



May 2019

Dear Friends,

Looking back over the last few months I remember the news of the atrocities that took place in two mosques in New Zealand in March. Forty-nine people, loved by God, were killed while attending their Friday Prayers. Accounts emerged of communities coming together to share in mourning with their Muslim friends and neighbours. Vigils took place around New Zealand. At one of these, words were written in shells laid on a heart of sand that said “*We stand with you*”. Meanwhile, in the UK, Andrew Graystone, stood outside a mosque in Manchester holding a sign that said “*You are my friends. I will keep watch while you pray.*” He suggested via Twitter, “*that Christians and others who are available gather outside their local mosque during Friday prayers to stand guard over our Muslim friends while they pray?*” What a fantastic gesture of love and solidarity!

Then on Easter Sunday as Christians woke full of hope, excited in anticipation of the story of Jesus’s resurrection we heard of around 359 people killed and over 500 others injured in 8 coordinated attacks on churches and hotels in Sri Lanka. What is our reaction to this? Outrage, anger, fear, Islamophobia? We must remember that these innocent Christians **and** Muslims were **all** targeted for their faith by those with extreme views for or against Islam or Christianity. They represent a small but vocal group, not the majority.

Christians believe that we love because God first loved us. Until we’ve received God’s love, and grasped its breadth, height and depth, our attempts to love others will falter. Our love is a response to meeting the God who is love, and allowing ourselves to be loved by him. That love includes loving **all** even those we fear and those who persecute us whatever their faith, culture, race or those with no specified faith.

Andrew Graystone’s actions of love remind me of words in Matthew’s Gospel “*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.*” The peacemakers are people like you and me, people like Andrew, and people who follow their calling as Christians to bring something of heaven here and now on earth. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, said: “*Christ calls us to be peacemakers who cross the borders and barriers that divide us – radical in our generosity and welcome. It’s a call to see others in their full humanity, to persist in seeking their good.*”

At Easter Christians celebrate Jesus’ rising from the dead. God’s love is stronger than all evil – even death itself. Each one of us Christian or Muslim is called to bring something of God’s love into our bit of the world, living out qualities of love, joy, peace and much more – being peacemakers.

May we be peacemakers, people who are radical in our generosity and welcome, people who see others in their full humanity, people who persist in seeing and seeking the good of others.

Rev'd Nicki