

Weekly Teaching

January 20, 2017

At the beginning of the Book of Exodus the Torah records:

“And the midwives feared God, and hearkened not onto that which the king of Egypt had told them to do; rather they let the boys live.”

One of the great public leaders against Adolf Hitler was the Protestant minister, Martin Niemöller. Rev. Niemöller spent the last seven years of Nazi rule in concentration camps. This Minister of God believed that the leaders of the German Protestant churches were complicit in the murderous Nazi Crimes against the Jewish People; guilty because of their sin of silence.

He is best remembered for his famous words:

*First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out —
Because I was not a Socialist.*

*Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out —
Because I was not a Trade Unionist.*

*Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out —
Because I was not a Jew.*

Then they came for me — and there was no one left to speak for me.

An American Protestant theologian, Reinhold Niebuhr, was a contemporary of Rev. Niemöller. In 1932, he published *“Moral Man and Immoral Society.”* Niebuhr asserted that “Love” will not dictate the moral actions of human beings. Rather it is human’s constant pursuit of “Justice”. As Hitler rose to power, Niebuhr insisted that pacifism was not a sufficient stance against the Nazi tide. Justice dictated that there should be an American military intervention against Nazism before it was too late.

Niebuhr’s entire book can be summarized with one sentence that he wrote in this classic work:

“Civilization depends upon the vigorous pursuit of the highest values by people who are intelligent enough to know that their values are qualified by their interests and corrupted by their prejudices.”

A companion quotation is the familiar Serenity Prayer written also by Niebuhr:

*God, give us the serenity to accept what cannot be changed;
Give us the courage to change what should be changed;
Give us the wisdom to distinguish one from the other.*

We Jews still live in a very dangerous world filled with too much senseless hatred directed against us. Rev. Martin Niemöller and Rev. Reinhold Niebuhr were Righteous Gentiles. There are many Righteous Gentiles who “speak up,” focus their energies on what can change and then pursue a just course of action. We can never forget the heroes who have been the Righteous Gentiles and those who are and will be the Righteous Gentiles.

There are Gentiles who hate Jews and there are Jews who hate Jews. Those deeply steeped in their hatred need to be forcefully held at bay. Then there are those who “don’t know” and/or don’t want to know. It’s in this Moral Limbo that we need to re-direct our energies.

I wrote last week on the new communal grass roots initiative: “GALVANIZE.” In a short period of time, I’ve personally witnessed how quickly true and just activism can be put in place. Church leaders have now joined. It is truly an inspiring coalition.

The upcoming opportunity for families with high school students to gather and learn about the challenging landscape of Anti-Semitism and Anti-Zionism is important. We all need to learn what can be done and thus how to effectively focus our steps moving forward. If you have children or grandchildren in high school, or wish to become more prepared and informed no matter your own family dynamics, GALVANIZE is a unique opportunity to begin to appropriately educate ourselves, and learn how to be better Zionist advocates.

Temple Sholom is proud to have joined the other community Houses of Worship as a Community Partner in this important pursuit of justice.

Shabbat Shalom,

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