

## Theological Musings from Dave's Laptop

July 19, 2016

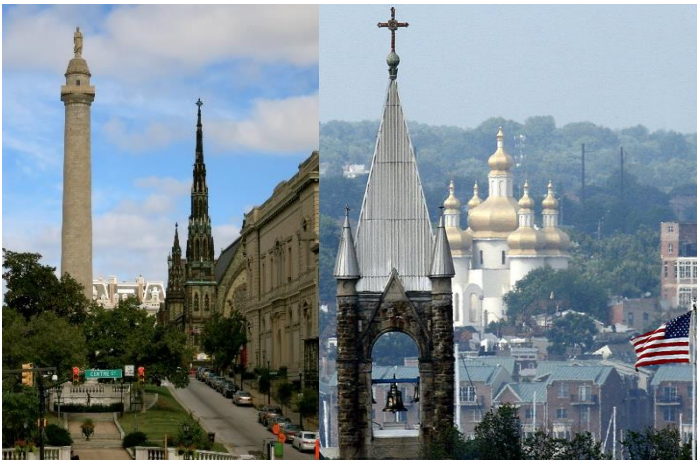
Just when we think things can't get any worse . . . things get worse.

I don't know about you, but I've felt a lot like Habakkuk lately:

*"How long, O LORD, must I call for help?  
But you do not listen!  
'Violence is everywhere!' I cry,  
but you do not come to save.  
Must I forever see these evil deeds?  
Why must I watch all this misery?  
Wherever I look, I see destruction and violence.  
I am surrounded by people  
who love to argue and fight.  
The law has become paralyzed,  
and there is no justice in the courts.  
The wicked far outnumber the righteous,  
so that justice has become perverted"*  
(Habakkuk 1:1-4).

Do you ever feel like that?

Parallel with this lament is another observation about which I think pretty much all the time. As I drive around in Columbia, in Baltimore, in Washington, and in other great cities of this land, I see churches everywhere—sometimes literally on every corner. And I ask myself, **"Are these churches making any difference at all? Are WE making any difference at all? Am I making any difference at all?"**



I was at a prayer meeting for the City of Baltimore this morning in which reference was made to the room where we were praying as "a war room." My guess is that the speaker was making reference to the recent movie *War Room*, which was indeed about the power of prayer to demolish spiritual strongholds.



We cannot—*we must not*—allow terror, hatred, and killing become "normal." We cannot—*we must not*—allow ourselves to become hardened to the world's darkness, horror, and pain.



Paul wrote that “*for though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds*” (2 Corinthians 10:3-4).

I don’t know about you, but I have to continually remind myself that **people are not our enemy. Satan is our enemy.** *Lost people act lost because they are lost.* We don’t need to kill them. We need to lead them to Him who is the Source of Healing and Hope.

Paul reminds us that “*our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand*” (Ephesians 6:12-13).

You and I have absolutely no guarantee that we will not die by a terrorist’s bullet or bomb. Indeed, that appears to become more likely every day. But we do not live in fear. We do not cower and hide. **We—you and I—are warriors on the front lines of this battle every single day.**



Ancient cities depended on their massive walls for protection, and conquering armies routinely destroyed those protecting walls. It was of such a wall—spiritual, not physical—that God spoke to the prophet Ezekiel: “*I looked for someone among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found no one*” (Ezekiel 22:30). At the very least, this is what all our churches and all of us who follow Jesus are doing. We are standing in the gap to protect the land.

You probably know 2 Chronicles 7:14 by heart: “*If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.*” We quote it all the time.

It is perhaps instructive to note that in ancient Israel, God sometimes accepted the prayer, the repentance, and the obedience of the few as protection for the many. God told Abraham that Sodom would be spared if only ten righteous people were found therein (Genesis 18:32). **That’s what we’re doing. We are standing in the gap.** There is more that we can do, but we cannot do less.

If you’ve seen *War Room*, you know that part of the point of the movie is the crucial importance of mentoring. I’m reading lots of things lately that point out that just about the only thing that makes a lasting difference in changing a life for the better is the willingness of one other person to invest time in loving and teaching another The Way of Righteousness. This is not a new idea. This is the strategy Jesus used





to establish the Church as a beachhead of the New Creation. And it's the theme of a familiar poem by Edgar Guest:

I'd rather see a sermon than hear one any day;  
I'd rather one should walk with me than merely tell the way.  
The eye's a better pupil and more willing than the ear,  
Fine counsel is confusing, but example's always clear;  
And the best of all preachers are the men who live their creeds,  
For to see good put in action is what everybody needs.  
I soon can learn to do it if you'll let me see it done;  
I can watch your hands in action, but your tongue too fast may run.  
And the lecture you deliver may be very wise and true,  
But I'd rather get my lessons by observing what you do;  
For I might misunderstand you and the high advice you give,  
But there's no misunderstanding how you act and how you live.



One of the things we can do to **Push Back the Darkness** is to ask God to send us someone into whose life to build our own. And along the way, we just might be pulling a young life back from the brink, back from the precipice, back from "radicalization."

We won't always be successful, but that doesn't mean we don't try. And even when evil seems to win the day, we can say with Dr. King:

"We shall match your capacity to inflict suffering by our capacity to endure suffering. We shall meet your physical force with soul force. Do to us what you will, and we shall continue to love you. . . . Throw us in jail, and we shall still love you. Bomb our homes and threaten our children, and we shall still love you. Send your hooded perpetrators of violence into our community at the midnight hour and beat us and leave us half dead, and we shall still love you.

But be ye assured that we will wear you down by our capacity to suffer.

**One day we shall win freedom, but not only for ourselves.**

**We shall so appeal to your heart and conscience that we shall win you in the process, and our victory will be a double victory."**<sup>1</sup>

I've told you how Habakkuk's prophecy begins. Here's how it ends:

***Even though the fig trees have no blossoms, and there are no grapes on the vine, and the olive crop fails and the field lie empty and barren; even though the flocks die in the fields, and the cattle barns are empty, yet I will rejoice in the LORD! I will be joyful in the God of my salvation!"*** (Habakkuk 3:17-18).

*the vines; even though the olive*

**Stay calm . . . watch and pray . . . and rejoice!**



<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "Loving Your Enemies," *Strength to Love* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 40.