“WHAT CAN WE DO? WHAT CAN I DO?”

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TISHA B’AV 5779

TEMPLE SHOLOM – VANCOUVER CANADA

Boker Tov,

Every morning as I make breakfast for my kids in our kitchen, I turn on CBC as background to the tumult that is our home at 630am. I used to joke that my kids could name the CBC morning broadcasters by name just from the sound of their voice. It’s never happened but I have this vision that one day one of them will stop in mid French toast bite and say, “Hey dad what did Stephen Quinn just say?” In my mind at least they are listening to every word and soaking up Canadian culture, news and human interest stories while they munch their Honey Nut Cheerios.

Which is why I noticed this past week in particular that I was turning the volume on the radio way down if not completely off during our morning ritual. The news was so grim, so graphic, so sad that I didn’t want them to hear it and I too could barely bear to listen. From last Shabbat to the Shabbat that just ended

last might there has been so much suffering and bloodshed in our world. From El Paso to Dayton, from Israel to China, from southern borders to northern glaciers and many places and parts in between, its been a particularly difficult week on humanity and our planet.

Some will say there have been worse weeks, more bloody weeks and I am sure it is true, and perhaps my sensitivity it is in part that I was away at camp, off the grid and not following the news much the weeks before, so I am super sensitized. But if the opposite is to be desensitized, inured to the suffering in the world then I would rather notice than not, and I will venture to guess that you would too.

If Judaism teaches us anything relevant for living in our world today, and I think it teaches us **many** relevant things, one of the core teachings is Lev 19:16, "Do not stand idly by, do not remain indifferent to suffering." We are commanded to notice and we are commanded to do something beyond taking note.

Which brings me to this morning and this particular moment in the Jewish Calendar. Yesterday was Shabbat Hazon, one of four thematically special shabbatot throughout the Jewish year. I

know your thinking, another holiday I have never heard of (although given you are here on a Sunday morning for Tisha B'Av you probably heard of that Shabbat Hazon). We have more holidays than opinions. Quite possibly true, but that's another sermon.

Hazon is the Hebrew word for vision and this past shabbat bares it's name because of two visions for the Jewish future. One from Moses in the book of Deuteronomy which we began to read yesterday. The second from Isaiah's vision following the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. That vision or Hazon is contained in the hatarah we will read yesterday morning on the Shabbat before Tisha B'Av.

Tisha B'Av, yet another holiday many have never heard of is the annual Jewish day of sorrow and remembrance of all the suffering that has befallen our people.

I know you are shocked to learn that we have only one day dedicated to sorrow and remembrance in the Jewish calendar, its seems like every holiday contains some element of that theme. And you're right so maybe a better way to say it is that

on Tisha B'Av we are supposed to feel REALLY sad, on all other nights just a little bit sad.

Whatever the degree of historical sorrow you feel, the juxtaposition of Tisha B'Av with the horrible week we have just endured is one of those moments when this ancient tradition speaks directly to our present circumstance.

First what do Moses and Isaiah say?

MOSES: - here are the most important parts of the Torah. You're out of the wilderness, you're going into the promised land take care of each other. Stay together, remember that you are all part of a family, all God's creatures. Follow the path of righteousness laid out by the Torah. Choose life and you will be blessed, choose the other and you are on your own.

ISAIAH: Speaking first of why the Temple was destroyed he echo's Moses' caution, criticizes the Jewish people with the harshest words imaginable. In the name of God, the prophet screams, "Bring no more vain offerings; incense of abomination they are to Me; as for new moons and Sabbaths and the calling of assemblies, I cannot bear iniquity along with solemn

meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates; they are a trouble to Me; I am weary of enduring them" (Isaiah 1:13-14).

The prophet declares that God is not interested in our prayers. Our sacrifices, we are told, are a farce. But what instigated such a terrible response from God? What caused God to reject our ritual service to Him?

Three verses later, Isaiah relates exactly why God was upset with us. "Devote yourself to justice; aid the wronged. Uphold the rights of the orphan; defend the cause of the widow" (Isaiah 1:17). And if that wasn't enough, six verses later he announces, "Your rulers are fakers and cronies of thieves, every one avid for presents and greedy for gifts; they do not judge the case of orphans, and the widow's cause never reaches them" (Isaiah 1:23).

What is God upset about?

The answer is clear, God is enraged that we are not caring for each other as human beings, that we are ignoring the most

vulnerable, that our prayers are meaningless if they do not inspire actions of equal holiness.

On this day of sorrow and suffering our text yesterday through Moses and Isaiah gave us a *shtuck*, a kick in the *tush* and asks us, "Yes there is sadness and suffering in the world **<u>and</u>** you are partly responsible for it. Its not happening to you, you're doing it to each other.

To quote Heschel's famous line about the German citizenry during the holocaust, "some are guilty but all are responsible." This is not a metaphysical question. The challenge of this week is not how to cope with the sorrow and the suffering, but how to prevent it from happening again.

Moses said in our Torah reading just 24 hours ago,' you can't stay on this side of the Jordan any more, the time for learning and growing and codling is over, you have to cross over and settle the land. YOU have to do it, the training wheels come off.' Moses dies and we have to live Torah, we have to *l'taken olam bmalchut shadai* we have to remake the world in God's image.

Isaiah says the same thing, when you go back into the land, when you rebuild the temple in Jerusalem don't fall into old habits of indifference and meaningless ritual. Practice what you preach.

So here it lays before us a week of murder and conflict on a massive scale. A week so bad that we turn off the radio because we can't take hearing it any more. But we cannot shut our ears, our eyes, our minds to what is happening around us. We cannot remain indifferent.

So what are we going to do about it? How do we stop the senseless violence, the *sinat chinam* that our tradition tells us was the reason God brought a flood of destruction in Noah's time. What can you do? What can I do so that people stop killing each other?

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