

Read Luke 17:20-21

The kingdom of God is within you. Given all the forces of evil arrayed against the human community right now, it may be jarring to focus on a saying of Jesus that points toward the inner life, where God abides.

It's a summons to pray - to pay close attention to the movement of God within you. And prayer has come under fierce criticism in the days after another horrific massacre by a deranged man with an assault rifle. In the midst of heated rhetoric about Islam, homophobia, Christians and guns, several people took offense at repeated calls for thoughts and prayers. They are offended because "thoughts and prayers" are mere empty gestures that are not going to do anything to change the reality of gun violence spreading like a plague across the country. When your very life is under threat simply because you are gay, lesbian, transgender - something I can't fully experience any more than I can experience what it is like to be Mexican, Muslim or anything else other than a white man - it is understandable to criticize sentimental calls for moments of silence. They seem weak if not insulting to those who are under deadly threat for being who they are.

After the Orlando massacre Congressman Jim Hines, a Presbyterian Elder, said, The Moments of Silence in the House have become an abomination. God will ask you, "How did you keep my children safe"? Silence.

I agree with Congressman Hines.

The problem is that moments of silence are not equivalent to acts of prayer. I stood among folks at the ballpark last Sunday afternoon holding a beer in one hand and hat in another as the announcer called for a moment of silence for the victims of the Orlando massacre. It was a respectful remembrance but I do not believe it was 35,000 people at prayer asking God to give us the courage to change our ways, console the grieving or truly intervene in our lives. That's the problem: a moment of silence is not necessarily an act of prayer. Silence is easy. Prayer is not.

Jesus says to pay attention to the kingdom of God within us and among us. Why? When we truly give ourselves to prayer - to knowing ourselves before God - we confront forces like anger, hatred, jealousy, envy, bitterness, fear, self-loathing that lead to acts of violence against our neighbor. Prayer is an act of faith and courage. Our loving God awaits us to enter that space. There is nothing to fear, unless you fear risking your life being changed, made more courageous and at the core joyful.

Therefore let us pray and act.