



**Auckland Unitarian Church**  
*Love beyond belief*

## What happened to compassion?

**Clay Nelson © 11 August 2019**

We are living in a time I find exceedingly painful. It seems that all too many feel it is okay to treat others as if they are less than human. Part of the problem is I spend too much time following what is happening in my home country. This past week the mass gun shooting in El Paso where over 22 died and 48 were wounded was the 250th this year. According to the shooter's manifesto posted online he was inspired by the shooter in Christchurch. The difference was he was seeking to kill Mexicans instead of Muslims. Just a few hours later the 251st mass shooting happened in Dayton Ohio. Police were able to stop the shooter in Dayton in less than one minute but he was still able to kill 9 including his own sister and wound 27 others.

When I was living in the US there were occasional incidents of mass shootings, but they were rare. They were described as someone "going postal". This was a reference to a fired postal worker acting out his rage in his work place at having been fired. Prior to such incidents the earliest mass shooting in my memory was when I was 17. It was 1966. Charles Whitman, a former marine, took weapons to a tower on the University of Texas and began shooting indiscriminately in the plaza below, killing 14 and wounding 31 others. I remember the country being horrified but not horrified enough to do what Jacinda did to push through gun control measures within six days of the massacre.

While there are a variety of reasons for such horrible acts, it was clear after the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in 2012 when 20 children between six and eight and six adult teachers were killed, that there was not a national will to do as Jacinda would later do. While it is clear that some of the shootings are due to mental illness, what is becoming more common is they are hate crimes similar to Christchurch.

After El Paso and Dayton Donald Trump gave a speech to the country blaming everything from mental illness to video games to social media for these acts. What he failed to do was acknowledge the role of his own hate speech against immigrants and support for white nationalists. He has normalised hate crimes, laughing at one of his rallies when his supporters said the answer to immigration was to shoot them. I shudder at his hate speech. It goes viral beyond the US. The shooter in Christchurch acknowledged Trump as his inspiration.

This lack of compassion that feeds such horrific acts is creating an environment of fear. This week in a conversation with the president of a Unitarian congregation in Tampa Bay, Florida that flies flags in support of Black Lives Matter, the Rainbow community and the United Nations, I learned that they lock the doors when the service begins.

While we can give thanks that we live in a country where such acts have been rare, we cannot rest assured that hate crimes will not rear their head. Members of the Muslim community have continued to receive threats in public since Christchurch. I know what that feels like.

Twice I have had to call the police when I received death threats. I have also received countless hateful emails and comments on St Matthew's website because of my support of the LGBTQI community and my opposition to the Bible in Schools programme. I have found that particularly ironic since many came from Christians. Over time I have developed a thick skin, but I am still left me wondering whatever happened to compassion?

I'm interested in what you think?

- Are things better or worse in your experience?
- Do you find it more difficult to be compassionate towards those who aren't?
- Is a society that lives out the golden rule hopelessly idealistic?
- Can Unitarian Universalists make the world more compassionate?