

My friends, today I was part of an interfaith service. It was originally conceived as a service praying for peace in the Middle East. After the natural disasters of the earthquake and tsunami, it was expanded to include prayers for those suffering in Japan.

I had mixed feelings about participating in the service. I was under the impression that Safaa Zarzour was going to be taking part. Zarzour is the Secretary General of the Islamic Circle of North America. I was unable to find what I consider to be an unbiased evaluation of that group, but I know CAIR, the Council on American Islamic Relations, and that is the group that Zarzour served as President and Chairman. CAIR is an extremist group; it is an Muslim Brotherhood offshoot. The Muslim Brotherhood's credo is *"Allah is our objective. The Prophet is our leader. The Koran is our law. Jihad is our way. Dying in the way of Allah is our highest hope."* Like CAIR, Hamas is another offshoot from the Muslim Brotherhood. For those who

follow CST on Twitter, I sent a link to an article substantiating these facts. For those who do not yet follow us (and I do urge you to sign on and follow us), I'll provide a link¹ to the article on the copy of this sermon that will appear on the CST web site.

I'm cautious about taking part in events with people like Zarzour. I generally don't do it. In this case, part of my decision to participate was based on the fact that Zarzour's role was to lead a Jumu'ah prayer after the interfaith service was over, and in a different room. I had no plans to attend the Jumu'ah prayer. Evidently, Zarzour was only attending the Jumu'ah prayer—I did not recognize him among the attendees at the interfaith service. That eliminated one of my concerns: I will not be used as a prop for a photo opp showing an enemy of Israel talking to a rabbi. Without Zarzour, that was not going to happen. So far, so good.

¹ http://www.camera.org/index.asp?x_context=2&x_outlet=118&x_article=2011

However, I have other issues with interfaith prayer services focusing on the Middle East. It is all too possible for people to fall into the trap that President Clinton did, calling for an end to the “cycle of violence.” That rhetoric lumps self defense and retaliation into the same soup as the terrorist attacks that start the so-called cycle in the first place. I have to make plain that my prayers for peace in Israel come from a very clear place in my soul and in my mind. I knew that if I represented the Jewish community at this service, I would have to do so in the only way I believed to be honest and appropriate. Given that there would be a local rabbi in attendance, I decided I wanted it to be me so that I could, as the poet has it, “speak of things that matter with words that must be said.”

And so I went. I opened with some words of prayer for those suffering in Japan. And then, my friends, I offered my prayer for peace. I spoke of things that matter with words that must be said. After the service, a Jewish

community lay leader said nothing about my words, but a Catholic priest and a Hindu cleric both urged me to publish it in the Indianapolis Star—an interesting juxtaposition. Now, to conclude my remarks tonight, is the prayer I offered this morning:

As an observant Jew, I pray for peace at least six times per day, even more when praying in a communal service. I could repeat one of those prayers now, but one begins to wonder if in praying for peace, I am asking God to do the impossible even for Him. So today I pray that throughout the Middle East and around the world:

No child is ever again dressed up in costume to mimic Jihadists and suicide bombers;

No parent ever again reacts to news of a son or daughter's suicide bombing with public pride and the wish that the rest of the family do the same;

No cartoons or other children's programs continue to be broadcast that glorify murder and suicide bombing;

All children grow up singing songs of peace;

No one continues to believe it is better to die and take other innocent lives at the same time than it is to live in peace next to others who are different;

The world achieves the moral clarity required to distinguish between a sovereign nation retaliating against attacks on its citizens and the acts of terrorism that prompt the response;

A ceasefire actually means a cessation of firing, not merely a time for terrorists to rearm;

We read no more about rockets being fired deep into Israel, as we read today;

We no longer need watch coverage of a terrorist bombing taking innocent life as we did this Wednesday;

Terrorists understand that every rocket they fire and every bomb they explode pushes their professed dream of statehood further away instead of bringing it closer;

And terrorists finally understand that the existence of Israel as a Jewish state is a reality that is not going to change.

Perhaps if we achieve that, it will be possible for the One Who makes peace in the heavens to make peace over us, over Israel, and over all the inhabitants of the earth.