



St. Luke's East Hampton Reflections from Fr. Ben March 12, 2026

Wednesday was a glorious day for a morning walk. The snow was almost completely gone. The songs of smaller birds joined the voices of great flocks of geese. The sky and the ocean were blue, the waves and wind were calm, and there was just enough mist to make the whole horizon glow with light. Though it didn't happen today, one of the frequent highlights of my walks is running into Rabbi Josh Franklin and his dog Izzy (Israel). Izzy greets me as a friend and tries to jump into my arms. Josh greets me as a brother and gives me a hug.

As a friend of mine once said, "Jesus builds bridges not walls." Through programs, events and classes, the people of St. Luke's and the Jewish Center of the Hamptons have bonded together through building community, digging into scholarship, standing with one another in times of need, discovering what we have in common. I look forward to helping lead a shared Seder together in Hoie Hall on Monday of Holy Week.

In the same way that I treasure the friendship that I have with Josh Franklin, I treasure the friendship that has developed with Asma Rashid. Dr. Rashid is the director of the Islamic Center of the Hamptons, housed at the Unitarian Church in Bridgehampton. Shari and I will be attending their Iftar at sundown on Saturday. Iftar is the celebration that marks the end of Ramadan, during which Asma has asked me to speak.

What to say at these events is a challenge.

How do I tell our Jewish neighbors that Christianity is a religion of love and peace, when antisemitism, particularly by Christians, is on the rise?

How do I tell our Islamic neighbors that Christianity is a religion of love and peace, when many, particularly Christians, define the war in Iran as a Holy War against Islam?

Maybe because of the war, or maybe because Islam is less familiar to me, the idea of speaking to our Muslim neighbors is a little more challenging. For me, the starting point is remembering that Jews, Muslims, and Christians are all children of Abraham. We all worship the same God. Did you know, by the way, that the word "Allah" simply means God and that Arabic speaking Christians refer to God as Allah and in worship even say "Allah Akbar" (God is great)? In 628 the Prophet Muhammed wrote a letter obligating Muslims to protect Christians and Christian churches. The Quran prohibits attacking "People of the book" (Christians and Jews), unless they deviate from scripture. They are to be treated with kindness and respect and not hostility, unless they attack Muslims. There is a long history of Christians and Muslims supporting and coming to the aid of one another.

There are extremists in every religion who manipulate or twist the teachings of their faith to justify violence and hateful acts. The fact that happens - and is happening now - does not mean that the core values of love and peace at the core of those religions don't matter. They - and people who stand up for them - matter more than ever before.

Perhaps my task isn't to worry about how people from other religions practice their faith, but about how I practice my own. Perhaps my role isn't to tell them about Jesus' command to love God and our neighbor but rather to show them what that looks like. Perhaps your role is the same.
