

Jesus didn't preach tolerance

By [Debra Dean Murphy](#)

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Outrage is pouring in from all sides — as it should. Terry Jones is the kind of “pastor” who gives clergy a bad name; the kind of “Christian” who affirms the worst suspicions of skeptics and cynics. His plan to burn copies of the Qur’an on Saturday (September 11) is a stunt both feeble and horrifying.

If we didn’t live in an age of instant access to quasi-news, fake-news, and no-news, no one outside the greater Gainesville area would know about the ironically named Dove World Outreach Center.

The response from both right and left, religious and secular, has been — in a nutshell — one of condemnation for Jones’s shocking lack of tolerance. It’s been interesting to observe the conflation of American and Christian “values,” and the naming of such values to marshal opposition to Jones’s primitive xenophobia: respect, open-mindedness, freedom of conscience.

But Jesus didn’t preach such things. Jesus preached — embodied, actually, in a way that got him killed — *love*. Risky, radical, costly, inconvenient love. Messy, complicated, difficult, demanding love. Love of neighbor, of stranger, of enemy.

Tolerance costs me nothing. *Loving* others — seeking their good, willing their prosperity and happiness, genuinely desiring their companionship — this is the hazardous business of community, of relationship-building, of making and sustaining friendships for the long haul. Tolerance is all too happy to avoid all this. Tolerance turns out to be a means for keeping us estranged from one another while we pride ourselves on our progressive politics or our general open-mindedness whatever our politics.

Nine years after 9/11 most of us are tolerant of Islam but we don't really love Muslims. We don't really know any Muslims to love. Tolerance has kept us at a safe and sterile distance.

It's easy to condemn a publicity-seeker like Terry Jones (what would it mean for Christians to love this nutty guy?). Righteous indignation abounds — just check Facebook. But it's hard to engage in the slow, patient work of love (of our Muslim neighbors, of wayward souls like Terry Jones). Yet this is the work we've been given to do, the work of love that is the way of Jesus.

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