

“Weeping may spend the night, but joy comes in the morning. While I felt secure, I said, “I shall never be disturbed. You, LORD, with your favor, made me as strong as the mountains.” Then you hid your face, and I was filled with fear. “

Weeping may spend the night, but joy comes in the morning. There’s something intriguing, compelling about that line. Filled with hope. The promise of a better tomorrow. But is it true?

Right now, the entire nation mourns the tragic and senseless deaths of 33 students and faculty at Virginia Tech.. It’s kind of amazing really. I’m seeing a depth of reaction from people that have no direct connection with the school that I haven’t seen since 9-11. It’s as though we all had a loved one at that school. More than 33 people die every day from drug or alcohol abuse, yet unless we have a direct connection, we don’t go into the kind of funk I’m seeing.

So what is it about this tragedy that makes it hard for joy to come in the morning?

It’s interesting to me that this event took place so close to Easter. Easter, the time where we celebrate new life, the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the promise of our own resurrection at the last day. Easter is a time of joy, specifically a time that after the night of weeping came the morning of joy. We even have a hymn, “Welcome happy morning, age to age shall sing.”

Yet, last Monday felt more like Good Friday than Easter morning. The death of innocent lives. Outrageous inhumanity. Heroism, sacrifice, betrayal all point more to Christ’s Passion than to his resurrection.

Sometimes, many times, often, I don't know, it feels as though we're living in a Good Friday sort of world. Jesus is dead and the powers and principalities of darkness reign. Kids killing kids. Adults conscripting boys to be soldiers and girls to be sex slaves. More and more flag draped coffins being flown out of Iraq. Racial tension. Religious intolerance. Welcome happy morning? I don't think so.

The Gospels all tell us that after the crucifixion, the disciples all hid out fearful that they would be next. They experienced the absence of their friend and Lord. He wasn't there. The Church has a wonderful liturgical event that reminds us of that.

At the end of the Good Friday service when we receive communion from the reserved sacrament, every scrap of consecrated bread and every drop of consecrated wine is consumed. The door to the aumbry, that box where we keep the consecrated elements is left open. The candle that signifies the presence of Jesus in the reserved sacrament is extinguished. There is no presence of Christ in the building. He is dead, in the tomb.

That's what it feels like, sometimes. Abandoned, like Jesus on the cross calling to his Father, "why have you forsaken me?" Why O Lord have you forsaken us? Why did you forsake Christopher Bishop, Livio Librescu, Nicole White and

thirty of their fellow students and faculty?

"While I felt secure, I said, "I shall never be disturbed. You, LORD, with your favor, made me as strong as the mountains." Then you hid your face, and I was filled with fear." Why did you hide your face, God? Where were you, God?

I just finished reading a book, the name of which I won't share because I'd hate for even one of you to waste your time even looking for it. In this book, the world is under one government that is vehemently atheistic and has outlawed all religion. A group of underground Christians pray that an old testament plague, namely the killing of all the firstborn males, be visited on the non-believers. And God does.

At least the god of this author. This author would say that tragedies like last Monday and 9-11 and all the other senseless acts of evil are somehow part of God's plan. One of this author's fellow travelers blamed 9-11 on this nations acceptance of homosexuality. God the executioner.

If that's who God really is, than I've been wrong and you've been wrong, and frankly I'll take my chances without him. God does not kill his children, Old Testament stories notwithstanding. If God does, than Jesus was a liar and a fraud.

Where was God? God was in that dorm room holding those two victims, weeping horrified that his plan for these two was cut down . He wept beside each person shot. He settled his spirit on those who hid. He inspired (which means gave spirit to) those whom we learn put their safety second to the safety of others.

God was beside every mother, father, sibling and friend of each person on that campus as they waited for the phone call they hoped would come with the simple message, "Mom, I'm OK" but afraid that they would hear, "Mrs. Sherman, I have some bad news about your daughter Leslie."

And God was with Cho Seng-Hui as he battled with his demons, pleading, embracing, fighting the powers of evil to save this one son in order to save so many others. And, I am sure that God is trying to comfort the minds and hearts of this young man's parents.

This wasn't part of God's plan. This was a gross perversion of His plan. God took a huge risk when he gave humankind free-will. That gift allows us to love him without coercion, rather because it is what we choose to do. However, it is that same free will that allows us to say no to God and even to give in to the temptations and coercion of the devil.

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I don't believe that old adage that time heals all wounds. It doesn't. Time gives us the opportunity to seek help and healing. It gives us the chance to find new joy, new happiness, but there are some wounds that never go away, and I don't think they should.

This Sunday afternoon, there is a holocaust memorial service at Temple Judea. It is only because of the open wounds that so many bear that we remember. The wound left by the loss of a child or grandchild never heals. We go on. The wound gets less infected. Perhaps it may simply leave a scar, but it isn't the passing of the hands on a clock, it is the grace, love and help of God coupled with what is often very hard work of raising ourselves up out of the despair our wounds left.

I don't think this nation will ever forget 9-11. Sadly, this tragedy will slip from the public's eye and be another faded memory of our corporate history. It will never be forgotten by the families of those lost, nor, I would think, the corporate memory of that institution. Example, I don't think about students killed in war protests until someone mentions Kent State, and the

memory of the National Guard shooting becomes fresh. Sadly, that's the only thing I remember about Kent State. I pray that doesn't happen with VTU, but I think it probably will.

So as we live through the night of weeping, can we really expect a morning of joy? For most of yes. It'll come. For some, it may never fully dawn. But we who remember the resurrection remember that hope certainly comes. Hope for a better day. Hope for break in the tears. Hope for the eternal life for those who died. Hope for God's peace to calm our hearts and fears.

Maybe for us to experience the joy of the morning, we need to wake up. Wake up to the presence of God in our lives. Wake up to the dawn of a new day and a new life. Wake up to the possibility of healing. Wake up to the promise of peace, God's peace.

The night of weeping will be long and draining. But God promises, and we put our hope in that promise, that Joy will come in the morning.