

**“Why Christians Should Love Muslims”**  
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**August 14, 2016**  
**Menifee United Church of Christ**

A Rabbi and an Imam are fishing buddies, believe it or not. One day they invite a Minister to go fishing with them. They drive out to the lake, get in a rowboat, and paddle away from shore. After awhile the Rabbi says, “Oh, no. I left my lunch in the car. I better go get it.” So the Rabbi steps out of the boat, walks on the water to shore, gets his lunch, and walks on the water back to the boat. The Minister starts to say, “How did you...” when the Imam says, “Oh, no. I left my lunch in the car, too. I better go get it.” So the Imam steps out of the boat, walks on the water to shore, gets his lunch, and walks on the water back to the boat. Not to be outdone, the Minister says, “Well, I left my lunch in the car, too. I better go get it.” So the Minister steps out of the boat and plunges into the water. The Rabbi chuckles and says to the Imam, “Maybe we should’ve told him where the rocks are.” A Rabbi, an Imam, and a Minister getting together is a beautiful thing. Especially in these times when some people seem to hate Muslims. Or at least fear them. Whether it's hatred or fear, some want to ban Muslims from coming to America. And we have seen some Muslims commit acts of terror in America in recent months and years. In San Bernardino. In Orlando. In Boston. And in other cities. But is that who Muslims are? Maybe before people hate or fear Muslims, they should learn more about them.

The Prophet Muhammad was born in the year 570. The Prophet Muhammad is considered by many people to be the founder of Islam. The Prophet Muhammad wrote the Quran, which, like the Bible, is believed by believers to be the Word of God. The Quran is the basis of Islam. And Islam means peace. Although many in the West don't believe Islam is a peaceful religion, because they've heard the word Jihad is in the Quran. And many in the West believe that Jihad means war. But as far as I can tell, Jihad means “exerted effort.” Here's what the Prophet Muhammad says about Jihad. “The greatest Jihad is to battle your own soul, to fight the evil within yourself.” Sounds a little like the Apostle Paul, doesn't it? Paul writes in Romans, Chapter 7, “I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do.” I'm sure someone could take something that Muhammad wrote or said out of context and make him and Islam sound not very peaceful. But you could do the same thing with Jesus.

Jesus doesn't sound very peaceful in the Gospel of Luke. In Luke Chapter 12 Jesus says, “Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division!” I believe what Jesus meant by that is: there will be division between those who believe in Jesus and those who don't. But I also believe that Jesus knew that peace is possible when we love our neighbor. That's why Jesus told us to love our neighbor. But would Jesus consider a Muslim our neighbor? Remember how Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan? Well Jews hated Samaritans. So for Jesus to put a Samaritan in a good light, was probably one of the reasons why the Jewish leaders wanted to kill Jesus. But if Jesus thought well of Samaritans back then, I have no doubt that Jesus would think well of Muslims today. And Jesus would tell us, I believe, to love our neighbor, including our Muslim neighbor. Because when we love our neighbor, including our Muslim neighbor, that's when there will be peace. Whoever our Muslim neighbor is.

Ibtihaj Muhammad is one of our Muslim neighbors. This past week the 30-year-old fencer made history as the first American Olympian to compete in a hijab. A hijab, as you probably know, is the headgear that Muslim women wear in public. Ibtihaj Muhammad, in case you haven't seen her, is also African-American. That's the beauty of the Olympics. Diversity. Not everyone who competes in the Olympics is an American, obviously. The Olympics bring people together from all over the world. Not everyone who competes in the Olympics is white, obviously. The Olympics bring people together of all different colors. And not everyone who competes in the Olympics is a Christian, obviously. The Olympics bring people together of all faiths and none. Ibtihaj Muhammad, a Muslim, is one of our neighbors that Jesus tells Christians to love. And God wants us to love our Muslim neighbors too.

King David tells us why God wants us to love Muslims. King David writes in Psalm 40, “I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart.” And what is the will of God, what is the law of God? For the answer to those questions we turn to 1 John Chapter 4. “Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.” So if we want to do the will of God, if we want to follow the law of God, if we want to be born of God, and if we want to know God, then we are to love one another, including Muslims.

Keith Ellison is someone God wants us to love. Keith Ellison is a Congress person from Minnesota. And Keith Ellison was the first Muslim elected to Congress. André Carson is another person God wants us to love. Andre Carson is a Congress person from Indiana. And Andre Carson is the second Muslim elected to Congress. People like Keith Ellison and Andre Carson make up the diverse tapestry that is America. Now I know at least one presidential candidate wants Muslims banned from coming into the U.S. But as we've said, Muslims, including Keith Ellison and Andre Carson, are people God wants us to love. The Bible gives us another reason to love Muslims.

King David explains why we are to love Muslims. King David writes in Psalm 82, "I say, 'You are gods, children of the Most High, all of you.'" All of us? Not just Christians? Muslims too? Muslims are children of the Most High? But of course. We are all descendants of Adam and Eve. We are all descendants of Abraham. And we are all brothers and sisters of Jesus. Christians and Muslims and everyone. We are all created by God. We are all made in the image of God. And we are all blessed by God. Christians and Muslims and everyone. We are all loved by God. We are all nurtured by God. And we are all uplifted by God. Christians and Muslims and everyone. That's why Christians are to love their Muslim neighbors. Because we are all children of the Most High. Even the president of the United States.

President Obama is a secret Muslim, according to some. He's not. He's a Christian. Of course, there are those who don't believe that he's a Christian. They believe that's why President Obama won't utter the words, "Radical Islamic Terrorist." Even though President Obama explained why he won't utter the words, "Radical Islamic Terrorist." Because Isis wants to be tied to Islam. But Islam has nothing to do with Isis. Isis kills innocent people, and Islam has nothing to do with killing innocent people. Again, Islam means peace. A Christian shot and killed three people at a Planned Parenthood clinic in Colorado Springs many months ago. A Christian blew up the Oklahoma City Federal Building many years ago, killing 168 people, including many children. A Christian bombed the Atlanta Olympics and a woman's health clinic many years ago, killing two people. But I don't remember anyone complaining that the President didn't call those people Radical Christian Terrorists. Because Christianity has nothing to do with killing innocent people. Just like Islam has nothing to do with killing innocent people. Islam is all about peace. Christianity is all about peace. And that's what Jesus wants, for Christians to be all about peace. And to follow Jesus, as the Apostle Paul tells us.

The Apostle Paul explains why we follow Jesus. Paul writes in the Book of Hebrews chapter 12 that Jesus is, "the pioneer and perfecter of our faith." So of course Christians are to follow Jesus, "the pioneer and perfecter of our faith." And I believe that when Christians love Muslims, they will be following Jesus and doing the will of God. Plus when Christians love Muslims, maybe they'll learn more about Muslims: learn more about their religion, learn more about their history, and learn more about their culture. And then, if they didn't know it already, they'll learn the Islamic culture includes one of the most profound writers ever.

Rumi was a 13th-century Muslim mystic. Rumi was also a Sufi scholar. And Rumi was also a Persian poet. Rumi wrote one of the most profound things I've ever read. It's short. But, oh, so sweet. Rumi writes, "You are not a drop in the ocean. You are the entire ocean in a drop." Wow. Christians should love Muslims because of their religion, because of their history and because of their culture. And because they are our neighbors, and Jesus told us to love our neighbors. Also, Christians should love Muslims because they are the brothers and sisters of Jesus, just like we are. Christians should love Muslims because they are the offspring of Adam and Eve, just like we are. And Christians should love Muslims because they are children of God, just like we are.

Let us pray...  
God of Love,  
*Help us to know that Muslims are our neighbors.  
Help us to know that Muslims are Jesus' brothers and sisters.  
And help us to know that Muslims are your children.  
Now and forevermore.  
By the power of the Holy Spirit.  
And in the name of Jesus.  
Amen.*