The New Antisemitism – Same as it ever was
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Video of this sermon available here:
https://www.dropbox.com/s/26px4xnhkfn8f8p/Antisemtism%20Same%20as%20it%20Ever%20Was.mp4?dl=0

Wednesday I will join a handful of leaders in the Jewish community to address the Vancouver City Council as they consider a motion to adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's definition of Anti-Semitism. Should we be successful, Vancouver will become the first Canadian city to adopt the definition which was officially adopted by Canada in last month. Canada became the 33rd country to adopt the definition.

So what is anti-Semitism?

In 1964 United States Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart famously declared when asked to define what is obscene material, he wrote in his legal opinion from the bench; "I know it when I see it".

One would think that you could apply the same test to anti-Semitism – but apparently hating Jews has gotten complicated and so a working definition is needed.

In point of fact I like definitions, Robert Frost wrote, good fences make good neighbors and definitions like all boundaries let you know where you stand relative to the position of another.

The IHRA definition that 33 countries have thus far adopted and that our city council will be asked to consider reads:

"Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities."

Pretty much what I think we all thought the definition of anti-Semitism was or is. As I have shared before on this bema and in the press; anti-Semitism is Jew Hatred – that simple and that offensive.

But its not that simple and that is why we need a working definition.

Take for example the claims of the political organization COPE, the Coalition of Progressive Electors that will join with Independent Jewish Voices to oppose this resolution on Wednesday. Though the working definition makes no mention whatsoever of Israel or even Zionism, they will argue, as they did in an email to their membership that,

> *"[adopting this definition] will make it easier for Canadian authorities to demonize campaigners for justice in Palestine and critics of Israel's state ideology, Zionism. Now the Israel lobby groups are training their guns on local governments, police departments and universities."*

The NDP and the BC Civil Liberties council have also joined in opposition to the resolution and are referenced in the email.

That is of course an example of antisemitism being equated with antizionism and opposition to the policies if not the very existence of the State of Israel. We see this kind of anti-Semitism more and more, particularly on the left through things like the Boycott, Divest and Sanction Movement (BDS) that is pervasive on university campuses across Canada and around the globe.

BUT we see a conflating of antisemitism with antizionism anti-Israel on the right as well. We saw it just this past week when the President of the United States called out four US congresswomen for being anti-Israel and thus anti-Semitic, "telling them to go back where they came from."

The president used a divide amongst American democratic lawmakers over statements by some of those lawmakers to further flame the fires of racism and hatred, and he did it by using Israel and the Jewish people as the scapegoat. That's anti-Semitism too.

Now to be clear: Both Congresswoman Omar and Talib have traded in classic anti-Semitic tropes about Jewish control of the political system. But the association by the president led Florida's Republican senator, Rick Scott, to call the entire democratic party anti-Semitic.

"It was not racist," Scott said of the president's tweets. "but let's remember the position that these Democrats have taken. They've become the anti-Semitic party now and so that's wrong. Our country is not anti-Semitic. They are attacking law enforcement, our border agents and ICE. That's wrong. These people are doing their job."

The Anti-Defamation League called the President's remarks racist and called on him to stop using Israel and Jews as a "shield."

Jonathan Greenblatt, ADL's CEO and national director, in a statement said, "As Jews, we are all too familiar with this kind of divisive prejudice," while ADL has publicly disagreed with these congresswomen on some issues, the president is echoing the racist talking points of white nationalists and cynically using the Jewish people and the state of Israel as a shield to double down on his remarks."

And that is my problem with all of this and why the definition of antisemitism is so important and so desperately needed

Bigotry in defense of Jewish interests is no virtue.

For centuries if not millennia Jews have been the scapegoat for all of the world's ills, and that is what is happening again, and now from all sides.

Nativists point to the Jewish involvement and leadership in the cause of refugees and migrants, which leads to White Supremacists marching down city streets carrying tiki torches chanting, "Jews will not replace us". They are chanting that because they view our imperative to Love the Stranger and our repulsion at the caging and dehumanizing of South American migrants as our attempt to dilute white power and privilege.

This leads to the mass murders in Pittsburgh and the attempted mass murder of Jews in San Diego.

The hate and the threats and the vandalism and violence continue, they feed on each other. Those that need a reason to hate Jews seem to lack no justifications for their bigotry and those that need a reason

to hate a policy or political party seem to lack no Jews to focus their rage. Be it hatred of Jews in general or Israel or Zionism or Tikkun Olam or George Soros or Jeffrey Epstein. The new anti-Semitism is the same as the old anti-Semitism, whatever the ills of society, blame the Jews.

And so, I come back to why I think it is crucial that we support the resolution next week in the city council. We must define what anti-Semitism is and also what it is not. Legitimate criticism of Israeli policy is not anti-Semitism, blaming all Jews for the policies of a democratically elected government in Israel, the United States, Canada or anywhere is anti-Semitism.

Wanting secure borders and a sensible immigration policy is not antisemitic, blaming Jews for the problem of immigration around the world is anti-Semitism.

Comparing the caging of migrants and children with Nazi concentration camps as a reminder of what it means when we say, “Never Again” is not anti-Semitism. Denying that the holocaust sadly and horrifically still stands out as the greatest example of humankind’s capacity to be murderous and inhumane is anti-Semitism.

Hate me because I am a liberal or a conservative. Hate me because I root for the Leafs and not the Habs. Hate me because I believe in climate change or hate me because I don’t. Judge me by the company I keep, judge me by my actions, that’s fine. But hate me, judge me because of the God I pray to or the cultural, ethnic identity of my parents, my tribe – that is bigotry, that is racial, religious hatred, and if I am Jewish and you hate me because of that – that is anti-Semitism plain and simple.

Better yet, don’t hate me, hate; hate. We all hate; hate, it’s perhaps the only thing that its truly ok to place in such an extreme category. I hate the hatred in our society, and to the anti-Semite, we probably have that in common, so sit with me, talk with me, let me try to understand the values behind your views and please try to understand the values that are at the core of mine and my identity. Don’t blame me for the problems of the world, sit with me and try to solve them. Because if not – well then as the saying goes, if you’re not part of the solution, you’re part of the problem.