

Monthly Devotional

Elm Street Church of the Brethren

Perspective on Tragedy

Last Thursday, on September 11, when our Wisdom Seekers group shared an evening meal together, we took time to recall where each of us was when we heard about the tragedy in 2001. Then we turned to our personal 9-11 experiences: accidents, fires, and illnesses. Especially poignant was the experience of a woman from our neighborhood who sat with us that evening.

Just 24 hours earlier, her common-law husband of some 20 years had handed her a \$20-bill and said, "I'm out of here," leaving her with utility cut-off notices, an eviction notice, and no place to go. Two days later we enabled her to board a Greyhound to her daughter's home in Florida.

I had planned to reflect on the meaning of such difficult experiences when the following words arrived from our son Mark (in Cleveland), which I am substituting with his permission.

Dear Small Groupers:

Our dog Brandy died yesterday. Of course it was just a dog and it wasn't necessarily the best dog in the world, but it was the first (and maybe last) dog of the Richard household. When we are faced with a loss, we wonder why. We wonder why God would take an innocent dog, only around five years old, with lymphoma. "What did the dog ever do?" one of us asked. The answer, of course, is that we live in a sin-stained world, where the curse affects us, where people and animals die.

I think often about the story of Jesus raising Lazarus in John 11. He comes, he sees the dead, and he weeps. Why? After all, He was going to raise Lazarus from the dead. Why was he weeping? I believe he was grieving at the results of the curse, where death sneaks in and steals life. It wasn't meant to be. Death has intruded into God's creation. Lydia said, "I wish we were in heaven, where nothing dies." I wish, too.

I think, too, of the hymn by Joseph Hart, "Come Ye Sinners, Poor and Needy." A verse in it says,

Come, ye weary, heavy laden,
Lost and ruined by the fall;
If you tarry till you're better,
You will never come at all.

I will arise and go to Jesus,
He will embrace me in His arms;
In the arms of my dear Savior,
O there are ten thousand charms.

Occasions of sadness allow us to make a choice. Will we run to Jesus in our shattered dreams? It's not an unkind God that asks us, "Do you love me more than these," as he asked Peter (John 21).

On top of it all, in an unfortunate accident, the back windshield of our SUV shattered yesterday. A friend quickly offered to loan us a vehicle until we can get ours fixed. It is not an unkind God that watches over us - even when the stain and bruises of a sin-filled world hit close to home.

Now may the grace and peace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all until we meet again - in a world ruined by the fall. -Mark

Wes & Sue Richard, co-pastors

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Upcoming Events

Sat. Sept. 27, 8:30 am Men's Breakfast

Sun. Oct. 5, 7:00 pm Love Feast (Sugar Creek)

Sun. Oct. 12, 2:00 pm CROP WALK (Trinity U.M.)