

Healing the Hokie Nation

For years I've joked with Virginia Tech students, alums, and parents that Tech was a cult. When you join the cult you cover yourself in 'Tech' apparel, decorate your home and property, accessorize your car, and even dress up your dog in Hokie stuff. I'll drop this joke in respect to the real Hokie Nation.

The shared identity among Hokies is a wonderful sense of community. It's a strength. It'll comfort as much as human comfort consoles. But, being 'Tech' won't heal the Hokie Nation.

The massacre at Virginia Tech is too terrible. It will never stop being beyond awful. I makes me pause periodically as I merely write about it. It's painful. Wrong. Tragic. Evil. It's real.

Virginia, America and much of the World mourn with the families and friends of victims – and the extended family of the Hokie Nation. Now is the time to grieve. Then, heal.

Set aside the political issues of gun control vs. crime control for awhile. There will be plenty of time later to argue.

Grieving is the natural expression of lovingkindness. Lovingkindness is my favorite word in the Holy Bible. Lovingkindness is the nature of God. Lovingkindness always triumphs in the human hearts touched by tragedy. Although, I must say I can't see ever healing if I had lost one of my children in their college classroom.

So, the anguished questions and accusations to a just and loving God come readily. Why isn't this horror prevented? Why isn't this horror stopped? Why aren't the innocent spared from such injustice, suffering and loss of life?

Because evil exists. Evil will exist until the end times of Earth. Evil can't be avoided in life – not completely. Evil exists in God's permissive will. Evil is fixed in His explicit will and acts. Evil deeds can spring from mental illness – stark madness. The acts remain evil, regardless of the cause.

Evil lives around us. It hurts every bit as much – it just has a lower daily body count.

Look at what evil has happened in twenty years where I live – in a wonderful, little town in Virginia.

- 1 Once, two blocks away, a man and woman were divorcing. The man killed the woman and her new boyfriend.
- 2 Once, two houses away, the sweet 'band' kid wanted to be with the cool kids in his first year of college. He died of a drug overdose. No one was ever punished. He came from a devoutly Christian, loving home.
- 3 Once, an alcoholic father of one of my children's friends died young. Only a handful of people honored his family by sharing his mourning.

- 4 Once, a troubled boy became a troubled young man. He was imprisoned for what he did in his involvement with a much older woman. His mother intervened illegally and was put in jail. He killed himself in jail.
- 5 Many times, young to middle-aged men went to war zones where evil thrives.
- 6 Many times, families were broken – with every heart wounded – by divorce, drugs, alcohol, mental illness and early, diseased death.
- 7 There were three children who died from accidents and one who stopped developing as a little girl and then digressed unto death. None of this pain is the result of evil, but the suffering and loss are similar.

There are other tragedies from my little town with people I don't know by name or sight. Is the sum of this pain equal to the 33 deaths at Tech? I include the killer's family in the suffering count. Is this different from the Hokie Nation?

Virginia and America suffers from evil as Tech suffers from evil. We are the Hokie Nation. Our healing is the same.

There's been healing, imperfectly, in my corner of the Commonwealth. The best medicine for my neighbors is the best healing for the Hokie Nation. The healing comes with the one called The Comforter, the 'paraclete', in the Holy Ghost. Part of God, Who is Spirit, is physically present in human beings who profess faith and have a relationship with the risen Jesus – the God-in-man who is alive in Heaven.

The Comforter physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually holds humans in lovingkindness. A person in this relationship, a Christian, gains a peace beyond understanding and a joy that knows no bounds.

Because Jesus lives, risen from the grave, we can face tomorrow. His Comforter helps today. He promises a tomorrow that never ends in a place with no tears, where the saved victims of injustice on Earth are washed in lovingkindness beyond the best on Earth, even the love of parents, spouse, children, kin and closest friends.

Grieve. Mourn. Hate evil. Love God. Love others. Love yourself. Heal the Hokie Nation, our American Nation, with the balm that God will provide. God is good. All the time. No matter what.

James Atticus Bowden