

“Painting Peace”

Remarks by Rabbi Mark Shapiro

At an event commemorating seven years of war in Syria

Sunday, April 29, 2018 at Christ Church Cathedral, Springfield

The city is called Kishinev.

It is found in the middle of Moldova, which is sandwiched between Romania and Ukraine on the western side of the Black Sea. Very few people had probably heard of Kishinev when April 1903 arrived.

That changed on April 6 and 7, 1903 when an attack on the Jewish community took place. Robbery, rape, and murder ran over two days in what came to be called the Kishinev Pogrom. When it was over, 49 Jews had been murdered, 500 wounded, 2,000 families were homeless.

Weeks later a Jewish poet by the name of Chaim Nachman Bialik went to Kishinev to report on what had happened. He did so in the form of a Hebrew poem which he called “The City of Slaughter.”

In the poem, Bialik spares no words.

He describes the carnage in gory detail. He assaults his readers.

And then he notes the worst irony.

By the time he has arrived in Kishinev, Spring has truly sprung.

Flowers are blooming near the corpses. Birds are singing over the ashes. The sun shines.

Life carries on.

It is unimaginable. And yet it is real.

The earth keeps revolving. Day follows night.

Later in 1903, children will be born. Boys and girls will fall in love. Marriages will take place.

That’s life. It keeps happening... and yet how unimaginable it all seems after the Kishinev pogrom and after so much other pain in this last century.

How impossible and inappropriate it seems even now as Syria is torn limb from limb while we complain about an April that was a bit too cold or while some of us sit here wondering even now what’s for dinner tonight when we leave this sanctuary.

We compartmentalize. We forget. Or perhaps we simply force ourselves to forget in order to survive.

And yet here we are today.

Not 10,000 of us. Not even 1000 of us. But here we are.

You and you and you... wanting to express our grief, to bear witness, to take some action to make Syria or at least some part of Syria right... better... safer... saner.

It is good to be here.

It is responsible... and it is Christian, Jewish, Muslim to take this time out of our day to be here. It is Baha’I, Buddhist, Unitarian to mourn the depravity of Syria.

And, above all, it is human to promise not to forget, to tell the story to others, to do whatever seems possible.

It is human and right this afternoon to hear the following poem.

Of all things, the poem was written about 35 years ago by a child. Her name was Tali Shurek, an Israeli 13-year-old who must have known something about our dilemma. As you will see, she clearly loved life in color. She clearly dreamed of a different world knowing full well the cruelty of the world..

God willing, by now Tali is into her 50s. Let's hope she has a career; let's hope she has brought heart and feeling to her life. Let's even hope that she is the mother of healthy children who dream the way she did when she was younger and the way all of us must dream too on this solemn day.

Tali's poem...our poem for this great day... is called **PAINT BOX**.

*I had a paint box
Each color glowing with delight
I had a paint box with colors
Warm and cool and bright
I had no red for wounds and blood
I had no black for an orphaned child
I had no white for the fate of the dead
I had no yellow for burning sands...
I had orange for joy and life
I had green for buds and blooms
I had blue for clear bright skies
I had rose for dreams and rest
That I sat me down and painted PEACE.*

So may it be for Tali and her community.
So may it be for Syria.
So may it be for us.