

21 April 13

“A Pastoral Word in a Time of Distress”

It's been a hard couple of weeks around here. First, there was the accident on Cox Neck Rd. that took the lives of four young men just coming into their own. It's said that there are no more than six degrees of separation between human beings. But on Kent Island there seems to be no more than two degrees of separation. The deaths of these four young men have affected nearly all of us. We knew them or we know their classmates, friends, or parents.

But before their funerals were even held we heard of the bombings at the Boston Marathon. And though it was on a much lesser scale, it was hard not to think of the 9/11 attack. And as if that weren't enough, this past week we also heard about a devastating explosion in West, TX and of poison letters sent to the President and to a senator from MS. This doesn't seem normal. It's unsettling. While our hearts hurt for the injured and for those who lost loved ones, we wonder what is happening to us, and we don't feel as safe as we did before.

That's the situation I want to try to address today. The first thing I want to say is that this accident and this bombing are senseless. What happened to those four boys is senseless. Yes, we can point to a reason—excessive speed—why the crash took place. But that doesn't make sense of this loss. We look for reasons to make sense of what happens in our world. We found out pretty quickly who we think bombed the marathon. But the real why behind what would make someone, especially the one described his teachers as a sweetheart, do this is a lot harder to fathom. These still remain senseless killings and maimings. God may have a plan—God does have a plan—but this isn't it.

One of the boys' who was killed father works at the Safeway where I work. My store manager asked me, “Where is God.” My answer is that God is in our caring of each other. I see God in the outpouring of care for grieving parents. I see God at work at the Boston marathon when after the bombs exploded many people ran not away from but toward the scene to help those in need. That included first responders, of course. But it also included civilians, runners, and volunteers working the race. They pinched off bleeding arteries. They carried the injured in their arms and on carts. At the end of a grueling 26 mile race they worked unscheduled shifts as nurses and doctors. I see God at work in the more than 6,000 Bostonians who opened their homes and apartments promising free lodging, and in many cases, free meals and rides for those who were stranded, cut off from their hotels. That's where God was; that's where God is.

So what do we do now? What do we learn from this? One, this is a teachable moment for teens. It would be good to remind them—and they need periodic reminders—that the part of the human brain that causes one to act with caution does not fully develop until about age 25. That means that if I'm under 25 I am prone to doing things that are risky, even dangerous. If I know that, maybe I'll keep the cautionary voices of others in my head and listen to them. I'll be delivering that reminder at the youth gathering tonight.

The second thing I take from all this is a reminder to watch my language. This time the act of

terror was foreign, sort of, in origin. Sometimes it is not; it's homegrown. In both cases it is inflammatory, hate-filled language that provokes the vulnerable to violence. We need to watch our language.

So it is not Obama, it is President Obama. It is not Boehner, it is Majority Leader Boehner. It is not Obamacare, it is the Affordable Care Act. We live in a democracy. The laws that are enacted or not enacted are done so by the people we elect. Each one of us is free to disagree, even strenuously disagree with what government does. What we are not free to do is use disparaging language or automatically ascribe nefarious motives to those who don't do exactly as we wish..

That kind of talk demeans all of us. And it leads to violence. It did so in the 60's on the left with the Student for a Democratic Society and the Weather Underground that called all police pigs and anyone who worked for the federal government a fascist. It did so in the 90's on the right with the rise of talk radio fanning flames of hatred toward our own elected government, leading Timothy McVeigh to bomb the Murrah office building in Oklahoma City. This kind of language is not right, and it is not excusable.

The third thing I take from this comes from the God sightings in Boston. It reminds me that part of God's plan is that I am to be the hands, feet, voice, arms, and heart of the God who is love. And that means I need to quit being so self-centered. Not everything in this world is about how I am feeling, whether I am getting my way or whether I have been properly fluffed. What we saw in Boston after the bombings are God sightings because all those people forgot about themselves, forgot about what was convenient for them, forgot even about their own safety to care for those who were not able to care for themselves.

There are places in the world where what happened in Boston are daily occurrences. We might want to find a way to show a bit more care for them. This is a fallen world. And every follower of Jesus, such as myself and yourself, is called to take up our cross and lose our life for Jesus's sake and for the sake of the Gospel. We are called to be peacemakers and love spreaders and Gospel proclaimers. That, too, is part of God's plan.

Yes, God does have a plan. We've just heard part of it, the part where God calls us to live and act as redeemed children of God in a fallen world. Here's the rest: the resurrection of Jesus is but the first fruits of the resurrection and the new creation to come. Even, especially, in times of uncertainty we live in that sure and certain hope.