

Theological Musings from Dave's Laptop

November 7, 2017

Another week, another mass shooting. Our grief seems unending. As the psalmist cried out long ago, "*When the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?*" (Psalm 11:3).

And let us make no mistake. Whatever our nation does or does not do about guns and gun control, the source of our troubles is much deeper than weapons.

Our sorrows come from the reality that "the foundations are destroyed." Marriages are founded less and less upon personal relationship with our Lord Christ . . . if couples trouble themselves to become married at all. Increasing numbers of children grow up without Christian parents . . . and many of them do not grow up with both parents. Increasing numbers of us have no idea how to have a healthy, durable relationship. Examples are without number. Just listen to the conversations around you in public spaces (they will be mostly via phone, I expect).

Yet even through all this pain, we can still say, with Jeremiah (after the destruction of Jerusalem), "*Because of the LORD's faithful love we do not perish, for his mercies never end. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness! I say, 'The LORD is my portion, therefore I will put my hope in him'*" (Lamentations 3:22-24).

And because of all this pain, it remains the case that there is probably nothing we can do, individually or together, that will make more difference in the world than to build relationships with youth and young adults *and to love them to Jesus*. Pray that God will guide us to the right person to become our Associate Pastor for the next chapter of our ministry right here in Oakland Mills.

One of our youth made a profession of faith in Jesus two weeks ago, and at least three others are asking about such commitments. Pray!

With respect to Sunday's mass shooting in a Baptist church in Texas, Andrea Taylor forwarded the following article from the *Washington Post*. Russell Moore is the president of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, the public-policy arm of the Southern Baptist Convention. . . .¹



Why church shootings don't intimidate the church - Russell Moore November 6

"While millions of other Christians were singing hymns, or opening their Bibles or taking communion this past Sunday, at that very moment, a gunman was opening fire on the First Baptist Church of Sutherland Springs, Tex. This, believed to be the largest church shooting in history, ended with at least 26 people killed, according to authorities.

¹ https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2017/11/06/why-church-shootings-dont-intimidate-the-church/?utm_term=.b1f1cda78405&wpisrc=nl_faith&wppmm=1

“Several children were among the fallen, including pastor Frank Pomeroy’s 14-year-old daughter Annabelle. Whatever the shooter’s twisted objective might have been, we do know this: It won’t work.

“The goal the gunman sought, to terrorize worshipers, has been attempted constantly over the centuries around the world by cold, rational governments and terrorist groups — all thinking that they could, by the trauma of violence, snuff out churches, or at least intimidate those churches into hiding from one another. Such violent tactics always end up with the exact opposite of what the intimidators intend: a resilient church that, if anything, moves forward with even more purpose than before. Why?

“Whether they are crazed loners in the United States or jihadist cells in Syria or governing councils in the old Soviet bloc [or Boko Haram in Nigeria], these forces fundamentally misunderstand the source of Christianity’s strength in the first place. Killers assume, after all, that gunfire or poison gas or mass beheadings will show Christians how powerless we are. That is true. They assume that this sense of powerlessness will rob the community of its will to be the church. That is false.

“If they looked overhead, in almost any of the churches they attempt to destroy, these killers might see what they miss: the cross.

“The church was formed against the threat of terror. Jesus himself stood before a Roman governor who told him that the state had the authority to kill him, in the most horrific way possible — staking him to a crossbeam to bleed slowly to death before a jeering crowd. That’s, of course, exactly what Pilate did— and the empire’s intimidation seemed to work, at first.

“Most of Jesus’ core followers went into hiding, out of fear that they would be endangered next. That’s exactly what crosses were designed to do: Their public display was to warn people that they could be the next in line.

“The very ones who scattered, though, soon returned, testifying that they had seen the crucified Jesus *alive*. The result was an open proclamation of the Christian message that led to thousands joining themselves to the tiny persecuted movement. Within a matter of centuries, the terrorists themselves, the Roman Empire, would be gone, with the church marching forward into the future.

“The reason was not that the church came to believe that they could find safety in the threats of violence. The reason was that the church came to conclude, in the midst of the violence, that death is not the endpoint.

“Much of the New Testament is made up of letters from the apostles of Jesus on why the cross is, counterintuitively, the power of God. The Christian gospel does not cower before death. Those who give their lives in witness to Christ are not helpless victims, in our view. In fact, the Book of Revelation maintains that those who are martyred are in fact ruling with Christ. This is not in spite of the fact that they are killed. They triumph even as they are killed. That’s because they are joined to a Christ who has been dead, and never will be again.

“You can’t kill me.”

When threatened by a terrorist, a Christian missionary responded,
**“You can’t kill me.
I’ve been dead
for a long time.”**

“I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:19b-20).

“The day of the shooting was, for many churches, a day of remembrance for the persecuted church. Christians do not see as victims those around the world who are rooted out of their churches, even lined up and executed. We see in them the power Jesus promised us: the power that is made perfect in weakness.

“To eradicate churches, our opponents will need a better strategy. They should see that Christianity can be easier suffocated with comfort, to the point that we forget who we are, than it can be terrorized with violence. Those who try to confront the church with the threat of death only remind the church that we were dead, and are now alive in Christ.

“The days ahead will be awful for the grieving community of Sutherland Springs. But one thing is certain: Come Sunday, they will be gathered again, singing and praying and opening the Word. That church will bear witness to the truth that shaped them:

“Eternal life cannot be overcome by death. And over that church will be a cross.”

