

## ANTI-RACISM RALLY | JUNE 20, 2020

When I saw the picture of Gourmet Garden last week, I was shocked. But to be honest, I wasn't really surprised. I haven't lived in Wyckoff that long. Only three or four years. But I've seen that same kind of thing here before. Justifications for racial profiling. Casual anti-Semitism. Demonizing of immigrants. So while blatant anti-Asian prejudice is shocking, it's not wholly surprising.

Whenever something like this happens in town, there's a refrain that we hear over and over and over. "This is not who we are." And I think we'd like to believe it. We would love to think this isn't a reflection of our civic character. But if this isn't who we are, why does this kind of stuff happen over and over and over?

When people say, "This is not who we are," what they really mean is, "This isn't my experience." And for many of us, that's probably true. It's not our experience. But that doesn't make it any less true, less real, or less urgent. Look, Wyckoff is a nice town. I like Wyckoff fine enough. But we'd be lying to ourselves if we didn't own up to the fact that Wyckoff has serious issues with racism and prejudice.

That gives us two options. The first option is to look at the racism and prejudice in our community and say, "That's not who we are." To say that it's an exception. That it doesn't really exist. It's just a bad apple. It's probably just a teenager. It's someone who doesn't live here. And to go back to our old ways of doing things. Cross our fingers it doesn't happen again.

But there is another option. There's a word we use in our houses of worship in town. Rabbi Beni at Temple Beth Rishon would call it *t'shuvah*. Pastor Andy at Wyckoff Reformed would call it *metanoia*. My Hebrew and Greek aren't so good, so I just call it repentance. Repentance means turning and going in another direction.

We have a choice today. We can go back to our easy excuses and claim this isn't who we are. Or we can choose to repent. We can recognize that we have a serious problem that needs to be addressed and recommit ourselves to solving it. We can reject our base instinct to pretend everything is fine and choose to follow our better angels down a different path.

The hardest part of repenting is the first step. It's realizing that there's a problem. It's acknowledging that the old ways of doing things aren't working anymore. And you've already taken that step by being here this morning. By saying publicly that you are committed to working towards a more inclusive, just, and equitable community.

I pray that this experience for you this morning does not lead you to believe that this is done. That you're ready to move on and get on with life. Instead, I hope you look around and see all the partners you have to make this journey with. People who are committed to eradicating racism and prejudice wherever we find it. Whether it's in our nation, in our town, in our homes, or in ourselves.

May God give us the faith to seek a true justice over a false peace. May God give us the hope to cherish our dreams for the future over our nostalgia for the past. And may God give us the love to seek the welfare of our fellow citizens as urgently as our own.

Joseph Schattauer Paillé, Pastor