

#PorteOuverte, est CoeurOuvert
[Open Door, and Open Heart]]

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Many politicians - here and abroad - were eager to label last week's vicious terrorist attacks as being just one more example of Islam's "war" against Western society. The problem with that, depends on which attacks to which they are referring. One day prior to the Paris attacks, two ISIS suicide bombers killed 43 people and wounded more than 200 others in Burj al-Barajneh, an area of southern Beirut, populated primarily by Shia Muslims. Members of ISIS aren't just attacking "Western civilization"; they are attacking civilization and humanity as a whole. In fact, the majority of ISIS victims have been Muslim. ISIS is made-up of brutal, greedy, *irreligious* individuals, whose only real ideology is anarchy. Just because people shout the name of Allah or God or Jesus while committing murder, doesn't make them believers; it makes them extremely warped and wicked individuals.

Now, an important part of ISIS's war on all civilized humanity, *does* involve a religious component. By claiming to be "Islamic", they fire-up the fear and reactionary responses of many non-Muslims. It's actually quite brilliant. Not only do they smear the reputation of millions of good and decent Muslims, they also inspire Christians, Jews, and others to betray the true core of our own faith traditions. So rather than practicing hospitality, we begin preaching hostility. Rather than opening our hearts to those in need, we close our minds and our borders. And while our Governors may think that they're getting a lot of mileage out of their rants about shutting their states to Syrian refugees, that's nothing compared to the mileage [and sheer delight] which ISIS gets from those pompous proclamations.

Instead of allowing those terrorists to make us more territorial and intolerant, we could follow the lead of countless Parisians who - within hours of those attacks - used social media to welcome stranded *strangers* into their homes [#PorteOuverte, "Open Door"]. They had active terrorists in the heart of their city, yet they overcame their fear, with compassion. So perhaps we Christians, instead of cowering before an illusionary reign of terror, should stand-up and commit ourselves to the real Reign of Jesus Christ. Martin Luther King Jr., a man intimately familiar with terrorist threats and physical danger said this: "Darkness cannot drive out darkness, only Light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate, only Love can do that." 2,000 years ago, in the person of Jesus Christ, the Holy One clearly demonstrates that when Light and Love "shine in the darkness, the darkness cannot overcome it!" Today, you and I can continue to raise-up that Light and Love, in a world that often seems dead-set on stirring-up fear and prejudice, darkness and despair.

Looking squarely in the face of the torturous terror of a Roman crucifixion, Jesus says to Pontius Pilate, "My realm is not of this world. If my realm were of this world, my followers would fight...but my realm is not from this world." In this world, fear and force are often key to building and maintaining sovereign rule; but that's not the case in the Realm of Jesus Christ. Jesus tells his followers to "put away their swords," to "turn the other cheek," and to "love their enemies." He refuses to play politics with Pilate, or King Herod, or any of the religious power-brokers of his day. That's because he is seeking to establish a totally different kind of realm - one which is ruled by compassion and grace, rather than fear and force. Participation in Christ's Realm is always a matter of choice; it can never be coerced or mandated. Now, sadly, there have been - and still are - people who try to force others to accept Christ's rule. Yet whether it be through inquisitions or crusades or constitutional amendments, those who try to coerce others into submitting to Christ's authority, are far more concerned with

asserting their *own* authority than with advancing Christ's genuine Reign of Peace.

Throughout his life, Jesus lovingly draws people to himself through his positive qualities of kindness and compassion, openness and joy. He never tries to force others to follow him or to accept his ways. Instead, he attracts them with his gracious welcome, and his gentle and peaceful spirit. And though Jesus often displays a remarkable strength, he always chooses to win people over voluntarily, and to hold their loyalty by his own loyal acts of compassionate service. Jesus says, "The rulers of this world lord it over their subjects, and their 'great ones' exercise power over them; but it shall not be so among you. For whoever wishes to be great among you must be a servant.... For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve; and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Jesus' Life Story is one of profound depth, and remarkable simplicity; tremendous acts of power, and humble deeds of service. His journey begins as a displaced person - forced by a governmental decree to be born in a strange place, and laid to rest in a stranger's manger. And his earthly journey ends as a falsely convicted criminal, executed on a cross and laid to rest in a borrowed tomb. That's radically different from the grand palaces and great pyramids in which temporal rulers live and are entombed; but Jesus Christ is a radically different kind of ruler. He comes to establish a realm where people are more important than possessions; where giving is valued above getting; and where greatness is measured by what we humbly do for others, rather than by what have them do for us.

On this Reign of Christ Sunday, you and I remember and honor that amazing life and love of Jesus Christ; and we anticipate that glorious day when Christ's Reign of Peace will finally prevail throughout the earth. This isn't to say that we can just sit back

and wait for that Realm to arrive. Today, right now, you and I are invited and challenged to help bring about that remarkable Reign:
By treating all people with openness and respect, compassion and kindness;
By generously using our resources to help those around us, whoever they may be;
By loving our enemies, and striving to forgive those who wrong us;
And by graciously welcoming the strangers into our communities, our faith community, our homes, and our hearts. After all, if the people of Paris can do it, then so can we! *Oui, oui, absolument!*