Two weeks ago I gave a sermon about the rise of Anti-Semitism. A reality that was reinforced this week with the desecration of a historic Jewish Cemetery in St Louis Missouri and the continuing spree of bomb threats against Jewish Community Centers across the United States and one in Montreal.

And at the same time that rise of anti-Semitism was defeated, at least for a moment by the outpour of support for the St Louis Jewish Community from a group of Moslem activists who raised tens of thousands of dollars to repair the vandalized head stones and who came out to lend a helping and supportive hand in the restoration of those toppled headstones.

Like so many things it is seldom all bad or all good, there is light amidst the darkness, and sometimes darkness when there is much light.

As I mentioned in my sermon, the response to the darkness of hate is the light of love and understanding. This past week in St

Louis, the Muslim community was the light amidst the darkness the surrounds us.

Many of you came up to me that sermon and told me how much you appreciated the full throated rebuttal to those that would hate us or seek to harm us.

You shared that you had been thinking and worrying about the same thing.

Worried that the world was again turning to blame the Jews for societies shortcomings and ills.

Its not the first sermon I have given on anti-Semitism in my rabbinate, in fact I have probably lost count. I pray that I never have to give another but I know that is false hope. Anti-Semitism as Eli Wiesel reminded us tragically survived even the Holocaust.

Not everyone agreed with the sermon. Some took issue with my branding those in the BDS movement as being anti-Jewish, and preferred to see their actions as political protest not ethnic, cultural, religious bigotry. You could be right, but I think generally those who are making it political not personal are the exception not the rule.

One member of our congregation wrote me a thoughtful and lengthy email about how the sermon seemed out of place with my progressive positions in many areas, the work I have done in the refugee movement and the pluralistic tone I have tried to maintain in our congregation.

He too is not entirely wrong, it can seem like a contradiction to be empathic in many areas but hold a harder line when it comes to those who are not empathic in their feelings toward Jews. Toward me and my religion as I am toward them and there religion.

I like to think that my application of Torah to modern life and particularly to issues of social justice is expansive and malleable to respond with empathy in our ever-hardening world and discourse. But its complicated. Politics they say makes strange bedfellows, so does multi-faith work.

I give no quarter to those that would deny my existence as a Jew or that of the state of Israel as a Jewish State. By the same token, I will work along side those who are fighting for religious freedom even if that freedom and tolerance is not something they so freely grant me.

That some disagree with a sermon or article I write in whole or in part, is I think in many ways a sign that it was a good sermon or article.

There is a teaching from Rabbi Israel Salanter, one of the early founders of the Musar Movement in Judaism that I keep taped next to my desk in my study at home where I do most of my

writing. Rabbi Salanter taught, “A rabbi whose community does not disagree with him is no rabbi. A rabbi who fears his community is no man.”

Its not that I set out to be contrarian or even provocative, but rather I endeavor always to have integrity in how I interpret and teach Torah. If those positions are not always popular so be it.

Judaism is a demanding tradition and sometimes it asks us to do hard things, uncomfortable things, because they are morally necessary.

In this week’s parasha, Mishpatim God through Moses instructs judges to do exactly that. Make unpopular choices if that is the moral and ethical thing to do.

Speaking about the role and qualities of a human judge, the Torah informs us that Judges are themselves judged in every

ruling by God. The guidance is very similar to that which applies to rabbis, in fact one of the sacred roles of rabbis it to be a *dayan*, a judge.

It you go look on the wall in my office here at the temple, you will see my *smicha*, my diploma from rabbinical school and it declares, like those of every rabbi, “surely he (or she) will teach and surely he (or she) will judge”.

Judges the Torah explains, like rabbis, assume an awesome task in evaluating a case and deciding it on its merits. They are God's emissaries on earth. However, the judges cannot allow this sense of godliness to go to their heads. Therefore, in this week’s parasha the Torah deliberately uses the word "elohim" to describe judges.

The words "shoftim" and "dayanim", which are more familiar refer to the task that the judge is asked to perform. But, the

term "elohim" reminds judges at all times that they must be humbled in front of God.

While the judge decides cases, and the Rabbi issues opinions, God is always sitting right next to them, in judgement of their judgements.

And so while there are grey areas and light amidst the darkness, at some point one must make a judgement and decide where they stand on things.

This is why I was so encouraged by the response of the American Muslim Community to the attack on the Jewish Cemetery in St Louis. Which mirrored the response on the Canadian Jewish community to the attack on the Mosque in Quebec last month. In both instances, people of faith did what was right and moral, even if it was unpopular in their eyes of some of their co-religionists.

In Quebec, Rabbi Yael Spalansky of Holy Blossom Temple gathered her rabbinic colleagues and then Christian colleagues and they made Rings of Peace around the local mosques. They stood boldly, and proudly arm and arm and declared not in our town, not in our Canada, there is no place for hate here.

Some in the Jewish community thought it was too much. And let me be clear this was led by the Reform Rabbis of Toronto – not the orthodox. CIJA issued a statement, Reform Rabbis and their congregants took to the streets.

In the wake of the attack on the cemetery in St. Louis, American Muslims started an online fundraiser, to raise money for repairs.

That campaign quickly surpassed its goals, and has now raised more than $100,000.

This, and this alone, might be responsible for the shifting of the narrative of Jews and Muslims in America.

Why did American Muslims help?

These are the words of Linda Sarsour, a Palestinian Muslim activist, who helped lead the clean up effort:

“This is what our faith teaches us to do.”

But, there is something more than that.

Linda Sarsour said that the Muslims have helped restore that Jewish cemetery because the Jews have been so supportive of the American Muslim community, in the face of right wing bigotry. She didn’t directly reference the Rings of Peace in Quebec but by her words we know they and actions of support like them have had a positive affect.

She figured out what we all need to figure out — that, in North America today, there is a confraternity of the hated — and that once again Jews and Muslims, literally brothers form another mother, have more in common than we have differences.

Now, its complicated, life is complicated.

Linda Sarsour has participated in anti-Israel activities. By my early definition her position on Israel should brand her not only anti-Zionist but anti-Jewish. And yet there she was leading the effort to clean up a desecrated Jewish cemetery.

Rabbi Sharon Brous writes:

In multi-faith and coalitional politics, we won't agree on all issues all the time. Our nation is suffering from a soul crisis, rooted in a cynical politics that pits vulnerable populations against each other…It won't always feel good to stand with folks who share some but not all of our priorities. But the only

way to work effectively toward justice today is together…We just might find not only shared humanity but also shared purpose, even in people who hold perspectives that differ from our own.

Rabbi Jeff Salkin adds: I will walk with my moral allies as far as I can.

And, when I cannot walk with them, because I vociferously disagree with them, I will sit it out.

But, when those fragile moments are over, it should be possible for us to walk together again — to diminish the hatred that now is raging like a fire in Western countries.

Judges are judged.

They are judged by God for the stand they take.

And so tonight and every day going forward I urge you to ask yourself, where do you stand on hatred? Is it ok with you that people hate others because of their religion, but not ok with you if they hate Jews for the same reason?

Is it OK with you to cry that the world should be more sympathetic for the Jews, more empathic for the Jews, but not feel compelled yourself to similar feelings for Muslims?

Do you want the world to condemn terrorist acts in Israel against Jews but are you silent about attacks on Muslims?

Judges are judged by God, so are people – where is God in your Judgements. Do you think God agrees with you?