



## Reading from the Quran

Someday, when your children ask, "Where were you when they prepared to burn the Quran in Gainesville Florida," what will you say to them?

When the Dove World Outreach Center posted "Islam is of the Devil" signs on their grounds in July 2009, Unitarian Universalist minister Meredith Hotetsu Garmon joined with members of her congregation, interfaith colleagues and several area Muslims in protest. When she sat down with leaders in Gainesville's Islamic community to ask how they wanted to proceed, they decided that ignoring this fringe group was the best policy. They didn't want to draw any attention to their hateful message. But when the Dove Church announced its Quran burning, which was to take place yesterday, religious leaders quickly realized their silence wasn't working anymore. Silence would be seen as consent.

Interfaith leaders met again with Gainesville Muslims for direction. How could they respond? Together, they decided to invite as many houses of worship as possible to read from the Quran in their services this weekend.

What has happened since then is astounding. This morning, countless churches across the United States, Canada and around the world are reading from the Quran to provide a clear statement that we stand against hatred and for freedom of religious expression. We are one.

The Quranic verses we will read today were chosen by Muslim leaders in Gainesville. Please join with me in solidarity with our Muslim brothers and sisters, as we hear these words:

*Love of God: Say: O People of the Scripture! Come to a common word between us and you: that we shall worship none but God, and that we shall ascribe no partner unto Him, and that none of us shall take others for lords beside God. And if they turn away, then say: Bear witness that we are they who have surrendered (unto Him). (Aal Imran 3:64)*

*Love of Neighbor: It is not righteousness that ye turn your faces to the East and the West; but righteous is he who believeth in God and the Last Day and the angels and the Scripture and the prophets; and giveth wealth, for love of Him, to kinsfolk and to orphans and the needy and the wayfarer, and to those who ask, and who set slaves free. (2:177)*

*A Common Word: Say: We believe in God that which is revealed unto us and that which was revealed unto Abraham, and Ishmael, and Isaac, and Jacob, and the tribes and that which Moses and Jesus received, and that which the prophets received from their Lord. We make no distinction from any of them, and unto Him we have surrendered. (Al-Baqarah, 2:136-137)*

*O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other (not that you may despise each other). (49:13)*

## Sermon

I would invite our children to come join me here at the front.

Can anyone tell me what grief is?

Nine years ago, which is before many of you were born, something happened that made a lot of people grieve. On September 11, 2001, a group of angry people stole four airplanes and crashed them on purpose – two into the World Trade Center, one into the Pentagon, and one into a field. Many people died that day. It was a scary time. And we didn't really know what to do. But what we did know is that we were sad and many people wanted to do special things for the people who died that day.

One of the people who died in the World Trade Center was Todd Ouida and the reason that's important is because someone in this church is related to Todd. Kathleen Nigro is the cousin of Todd's mother. Kathleen knew Todd, and she was grieving Todd and grieving that her cousin Andrea had lost her son. Kathleen wanted to do something special with her grief. Todd's family is Unitarian Universalist, just like we are, and Kathleen offered to donate a beautiful chalice in honor of Todd, and the church said yes of course we would love that. The chalice that you see on our front altar, that many of you have had the chance to light when we start worship, is the chalice that Kathleen gave us. And when we light that chalice, not only are we honoring Todd's life, we are honoring the love that Todd's family has for him, the kind of love that we are asked to have for each other and for all living things. It is the kind of love that asks us to be people of peace, people of struggle, people of hope and people of joy.

I'm going to invite you to go back to your seats because I'm going to talk to the adults for just a little bit before we begin the water communion.

If you have ever worked through grief, and most of us have, you may be familiar with the work of Elizabeth Kubler Ross who came to understand that there are five stages of grief, and these stages are the same whether you are preparing for your own death, or if you are grieving someone else's death. The stages are also the same stages for losses of all kinds. First there is denial – This can't possibly happen to me. Then there is anger – This isn't fair! Why is this happening to me? Third comes bargaining – If I do this and this and this maybe I won't die so soon, maybe I won't even have to die at all. Fourth comes depression. – O.K. I'm dying so why bother with anything at all? And fifth comes acceptance - I'll will be all right. I'm ready for what is coming. Those are the five stages – denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.

This is the thing about grief - if you avoid going through one of the five stages, it sets you back in all of them. So if someone denies they're in denial, they have a hard time getting beyond the denial stage. If someone resists their depression, they're going get stuck in it. If someone tries to bury their anger, any little thing can set them off. They are imprisoned in a cycle of anger. When this happens, it is called complicated grief, or a grief that is hard to resolve. This is grief that you get stuck in. Sometimes if you had a conflicted relationship with the person who died, your grief will be complicated grief. If you've faced some challenges in your own life that you're struggling with, you

may find yourself in complicated grief. Complicated grief doesn't mean you're a weak person. It just means that your grief is going to take longer to get through.

So let's take this from abstract examples to today. Let's apply this idea of the stages of grief to the losses we incurred on September 11, 2001. Nine years later, how are we moving through the grief?

It's been said that this year's 9/11 commemoration is the most political yet. You've got a tiny 50 member church in Gainesville threatening to burn Qurans, a media that couldn't keep their hands off the story, and a public that greedily fed off of it. You've got people pitted against each other about building an Islamic community center in Lower Manhattan, and again, a media that's prepared to inflame the story, and a public hungry for the drama. Would you say that this country is stuck in complicated grief?

What are we denying? What righteous anger are we blocking? What bargains are we trying to drive? What sadnesses beckon to us over and over again? The strong reactions to both these stories tell us that we still have not fully grieved 9/11. We are stuck, in cycles of denial, anger, bargaining and depression and you saw all of them playing out around both the Quran burning and the Islamic Community Center.

It would be so easy to respond to the ugliness that has raised its head these last months, throw up our hands and say, "You know, this nation doesn't have a prayer to get through this grief in a healthy way," and there's a lot of proof to back that up. But you know what that is? It's the fourth stage of grieving - depression. That's the "it's all crap so why bother" stage.

One of the things that gives me hope, is that a lot of people were pulled out of their depressive apathy because of the crazy dramas that played out around the Quran burning and the Islamic community center. Now there's no denying that these issues have damaged America's reputation abroad. But, the internal response that has grown up so quickly has revealed that there are slivers of hope that we can move forward in a healthy way. We can no longer expect the rest of the world and the minorities of this country to bear the burden of our unresolved complicated grief. How many people spoke out against the burning of the Quran in the last couple of weeks? Some of these people couldn't sit in the same room together, but they could agree on the fact that we need to respect each other. We have no idea how many churches read those Quranic verses this weekend. Many people will hear actual words from the Quran for the first time in their lives because enough people pulled out of their depressive apathy to stand up for what they believed in. And, no one Qurans were burned yesterday. I have no illusions that the Dove World Outreach Center has had a chance of heart, but something shifted when it became clear that most Americans were appalled and wanted no part of this act of intolerance.

Something similar has happened in regards to the building of the Islamic Community Center. So many people have come together in strong support of the building of the Islamic community center that there has actually been a shift in public opinion, not necessarily a huge shift, but I'm convinced that shift didn't happen by accident. I believe that all those people, including some of you, who spoke out for freedom and diversity, whether publicly or to your friends and family or on Facebook and Twitter, have done more to move us through our collective grief than the War on Terror will ever do, because that war is grief stuck in the stage of anger and if we continue to see it as the primary action by which we will resolve what was let loose on 9/11, we are sadly mistaken.

I would say that the spirit has moved among us. And no doubt, some will resist the movement of that spirit, but my hope is that we are forging a better path, and in that path we will align ourselves with the ultimate manifestation of the holy whereby we weave together our memories, our grievings, our

hopes, and our hunger for justice into strands of mercy and grace that know no bounds, and we truly live as if we are one, and we will be people of peace, struggle, hope and joy.

One that day it will be as powerful to light a chalice as it is to go to war. Amen.