

June 1, 2020

Trinity Musings #17: Rev Brian Goodings (self-isolating in my office at Trinity United Church: Collingwood. EpiPen at the ready!)

Warning: In this Musing I'm gonna raise the g-word. Not god or geezus but GUNS. Yep the big G-word.

My friends and I used to play a game called "Who can touch the paper-wasp nest without getting stung?" Sometimes it did not end well but we did it anyway because...well, it just needed to be done.

I know I may be touching another hive with this Musing too. I actually started to write this Musing immediately after the Nova Scotia shooting rampage that killed 22 people but was advised not to do so. Strongly advised. "Too controversial and not the time." When is the right time?

In our society we can talk about gods and religion and sexuality as much as we want but if you want to split or end a party, raise the topic of guns. Like the Leaf's, everyone has a VERY strong opinion about how to fix them.

Perhaps it is an oversimplification but it seems to me there are two main polarities to this debate. At one end are people who believe the world is essentially a safe place and guns make it more dangerous. At the other end are people who believe the world is a dangerous place and guns make it safer. People at both ends want a safer world but they are diametrically opposed to the effect they believe guns have on their safety.

In the land of The-Crazy-Donald, guns are more of a fetish than anywhere else in the world. Although the right to bear arms was only an Amendment to the original U.S. constitution, it has been the main debate for 250 years. One side believes it was intended to allow the State to train their own militia, the other side believes it was intended to allow private citizens to arm themselves against the State. Quite different interpretations and the second one is supported by the National Rifle Association (NRA).

The crazy thing is that the NRA is so powerful there is a law against anyone even talking about or researching gun safety. After one of the many mass shootings, President Barack Obama said, "We can talk about car safety and research air bags and seat belts to keep people safer while driving...but we can't even bring the topic of gun safety up because it's against the law to do so."

The NRA has a very strong presence in Canada too and influences our politics and public discussions. After the shooting in Nova Scotia the Canadian Federal Government introduced a law banning some assault guns, including the ones the killer used.

(Reminder: I'm not talking about hunting. I'm talking about big G-guns. One is a tool and the other is a weapon.)

It's hard to argue that a hunter would need to have a gun that shoots 800 bullets a minute (yep 13 bullets or more a second) but, even as I write, there are some very powerful gun-lobby groups launching appeals against the legislation. They will likely be successful in at least stalling the ban for a long time and at least shortening the list.

When I have been bold enough to raise this topic before, the first thing I usually hear is "Religion has led to the killing of a lot more people than anything else in history." My answer is..."No, fanaticism and extremism of every stripe has led to the killing of more people than anything else in history." An assault gun is the extremist version of a firearm. A hunting rifle gone mad. Like attracts like.

When anything or anyone becomes extreme, it/they can become toxic and very dangerous. I extend this to just about everything actually. Cars and motorcycles that can go 300 miles an hour really have no place on our public streets and assault guns don't belong there either.

In this Covid-time we are talking endlessly about how to stay safe and well and you might feel that raising the topic of gun safety now is a bit of red herring. But, I suggest, that since we are in a bit of culture-pause right now, we do have the time to thoughtfully discuss many matters in the world. Even those that might sting when we touch upon them.

I can imagine some of you are buzzing already.