

‘LIVE YOUR LIFE AS A BELIEVER’ Muslim service focuses on faith, forgiveness

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"We did not enter this country in tanks or fighter jets. We entered on different types of visas. We are freer to practice our religion here than at home. We have a great responsibility to show what Islam is all about."

Dirar Ahmad gave the Friday prayer sermon to about 70 believers at the Islamic Center of West Virginia in South Charleston.

Candlelight vigils, interfaith prayers and coalitions to foster understanding among Christians, Jews and Muslims have been taking place all around the country since the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

Friday's sermon and prayer at the Islamic center stressed personal responsibility and accountability.

"When Allah created us, brothers and sisters, he did not create us and say, 'Go on and do whatever you like and I'll see you in a few thousand years.' He gave us criteria to live by."

Ahmad told the story of Cain and Abel, the two sons of Adam, a story also holy to Muslims. Cain became envious of Abel and killed him.

"Whoever kills any soul without justification it is as if you killed all mankind, in the eyes of the creator," he said.

He said people should do what Abel did, saying, "If you reach to kill me I will not reach to fear you because I fear God."

Ahmad read a section of the Quran, first in Arabic and then in English. He read a passage that said those who have been wronged have the right to defend themselves and to inflict an injury on their enemy that is equal to the one inflicted on them.

"But if an individual or a group or a nation chose to make a reconciliation, the reward is the Almighty God," he said.

"God doesn't like aggression. He doesn't like evil or wrong-doers, but if they retaliate, God will not blame them ... But it is much better for you to move on," he said.

"You have to live your life as a believer."

He said the prophet Muhammed, in the last sermon he gave, told the believers, those who follow Islam, that he was leaving them two gifts, and if they held those gifts dear to them he would not worry about them until judgment day.

The first gift was the Quran and the second gift was the example he set by way he had lived his life.

Ahmad then told a story that he said every Muslim is familiar with.

He said every day the prophet walked by an old woman who threw dirty water on him as he passed. She put thorns and other obstacles in his way. One day she didn't.

"You think he'd be happy not to get dirty," Ahmad said.

Instead the prophet was worried and went to check on the woman and indeed she was sick. He ministered to her.

"He showed us how to live. He did not retaliate."

Ahmad continued, his green Quran in his hand. He wholly condemned the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

"We do not support this regardless of what cause it was supposed to promote. Please, be proud you are Muslim. Do not be scared. If we didn't have fear we wouldn't human, but let's use this to reach out to neighbors, co-workers and our broken communities.

"We are part of this great nation."

When he finished speaking, about 60 men stood shoulder to shoulder in the front and seven women stood shoulder to shoulder in the back.

Ahmad began the call to prayer and the believers prayed.

When the prayer was done, the lines broke. The believers scattered and left their rows and said additional individual prayers.

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