

Why Terry Jones Doesn't Speak for Me

The Florida pastor says he's on a mission from God. But I can't see in Scripture where God calls us to spew hate speech.

I recently spent time with two of my daughters and their husbands at a frozen yogurt shop in downtown Gainesville, Fla., on a quiet Saturday evening. It's a good thing it wasn't Friday, because controversial pastor Terry Jones—who was indirectly linked to last week's violent outbreaks in the Middle East—has been known to stir up trouble at the corner of SE Second Avenue and SE First Street.

Members of Jones' tiny church, Dove World Outreach Center, often use megaphones to tell pedestrians they are going to hell. The angry street preachers blast homosexuals, President Obama, Muslims and any Christians who believe in tolerance. Sometimes restaurant patrons are forced to leave their patio tables and move indoors to escape the unwanted tongue-lashings.

Jones makes local news in Gainesville because of his attention-getting antics. Earlier this year he hanged President Obama in effigy on his church property (until the mannequin mysteriously disappeared). His members sometimes wear "Islam Is of the Devil" T-shirts. And back in 2010, when openly gay mayoral candidate Craig Lowe was running for office, the church launched a campaign against him with signs that said, "NO HOMO MAYOR."

But it is Jones' anti-Muslim rhetoric that has reached the boiling point several times recently. When he urged Christians last year to burn copies of the Quran, the resulting furor sparked riots throughout the Middle East—and 10 United Nations personnel died. Then last week, on the anniversary of 9/11,

Jones admitted that he helped promote a low-budget film that mocked Islam. The violence that erupted in Egypt, Libya, Yemen and other countries caused the deaths of four Americans.

Jones insists that neither the film (which was produced by a Coptic Christian from California) nor his inflammatory comments about Islam caused last week's violence. When *The Daily Beast* asked Jones if he felt he shared any responsibility for the deaths, Jones replied: "Absolutely not. We are here 1,000 miles away. Our actions pose absolutely no danger to their lifestyle. ... What it does, of course, is insult them, but that's what freedom of speech does."

Since I have the same free speech rights, I'd like to stand on my cyber-soapbox and offer an alternative. I respect the Rev. Jones' right to preach on a street corner, but he has a warped view of Jesus Christ if he thinks the best way to evangelize the world is to ridicule people or spew hate speech at them.

I'll use my own bullhorn to make these announcements:

1. Real Christians don't hate Muslims. I believe Jesus is the only way to salvation. As a Christian, I don't believe there are multiple paths to heaven. But I'm not going to convince a Muslim of the uniqueness of Christ by denigrating Islam or mocking Muhammad. And the ugly history of the medieval Crusades proves you can't force Christianity on Muslim cultures.

What God calls us to do is love Muslims, pray for them and show them the compassion of Christ. Ultimately we must trust the power of the Holy Spirit to open a Muslim's heart so he or she can see how much Jesus loves them.

2. Real Christians don't hate homosexuals. Any faithful reading of Scripture reveals that God's original plan for sexuality is monogamous, heterosexual marriage. But we live in a broken world, and because of family breakdown, abuse and other factors, many people today have embraced homosexuality.

Jesus doesn't put gay people on a special naughty list. He offers everyone, regardless of their sexual orientation, an opportunity to take up His cross and follow Him on the pathway to discipleship.

Our job is to point the way to Christ, who has the power to conform our lives to His standards of holiness. But we won't do that effectively by calling gay people "homos" or by screaming judgments at them. Love will require honest conversation, lots of sensitivity and Spirit-directed intercession.

3. Real Christians don't hate President Obama. I still can't believe that people from Terry Jones' church (in the South!) hung an African-American doll on a gallows on church property. What were they thinking? No wonder local resident Larry Condra told the *Gainesville Sun*: "Jesus is cool, but some of his followers give me the creeps."

You may completely disagree with President Obama's policies on abortion, gay marriage, taxation and the national debt. I disagree with him on many issues, too. But he's still my president, and my Bible commands me to pray for him. I don't have to agree with his views on socialized medicine to show him the respect any civil leader deserves.

The apostle John's first epistle gives clear New Testament guidelines on who is really a Christian. And one of his requirements is this: "Everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love" (1 John 4:7b-8, NASB). That tells me that a person who claims to be a Christian but whose life is characterized by hate speech might need to reevaluate whether he really knows God at all.

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