

Today's service would be incomplete without speaking to the events that have taken place in Charlottesville over the past few days. As someone who just visited the Auschwitz and Birkenau concentration camps in Poland, it made me grieve in a visceral, physical, stomach-turning kind of way, to see so-called "Americans" doing the Hitler salute and carrying flags with the swastika.

There is nothing American about the Nazi regime or anything that it stood for. You literally cannot be a Nazi and an American. We had a war about this. This is a country founded on the highest ideals that people can achieve success and become who they want to become regardless of gender, skin color, ethnicity, country of origin, sexual orientation, or otherwise.

Sadly, as we saw this past weekend, we are not living up to our highest ideals. Our country is in a state of disrepair, and it's up to each and every one of us, each of us who calls ourselves an American, to come together to help repair it.

We must declare loudly and fervently that we will not tolerate any racism, bigotry, xenophobia or hate-filled speech. We must declare that our country is already great because of the diversity of people that call this land their home. And we must be vigilant, because we can look at Charlottesville and say oh, what a shame, poor Virginia. But the truth is that it's not just Virginia or the south. These hateful sentiments lie in every corner of the country, every neighborhood, within each of us if we look deep enough.

So we must acknowledge our demons before we can begin to fight them. But don't despair, because this country is capable of

being all that we aspire to be, we can be the land of the free and the home of the brave. We can be the country that our forefathers and mothers imagined, the country that so many have given their lives for. But in order for their sacrifices to not have been made in vain, we must not take these ideals for granted, we too must commit ourselves to the cause. We have to work for the healing of our nation, day in and day out, by speaking out against hatred and intolerance in our homes, our communities, our places of work, and even and especially in the church.

I want this church to be the place where we live into those deeply-held values of acceptance, diversity, love and inclusion. Anything to the contrary will not be tolerated. I hope you know that you are welcome here, you are wanted here, you are needed here, just as you are, not only in this church, but also in our country, the United States of America. Now we must get to work until everyone who calls themselves an American knows that they are welcome, they are wanted, and they are needed, here in our country, just as they are.

Let us pray...