

**Tragedy Sunday
Giffords Shooting
January 9, 2011**

The Rev. Kate Baird has a dynamite sermon for you on baptism that is very important for all of us to hear today as we struggle to live in hope this morning. But before we begin, I wanted to quickly add some of my own thoughts and prayers as we struggle to understand what happened yesterday.

I am not always so happy with this Episcopal church in which we reside. God knows we have had enough of our own issues with unity and reaching out to the oppressed. But in the summer of 2009, I had the opportunity to sit in the midst of the General Convention of this church for two weeks. Good gosh, we argued about everything. Not just sexuality but the way we pray, the way we raise money, the saints that we honor, the place of creation in worship, and on and on and on. But I sat there in the midst of that arguing and saw something amazing. Every time things got heated, we stopped. We stopped for a moment, we collected ourselves and then we sang together and prayed together.

None of that changed many minds of course, but here is what it did do. It allowed us to listen to one another. We prayerfully listened to what the other had to say and why it was so important to them. When it came time to vote, there was no in your face shouting and no cheering after the vote was cast. Instead, those who had won the vote consistently went to the minority and embraced them. We loved one another and respected one another, even though we totally disagreed with one another.

The first day I saw this happen, I literally wept on the floor of Convention. That is because I finally saw what the founders of this country and our church had in mind. We are supposed to disagree with each other for heaven's sake. But we are to do so with the utmost respect for those with a different position. It is not just our political system that has lost this critical element of our tradition, it is every aspect of our lives. There are no newscasts anymore, only commentators yelling and screaming at one another. We have replaced the language of compromise and respect with a language of hate and bitterness.

God only knows what possessed Jared Loughner to do what he did yesterday. Perhaps his state of mind made it impossible for him to function in any other way. But if we continue to treat the person who disagrees with us as an enemy and hurl insults at them from every angle, we are creating the most fertile ground possible for Jared Loughners. When we participate in vitriolic speech and verbal venom, we are giving people like him a rationale for acting in the manner he did. When we allow someone to be subject to verbal invective, we allow others to feel like pulling a trigger is an acceptable form of protest. What this means is that all of us must stop it every time we hear it. It is not good enough to avoid participating in such verbal abuses yourself. It is incumbent upon all of us to stop every single person when they participate in the language of polarization. If we are going to end events like yesterday's we need to call everyone on the use of hateful language. We need to run all of the commentators on radio and tv off the air who take part in it. We need to stop in their tracks not just our leaders but our friends and relatives who take part in it. Disagree yes, be passionate about your politics yes, but enough already with the demonization.

As terrible as the events of yesterday were, we cannot let them die. They have created for us the opportunity to stop the vitriolic once and for all. Let us all stop from now on and sing a hymn first before we respond. Let us stop the polarization forever. Let us create the world that Jesus birthed 2000 years ago, a world where the light shines on in the darkness and where the darkness is never able to overcome it, no matter how hard it tries. Amen.