  
Rachel weeping for her children;  
she refused to be consoled, because they are no more."

As I thought of British Rachels weeping for their children in Manchester, I was reminded of the pedigree of that Matthean passage and the other Rachels across time grieving their children's senseless deaths:

- In **Genesis 35:16-20**, Rachel dies in childbirth. Her midwife tries to console her with the news that she is having a son, but she dies weeping.
- In **Jeremiah 31:15**, Rachel weeps over her children again, this time because they are being led into exile in Babylon past the place where she is buried.
- In the **Matthew** text, Rachel's tears break forth once again, this time in response to Herod's "slaughter of the innocents."

Across the ages and still today, children are killed and mothers weep.

In Sunday's sermon, I focused on the exchange between Jesus ("Do you love me?") and Peter ("Yes, Lord, you know I love you") that culminated in Jesus telling Peter, "Feed my lambs. Tend my sheep. Feed my sheep." I let that exchange serve as a springboard for naming all the specific "sheep" Jesus calls us to love, a series of concentric circles radiating outward from family and friends to church family to neighbors to people different than us to the poor to enemies.



The circle I left out is people of other faiths, a subset of which is the people of the other two Abrahamic religions. As Christians, we're called to love Jews and Muslims. Christians, Jews, and Muslims: we're all children of Abraham.

Jennie told me on Sunday afternoon that during the warm-up time of Kids Central Sunday School on Sunday, she led the kids in singing that old Sunday School/ Summer Camp/ VBS chestnut called "Father Abraham." Its original version went:

*Father Abraham had many sons (we now sing "kids" instead of "sons")  
Many sons had Father Abraham  
I am one of them and so are you  
So let's all praise the Lord.  
Right arm, left arm, right foot, left foot...*

It's got rhythm, movement, a memorable melody... and meaning. We're all sons and daughters of Abraham. It dawned on me that if there were ever such a thing as an interfaith Sabbath School/ Summer Camp/ Vacation Holy Writ School for the three Abrahamic (monotheistic) faiths, we'd have at least one song to sing.

But though I failed to include in my sermon Jesus' call to love the people of other faiths, beginning with our own Abrahamic kindred, what I did include was a petition in my Pastoral Prayer:

Creator of us all, as President Trump travels to lands holy to all three of the Abrahamic faiths, Islam, Judaism, and Christianity:

- Strengthen the resolve of all children of Abraham who reject violence, revenge and retaliation.
- Renew in all children of Abraham the resolve to safeguard the dignity of people of every race, nation, and religion.
- Make all the children of Abraham, including us, "instruments of your peace."<sup>1</sup> Like our common ancestor, "**Blessed, to be a blessing**" (Gen. 12:2).

So it is that on Sunday I left out of the sermon the mandate to love other faiths while including a prayer to do the same. And the kids sang of being sons and daughters of Abraham. And the choir intoned, "Make me an instrument of your peace." Meanwhile, a child of Abraham killed himself and nearly two dozen other children of Abraham. And Rachel weeps yet again, this time in England.

Even though we may not fully realize it at the time, what we do and say and pray and learn and sing on Sunday really does have implications for the real world.

And so I pray for *all* the children of Abraham to be a blessing to one another and to the whole earth.

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<sup>1</sup> The phrase alluded to the lyric in choir's later Anthem: "The Prayer of St. Francis"