

May 31, 2022, the day after Memorial Day.

I just got home from dropping off my wife Olivia at Brimhall Elementary School, where she is a volunteer reading tutor, this year working with a group of 1st, 2nd and 3rd grade children. Each day she returns with stories about the inquisitiveness, joy, and life energy of each of the children she has come to know and care for during their visits.

A week ago today, at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas, an 18-year-old boy slaughtered 19 children and two teachers, coming into the school with two “AR15 style” rifles and 375 rounds of ammunition that he had purchased, legally, just days following his 18th birthday. This followed by just days the slaughter of 10 Black people in a Buffalo, NY, Tops grocery store by another 18-year-old boy, who was motivated by the overtly racist and hateful replacement theory ideology being promoted by many prominent Republican elected officials and “conservative news outlets.”

Since the slaughters at Robb Elementary and the Tops grocery store, I have heard few if any people asking the question, *What do we tell our children?*, as I believe we have largely run out of answers. I am a 65-year-old man who has spent my life and career working for and promoting nonviolence and peace, and sadly, here is all I can think of to say at this time, to our children and one another:

- I believe that the primary job of parents and humans is to nurture and protect our children and elders, our fellow human beings, and our planet. We are clearly failing terribly at this fundamental and sacred responsibility.
- We live in a country that has decided that the “right” to unfettered access to any and all weapons of war and human slaughter that manufacturers can produce and sell is absolute and beyond question.
- There is no magic answer to solve the ongoing slaughter of children, women and men in America’s schools, stores, theatres, and streets. While we continue to throw around slogans and platitudes about guns not killing people, and that we just need good guys to be armed to stop bad guys, in the America of today, I am sorry to tell you no one, anywhere, is safe from being slaughtered.

I support people who choose to responsibly own and use hunting weapons, as well as, if people choose, weapons they think may protect themselves and their families. I do not and never will support the notion that our “forefathers” envisioned a country where children and adults would be hunted with weapons of war and slaughter, over and over again in schools, stores, theatres, and on our streets, in the name of “freedom.”

So, to quote Dr. King, “Where do we go from here: Chaos or Community?” I fear we are already well into a time of chaos. Each of us needs to decide today whether we wish to live in a community where all of us are armed and ready to kill anyone, anywhere, at a moment’s notice, or whether we might work to limit the availability of weapons of war and slaughter in our schools and on our streets, to at least try to reduce the likelihood of the next slaughter.

As I watched Olivia walk into Brimhall today, and saw and heard so many beautiful children, filled with life and joy in the school and on the playground, I thought of the destroyed children's bodies and families at Robb Elementary and at the Tops grocery store. I decided then that if I were to hear gunfire erupt that I would hope to have the courage to run in, unarmed, to do whatever I could, however futile I know it would be, to try to save Olivia, a child, someone, anyone.

However equally futile it may appear to be, I will run toward engaging my neighbors, friends, community, and family to work toward reducing the number of weapons of war and slaughter in our homes and communities, in the hope that one day in our future we can drop off our children and loved ones at school, the store, our faith community, or anywhere else, without first thinking of and fearing their being killed by someone with a weapon of war and slaughter.

Again, the words of Dr. King: "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that."

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Building Peaceful Community
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