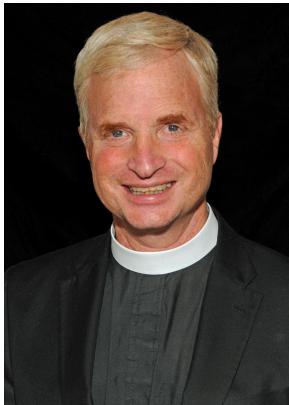




St. Luke's East Hampton Reflections from Fr. Ben



From the Rector

On Sunday morning, I woke to the news of the shooting at Bondi Beach in Australia. One of my fraternity brothers lives on the next beach over from Bondi Beach and I immediately sent him a WhatsApp text to check on him and his family, who were fine. I was so focused on them that it took a few moments to sink in that the shooting was at an event very similar to the Shabbat on the Beach held every Friday here in the summer. It took a little longer to learn that the rabbi who was shot had studied in New York and was known personally to many people here in Long Island. It took longer to remember it was the first day of Hanukkah.

Hanukkah celebrates the rededication of the Second Temple in Jerusalem by the Maccabees in 165 BCE. They needed to burn a candelabra for eight days in order to rededicate the temple and only had enough oil to burn the candle for one night. But miraculously, the oil lasted eight days, long enough for them to reclaim the temple. It is a holiday focused on faith, on hope, and on love, a festival focused on the miracle of light shining in the darkness and a celebration focused on God caring for his people, in the darkest of times.

A rabbi posted the following reflection on Facebook in which he asked people to focus not on the shooter but about the hero that stopped him. "May this Hanukkah remind you of miracles, hope, faith, and love. In a moment meant to divide and terrorize, humanity showed up. As a Jewish community gathered to celebrate Hanukkah at Bondi Beach, violence tried to intrude. And in that darkness, a Muslim man reportedly ran toward danger — not away from it — helping stop further bloodshed. Terror thrives on division. Courage defeats it. This doesn't erase the hate that exists, or the fear Jewish communities live with. But it reminds us of something essential: extremists do not speak for entire peoples, and humanity still has a pulse — even in the darkest moments."

If you google around, you will quickly see Hanukkah described as a lesser Jewish festival that is not some sort of Jewish version of Christmas. I understand that. I wonder, however, what it would be like if we made Christmas a little more like Hanukkah. If, like our Jewish friends, we can find light in the midst of darkness, hold on to faith, hope and love, trust in God's presence, and believe in miracles even in the most challenging times, we may just experience Christmas in a new way.

This is a particularly difficult time for our Jewish neighbors. If you have a chance, reach out. It will be appreciated more than you can know.