**Reflection lifted up on Sunday morning regarding Aurora shootings –**

**by Rev. Paul Kottke, University Park United Methodist Church**

Reflection on the tragic shootings in Aurora -  July 22, 2012

*The Lord is my shepherd.  I shall not want.*

*He makes me lie down in green pastures;*

*He leads me beside still waters, he restores my soul.*

*He leads me in the right paths for his name’s sake*

*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,*

*I fear no evil; for Thou art with me; Thou rod and staff they comfort me.*

*Thou prepare a table for me in the presence of my enemies;*

*Thou annoints my head with oil; my cup overflows with goodness.*

*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,*

*And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.  [Ps.23]*

These words speak to us in a very poignant way this morning.  Once again we are confront with the tragedy of meaningless violence, striking down innocent people  in a place where they felt that they were safe, in a place where they simply were looking to have an enjoyable time.

This is not the time for a debate on gun control.  Though, I must give witness that I personally do not feel safer because these items are readily available to be purchased legally.

But, what of our faith?  So many do not see the need for forming, developing, or strengthening their faith.  They view their faith almost as a static commodity…something that you tuck away in the top drawer of your dresser and call upon it only in times of great need or tragedy.

Yet in the time such as this, if our faith is not well formed, we find ourselves crying out “Where are you God?  Why did you allow this to happen?”  We find ourselves too often collapsing into the worst of who we can be -  seeking vengeance, striking out in anger, allowing fear to control our lives.

As Christians, if we take our faith seriously, it becomes the very core from which we are able to live into an uncertain time, an anxious time without being consumed by our fear.  If we take our Christian faith seriously, we are able to continue to live with boldness for the good that exists all around us, for the beauty and for the grace and compassion that is part of the love we share with God and with each other.

The choice is ours: Do we live into the fear that threatens us?  Or do we live for the abundance of life?

I close with this poem from Howard Thurman, an African-American Quaker who lived and wrote in the mid-20th Century.

THE GROWING EDGE    by Howard Thurman

All around us worlds are dying and new worlds are being born;

All around us life is dying and life is being born.

The fruit ripens on the tree;

The roots are silently at work in the darkness of the earth

Against the time when there shall be new leaves, fresh blossoms, green fruit.

Such is the growing edge!

It is the extra breath from the exhausted lung,

The one more thing to try when all else has failed,

The upward reach of life when weariness closes in upon all endeavors.

This is the basis of hope in moments of despair,

The incentive to carry on when times are out of joint

And men have lost their reason; the source of confidence

When worlds crash and dreams whiten into ash.

The birth of a child – life’s most dramatic answer to death  –

This is the Growing Edge incarnate.

Look well to the growing edge!

I light this pedestal candle to honor the 12 lives tragically lost to senseless violence and to all the lives that will forever be changed, including the perpetuator and his family.  We pray for a day when ‘every tear will be wiped away, and there will be no more violence.’  Amen.