

Community March Against Gang Violence

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Many of us come to church expecting to have what we already know and believe confirmed and validated. We like talking with people we've known for a hundred years. We enjoy the familiarity of this sanctuary that holds so many memories for us. We love to sing those hymns and songs we've been singing since childhood, and we wish the preacher wouldn't constantly try to make us sing new stuff.

There is so much that threatens us in our weekday existence. The world is changing so fast we can't possibly keep up with it. On Sunday morning, in the church, we want to encounter a solid rock to hold on to. And there are times when God meets our need to be comforted and strengthened.

But there are also times when God knows that our greater need is to have our thinking challenged, our faith examined, our lifestyle called into question. A time when we are called to leave our comfort zone, a time when we are called to stand in the gap. (Ezekiel 22:30)

If we're honest about it, we have to admit that just about the only place where we feel comfortable making bold statements about our religion and our allegiance to God is in our church. In our hymns we sing, "All to Jesus I surrender All to Him I freely give." In our confession of faith, we say, "I believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, and I accept him as Lord of my life." And when we pray the Lord's Prayer, we pray, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

We say all of these things, and that's wonderful. But what do we do with them when we leave the security of our places of worship?

There are some things in life that are best experienced first hand. We can't really learn how to do a particular dance just by hearing a lecture on modern dance. We've got to get on the dance floor and feel the beat of the music. If I say, "It looked like the runner was going to be out at the plate, but he used a hook slide and slid around the tag," and you don't know anything about baseball, what do my words mean?

The Christian faith is sort of like that. We can talk about it, but unless we really put it into practice, what we have is lacking. Unless people actually experience our faith in action, what do our words mean?

As a preacher, my task is not just to be interesting or informative or amusing or entertaining. I hope that my sermons are all these things, but I'm realistic enough and aware of my own limitations enough to know that's not going to happen all the time. But none of these things, as desirable as they may be, amount to anything unless I can somehow convince people of the need to ACT, to allow the Spirit of God to transform them. Hearers must at last become doers. The faith we proclaim with our Sunday morning affirmations has to be evident in our Monday morning lives.

On Saturday, March 21, we have one such opportunity to do this. I invite you to join me and others in a Unity March Against Violence. We will gather at 10:00 a.m. across from the old sub station at the corner of El Paso and Francisco in Clewiston. The plans are to march through several troubled neighborhoods and conclude with a rally at the Elk's park on Francisco. Those who can't march are invited to come to the Elks park as a show of support. We love our community and want to let certain elements know that we are not going to just sit by and let them corrupt our youth. Join us!

Some of you, like me, might find that a unity march might not be in your comfort zone. I have realized that sometimes I am called to go outside of my comfort zone for the sake of Kingdom work. As for me and my

household, we will do what we can do to stand up to this violence epidemic. Even if that involves marching through a troubled neighborhood.