

At 2:03 Friday morning, the devil laughed. He had chosen well and the Body of Christ suffered another lash mark and more innocent blood was spilled. Oh, it wasn't the devil himself that swung the lash. No, as the coward the devil really is, he coursed his venom through the veins of a weak and corrupt man. Another weed choking the life from one of the divine Sower's ripe grain. And the devil laughed.

Andrew Widman was a gardner of sorts. It was his job to pluck the weeds that had grown up in the midst of our field so that the healthy grain could reach its full potential. This time, the weeds over-powered the grain and a good man died.

I am of course speaking of the death of FMPD officer Andrew Widman at the hands of Abel Arrango who was killed in a shoot out with other officers a few minutes later. Have no doubt, evil walked the streets, as it does so often. Evil found a willing soul to end the life of a good and holy man.

We don't like to talk about evil. Or, we talk about it so much that it gets confused with benign forces of nature. Evil is real. Whether evil exists in the form of a living being, or as a spiritual force is irrelevant. Souls become corrupted and bad things happen to good people.

I spoke with officers who worked with Andrew as they stood near the body of their fallen friend, and that is what I heard. Why Andrew? Why any one? Why did this happen? Such anger, sadness and that indescribable need to know why.

That wasn't a time for long theological statements. That was a time to hold each other and cry, and even to shake a fist at heaven, or the world, or evil forces and wonder. And so I said that I didn't know and shared in their tears and anger and fist shaking.

But neither was it time for bumper sticker theology that does little to comfort and serves to confuse as time and clarity emerge. I don't know why a young cop died. Well I do on one level, a bad guy had a gun when he shouldn't have, and so he transferred his rage from his girlfriend to Andrew. He died because a bad guy shot him.

But at a more cosmic level, I can't answer why him, then and there.

I know why he didn't die. He didn't die because God needed a new angel. He didn't die because it was just his time. He didn't die because God needed him more than his wife and 3 children. He didn't die because some cosmic clock reached a pre-set time. He didn't die because of God in any way.

God does not kill his children. Sometimes it seems that God intervenes and a miraculous thing happens. I can't explain why. But God is not a puppet master controlling the lives of his children. If he was, that make him one mean being. Neither does God look away from certain people and focus his love on only his certain chosen ones. That would make him one arbitrary fascist.

God is neither of those things. Maybe sometimes people are in the wrong place at the wrong time and evil happens.

Most of you have at least heard about the book "Why Bad Things Happen to Good People" by Rabbi Kushner. He makes the claim that God is not all powerful as we tend to define it. Not Kushner's idea, but mine, maybe when God gave free will to his children evil found a foothold it needed to skew life for some at some time. It's not a completely satisfying answer, but it helps me deal with the idea that God is mean and arbitrary.

I haven't experienced God as mean or arbitrary, well at least not completely. My experience of God in his Son Jesus Christ is that of a loving, reconciling parent who wipes the tears from my eyes and helps me rebuild my life when I screw it up beyond recognition.

I need to believe that. My whole worldview is based on a loving God who we can't really understand or know.

That's also why I believe so strongly in a palpable evil. Not just a choice by people with an ill defined moral compass, but real malevolence and malignancy. As I knelt by Andrew's body and said those all too familiar words, "Into your hands, O merciful savior, we commend your servant Andrew..." I knew I was feet away from the very core of earthly evil.

I also knew I was in the nearer presence of ultimate good. God was there. Jesus Christ was holding this fallen hero in his arms, even as I traced the sign of the cross on his shrouded head. The Holy Spirit was there comforting all those who mourned or seethed or shut down.

I know God was there because I saw His grace at work. These officers didn't know me. I'm county, they're city. But as I knelt down, truly just so I could touch Andrew's body, I saw a dozen cops up and down the street kneel with me. Each in their own way, commending their friend to God's care. I stumbled over my words because the language of the angels was singing in the bent knees of these who serve. These who will go out into the field day in and day out to separate the grain from the weed.

Jesus was telling his disciples that good and bad grow up together. It's inevitable as long as Satan can find an empty hurting soul to persuade and use. We know that on the last day when all the world stands before God, the remaining weeds will be cast away and the healthy grain will

be gathered into the heart and imagination of God. But in the mean time, the field needs tending lest the weeds, who are not bound by the same rules of the grain, will suck all the nutrients out of the ground with the goal of turning healthy plants into diseased weeds.

The world is full of field hands who tend the grain and pull the weeds they can, for, as Jesus tells us in other parts of this same set of stories, the Harvest is Plentiful. The time of harvest is here. The day of the king of weeds has bumped against the day of the King of Life.

I give thanks for those who go into the fields to make it safe for grain to grow. We see some fairly easily. They wear a badge. They carry a stretcher. They pull the hoses. They wear a uniform and carry arms in far away places. They drape a stethoscope around their neck or stare into a microscope. They hug un huggable kids. They make a difference. You make a difference.

You really do. Jesus may have described us, in his story, as the good seed, and by his mercy and grace, we are. And, we are the fieldworkers. It is our job, our duty, our ministry, to recognize the good grain and the weed. It is our ministry and joy to fertilize the grain with the strength of the Father's love, Christ's compassion and the Spirit's joy.

You know, sometimes a plant can look like a weed, yet be the start of a truly healthy grain. It takes God's grace to avoid culling the good, or the ones who, with just a little help can become Oaks of Righteousness as Isaiah calls them.

This coming week, at DaySpring camp and conference center, 40 some children, all of whom have a parent in jail or prison, will experience the love of Christ as they play and learn and grow. Some of these kids have already been given up by society. They're weeds and nothing more. They are souls waiting to be filled with the puss of evil. But they are so much more.

They are the children of a loving God and the teens and adults who will minister to them are a special kind of gardner, for beyond sorting weed and grain, they make sure that those forgotten, overlooked plants get the kind of nurture they need to resist the corruption of the evil one and become the flowers and trees that bring beauty and holiness to the world.

You know, the devil laughed Friday morning. It only cost him one lost soul to wreak havoc among good people. He didn't care about that soul. It was only a tool, a cheap paintbrush to be tossed away after the wall is completed.

But, God is bigger than Satan. God's Love is greater than Satan's hatred. God's grain is taller and healthier than the Devil's weeds. And at the last day when the weeds and the grain are separated out, the good grain will fill the world and Satan's harvest will be will be just a few burnt out souls who lost their way in the dark corners of the field.

There are a lot of tears in the world today and we can hear the far off chortling of evil. But we who claim the life giving love of God can feel deep within our souls the beginning chords of a joyous laughter for no matter how hard evil tries, good and God will always prevail.