God is

Sick.

The 2020 Writings

Jeff Hood

January 13, 2021

...

There is nothing humane about the human. The humane always seems to be elsewhere...hidden from those that are charged to be its' carriers. The ones made in the humane image.

This was the year of sickness. This was the year of death. This was the year that I learned to stop counting the years...and learned to keep the faith.

These are the words that mattered.

J.

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quotes.

Nothing moves my heart like Jesus.

Despite my many disagreements with him, Mitt Romney is a man of God. I have tremendous respect for his decision to convict today.

My latest art: The Black Christ. - A Repurposed Painting of a White Jesus

Really proud of this one. Every movement felt like a prayer. + It's 5 feet tall (my biggest yet)

Pass me not, O gentle Savior

Hear my humble cry

While on others Thou art calling

Do not pass me by

Emily (39) / The Baddest Momma Around

Do you feel guilty for skipping church? No, I actually feel quite rested.

Is COVID-19 God’s fault?

Were you there when they crucified my

Queen? #GoodFriday

Some big shit is about to go down. #HolySaturday

God got up. #Easter #Resurrection

Payday lenders have to be amongst the vilest of humans

to ever exist.

+In addition to being a beloved professor and patient

mother of five hyper-hyperactive young children, Emily

just published a textbook that will be used by hundreds of thousands of students each year. Badass.

I’m currently hospitalized with COVID-19.

Back from the Dead. #Covid19 #ProofofLife

#CooperCreek

Latest Sculpture: “The Martyr.”

NASA - National Aeronautics and Space Administration

/ SpaceX have reminded me once more of the beauty of exploring all of God's creation.

"No Justice, No Peace."

There are few greater evils than blaming the marginalized and oppressed for their marginalization and oppression.

Word for the week: If people ain't talkin' shit...you ain't doin' shit.

Blessed.

New #Backyard .

Help me with this. We hire random people (with all of their prejudices) that want to be cops. We give them guns. We train them to use them. We allow them to use deadly force at their discretion. Then, we are surprised when they kill someone. Have we ever considered that our reliance on guns (and police for that matter) might also be a problem?

A Confession: I talk a tremendous amount of shit on United Methodists...but when something happens...they are always the first persons to call/message. Thank you.

Saint. #RBG

Prayers for #Ren #TheCannon / Xi is the most dangerous dictator in the world {.}

Mitch Mitchell was the best print journalist in DFW {.} Despite his contemporary absence, I know that I will see my dear friend again. We talked about such a meeting in the air many times.

Police brutality.

Spent today with my 92yo Grandfather. #grateful

2 Hoods 2 Glasses Wearers

God is not mocked. We will reap what we sow. *The carnage of Black America should haunt us all.

Mike Pence had to drive right past us twice (over a dozen of us/huge crowd in NorthWestern NC). Proud to

have had a hand in organizing this. This won't be our last protest Ashe Indivisible. Keep the faith/courage.

If I believed in hell, I would say one of the hottest corners is reserved for Donald Trump. #democracy

'Stealing hundreds of thousands of votes would require a conspiracy on the scale of a James Bond movie. That isn't going to happen.' -Karl Rove

2 Chronicles 7:14 - if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear

from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

Let it begin today.

#BidenHarris2020

FYI: This is why people think that Christians are a joke.

“This sucks.”

“Could you please stop?”

“Why are we doing this?”

The Annual Thanksgiving Table Homily...

Love.

Good Morning from Zionville, North Carolina.

Why do we kill people who kill people and think that we are teaching people not to kill? #evil

Few people have more embodied what it means to be most fully human. Kiss an angel good morning brother Charley. I miss you already. The GOAT.
#CharleyPride

Far and away, the best popular article I have ever read about THE LUNACY & EVIL of CANCEL CULTURE. In her

decades of activism, Professor Ross has been on the front lines of nearly every major social movement. Yet, there will be those who try to cancel her simply because she is asking them to put down their guns.

Merry Christmas! & It's Cold as Shit Up Here.

Phillip & I hiking the Appalachian Trail.

On the Death of Jack Dillard. / My Grandfather.

Fuck this bullshit. God is not mocked. Those who continue following Trump will suffer the same consequences as he. #treason

January 6, 2020

God Don't Wear a Damn Police Uniform...Chief Kraus

"The shooting at a White Settlement church last Sunday that left two men dead has rocked communities of faith, leaving many to wonder how congregants can feel safe again in their places of worship.

Fort Worth Police Chief Ed Kraus is asking officers who attend faith services to do what they can to add a sense of security by wearing their uniforms.

Kraus took to Twitter late Friday to implore his officers belonging to a religion to wear their uniforms to service, ideally after they first ask their faith leaders if it's OK. The simple act, suggested by Assistant Chief Charles Ramirez, will make congregants feel safer and serve as a deterrent to those who intend harm, Kraus said in a series of tweets."

Fort Worth chief urges officers to wear uniforms to faith services after church shooting

January 4, 2020 / Fort Worth Star-Telegram

https://www.star-telegram.com/news/local/fort-worth/article238966753.html

Each second brought deeper fear. The night highlighted the blue lights. In the rearview, the cop approached. Without saying why, he asked them to step out of the car. The situation grew more and more physical...until

they were in the back of the cruiser. For what seemed like an eternity, the cop went through every single inch of their vehicle. It seemed that he did site tests on everything he could find. Repeatedly, he came back to the car to taunt them. Ultimately, the cop didn't find anything. This seemed to only make him angrier. They weren't sure they were going to make it out alive...until they did. The cop's hot breath was sill wafting in their nostrils as they slowly drove away. Too scared to speak...they drove straight home. Too scared to cry...they went straight to bed. Too scared to be alone...they went to church the next morning.

Sitting in the back row, they listened for a word from God. Leaning forward, they thought they might be hearing something. Then, the terror returned. Standing right next to the altar was the same officer...in uniform...who had roughed them up the night before. They didn't hear anything else. When the intimacy of communion was offered, they ran out the back door.

Chief Kraus is ignorant of the fact that his officers don't always make people feel safe.

God don't wear no damn police uniform...Chief Kraus...

...and nor should anyone in our churches.

Amen.

January 13, 2020

Confessions at the Cross

Though the Evangelical Movement has often been

unable to ascertain the difference between their

collective ass and a hole in the ground, they have courageously refused to cede the crucifixion to the demythologizing fantasies of their secular enemies and for that we should all be grateful. For it is at the cross, that we come face to face with what it means to be human...and even more...what it means to be divine. Golgotha is not an attractive destination...but surely it is the destination of all who choose to believe in the transcendence of divinity or the transcendence of love.

I hate the church. By church, I mean that huge evangelical church across the street. When I see those dumbass slogans in flashing lights, I just want to blow my breakfast all over myself. I hate that shit. Try as I

might, I can't ignore them. Not too long ago, I noticed the cross on top of the church. The crucifixion drew me in. In that moment, I heard the voice of my creator, "Would you die for them?" Immediately, my mind went to the glorious martyrdom of Bonhoeffer. Then, I started thinking about the less glorious scenario of dying for a bunch of cheese dicks at the local evangelical church. With that, I turned up the damn radio as loud as I could. For that, I repent. God didn't get to choose who he was going to die for. God just died. The Evangelical Movement has constantly reminded me that the crucifixion is an invitation to follow God...an

invitation to die...no matter what. Forgive us for living beyond that...them...

Amen.

January 26, 2020

The Power of Social Ethics / On Robin Lovin

These thoughts were adapted from the work of social ethicist Dr. Robin Lovin. In fact, this is an attempt to

create a brief description of his thought. Lovin was important in the development of my early theological understandings of the self and the other. I guess you could say that his work was a launching point for my journey into more explosive things.

"When we encounter a gracious God in the midst of actual ethical life, that life becomes our own, probably for the very first time. We need no longer live according to someone else's pattern, but we can find the goals and virtues that allow us to live a good life in our own situation…We are free to live by the rules and

commitments that make a good life possible, instead of trying to justify ourselves according to someone else…So ethics, instead of being a way to defend ourselves, becomes a way to love our neighbors and a way to love God as well."

-*Christian Ethics*, 125

Social ethics is about loving the neighbor as we love our self. Is this not the definition of what it means to be most human? Social ethics is both an individualistic and collective task. We must never

trample the other. We cannot be well until the other is well. We is the path to me...the path to holiness or wholeness. The commandment of love guides us in the task.

A society cannot function without social ethics...and we are going to constantly be called upon to decide what is ethical. Sometimes the path to righteousness is obscured by he path to self-righteousness. The greatest temptation is always to totalize our experience at the expense of the other. We are not ethical if we think we are the embodiment of ethics. Therefore, the study of social ethics is important to help us learn the beauty of denying the self...and

opening the heart to the neighbor. Indeed...you one can't be ethical alone. People are our only ethical guides.

We are called to be salt and light. The age makes no difference. The place makes no difference. The cost makes no difference. We are called to be salt and light.

Social ethics is the center of the spiritual life...because without it...we have no center from which to begin. God is the power of social ethics that pulls us ever closer to God .

Amen.

bio:

https://www.abingdonpress.com/authors/robin_w_lovin/

January 28, 2020

The Definition of Justice: Love or Revenge // Howard Thurman v. Michael Bell

Howard Thurman, in his *Jesus and the Disinherited*, and Michael Bell, in his *God Hates Fags*,

have different ways of talking about the construction of oppression, enemies, and what one should do after the construction of such enemies. Such constructions determine if the work will actually lead to a sustainable peace or if the work will lead to the continuation physical and emotional violence. How one defines and treats their enemies speaks to whether or not they see their enemies as human or not. If the enemy is not seen as human, then there seems to be little hope for lasting solutions where people learn to love each other and live together. Understanding the author's construction of oppression, formulation of enemy, and response to enemy are important to understanding the ethical

points that the author is making, either implicitly or explicitly.

In *Jesus and the Disinherited*, Howard Thurman argues that the religion of Jesus must respond to "the poor, the dispossessed, and the disinherited" (36). Previously in the text, Thurman beckoned, "*What does our religion to those* with their backs against the wall?" (13). Judging from his time, social location, and some textual clues, one must assume that he was speaking to black people during the Civil Rights Movement, but the text is broad enough to apply to all people with their backs against the wall. In my opinion, this is where the beauty of Thurman lies, in the broadness of his message

and the ability to apply it to both the oppressed and the oppressor. In the message of a Jewish Palestinian peasant, Thurman found salvation and argues that those with their backs against the wall can find their salvation in his message as well. Thurman calls the religion of Jesus, where one is taught to 'love their enemy,' "*a survival technique* for the oppressed" (29). Thurman's survival technique is both practical and spiritual in its application for people of all oppressed backgrounds. "Wherever *the* Spirit appears, the oppressed gather fresh courage…" to 'love their enemies' and their self (29). The Spirit speaks to liberate all. For Thurman, "loving your enemy" is a step toward liberation.

In *God Hates Fags*, Michael Cobb uses the hate speech of Westboro Baptist Church (i.e. God Hates Fags) to speak to larger problems and trends in public policy in the United States. "It is important to recognize the public, doctrinal, and political gains opposition to 'homosexuality' has provided for Christian organizations, not to mention the Republican Party" (3). The hate speech also speaks to a larger fight over what it means to be 'American.' "Strong religious words about such an uncomfortable topic such as queer sexuality not only unite sexually conservative people across economic classes, ethnicities, and races, but are part of a tradition of collective rhetorical expressions of what it means to

be an ‘American’” (6). Cobb argues that hate speech is helpful for constructing enemies. “Religious language… serves the United States as it continues to evolve into a coercive, extralegal empire that needs enemies inside and outside its borders” (30). For Cobb, identifying the enemy is the core ethical starting point. Next, working to gain power over your enemies is the next step and ultimate goal. Learning how to “love your enemies” is not part of his calculus.

Besides the difference in genre, I would contend that the reason that these two books sound very different in tone and outcome is because they take two different paths to construct the oppressed, the

formulation of enemies, and responses to oppression. Howard Thurman constructs the oppressed as the people with “their backs against the wall” (13). This definition allows for great inclusivity as to who the oppressed are. Michael Cobb identifies the oppressed as queer folk, which he never really defines. This definition is assumed to speak to a particular group, but we don’t know who that group includes. Speaking to a particular group is not the problem. Speaking for one group to the dehumanization of the other group is the problem, because you are doing the same thing you are accusing others of. When constructing enemies, the authors speak differently as well. Howard Thurman

grants wide latitude to who the oppressor is and therefore who the enemy is. The ambiguity of Thurman's work leaves space to imagine the oppressed and the oppressor inhabiting the same person. Michael Cobb states that the enemy is Westboro Baptist Church, the Republican Party, Christian organizations, the United States government, and a few other entities. Cobb is very interested in cohesive enemies that all seem to flow from the language of Westboro Baptist Church. Howard Thurman encourages a "love your enemy" response to instances of oppression. Michael Cobb encourages a winning at all costs perspective, including lying if necessary (148). The texts seem to

point in starkly different directions and toward starkly different responses with regard to the construction of oppression, formulation of enemies, and response to enemies. Judging the texts based on ethics one must ask, which conclusion seems to point to a more lasting justice and peace that values both the redeemed oppressed and oppressor as human? For me, the answer is obvious.

Howard Thurman: Jesus and The Disinherited

Michael Bell: God Hates Fags

January 31, 2020

A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF RACIAL INCLUSION

Someone recently asked me to construct a theology of racial inclusion based on the Bible. This is what I came up with...

Introduction

“The Bible says plain as day that white people are chosen by God… It's absolutely of the devil to say otherwise… Haven’t you been listening to the preacher? Blacks are just not on the same level when it comes to God.” These comments occasionally filled my brain when I was child. Thankfully, God saved me. I embraced a spirit of resistance from a very young age.

"How can Christians be so racist?" This is one of the most pivotal questions facing the modern church. The Bible is not silent on this subject...on the contrary. The Bible speaks loud and clear.

The Image of God

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God...God created them... Genesis 1:27

Humanity is made in God's image. Each person is the great climax of God's creation. There is no differentiation. We are all made in the Image of God. The importance of this statement cannot be overstated. The one thing that makes humanity distinct from all other creatures is the nature of its' relationship with God. Humanity has a limitless capacity for fellowship and communion with God. While this is certainly the case with regard to race, it is also true of any other identity characteristic for that matter. This capacity is given to all humanity. There is absolutely no partiality

or differentiation with God. Humanity...all of humanity...is the image of God.

The Argument For Destruction of the Image (and Its Unifying Quality) Based On Sin

Sin came into the world through one man and death through sin. Rom 5:12

No one does good, not even one. Rom 3:12

Many have attempted to make the argument that the image of God was totally destroyed in Eden and has presented itself, through restoration, more fully in some people than others. Those who make such arguments provide cover for racism and other types of violence. God cannot be destroyed...and God was made to be in us. To reject another is to reject God. How could anyone claim to love God and be a racist? It's not possible. The Image of God is alive and well in all of us.

The only thing that is being destroyed is the irrational hate that we have toward each other. The Bible makes it very plain.

As early as Genesis 9:6, after sin had entered the world and was at its height before the flood, Noah is told that murder is wrong because all men are made in God's image. This shows that even the vilest of humans have tremendous value before God. Paul asserts that all humans have the responsibility component of the image of God in two direct verses in Romans. Romans 1:20 that all men stand equally before God without excuse. Paul goes on to state in Romans 2:14-15 states: "Even the Gentiles, who have not the law, have the law written on

their hearts." These verses combined with the weight of verses of the collective verses on this subject make it very hard to argue that the image of God was completely destroyed in anyone, much less in a particular race. There is undoubtedly reason for unity around the collective image of God even before Christ comes into the mix.

Christ is the exact likeness of the unseen God.

Colossians 1:15

God's purpose in the union with Christ makes us children of God so that we might be conformed to the image of His Son. Romans 8:29

One puts on the new self, through Christ, which is in the process of being made new in the likeness of our creator. Colossians 3:10

Even if one tries to argue that the image of God and its unifying qualities were destroyed at the fall, Christ is the trump card. There is no way to get around

scripture after scripture that humans are all united in the person of Christ/God. When God saves us, we are fully bound to God and we take on God's qualities. This binding allows God to see us through the prism of Jesus/love. The Bible gives no evidence that race is seen through the prism of Jesus. It is ludicrous to say otherwise. Christ is the exact likeness of the unseen God and therefore the perfection of His image. If we are bound to the likeness of Christ/God then there is no argument of differentiation based on race available. To deny the fullness of God in anyone who is bound to God is not only wrong...it is heretical.

All People Are ‘Of One’

And he made of one every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, having appointed their appointed seasons, and the bounds of their habitations. Acts 17:26

There are two main interpretations of what ‘of one’ means in this passage. The first is that ‘of one’ speaks of the fact that all peoples and nations are from one God. The second interprets ‘of one’ to mean that all are originated from one Adam. Regardless of which interpretation one takes, there is still a uniting force in this verse for all of humanity. This verse speaks of the fact that all people are united based on the fact that they are all ‘of one.’ Truly people who are of one creation and one human family should seek to worship together. Every time we worship in a racially diverse setting we are proclaiming the glory of the oneness of God’s image

connecting all of humanity together...and each time we don't...we don't.

God Is No Respector of Persons

And Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no repecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is acceptable to Him. Acts 10:34

This statement is truly one of the more significant revelations in all of scripture concerning God's relationship to man. God does not look on or judge humanity by the color of their skin or their general external conditions...God looks at the heart. God's relationship to humanity is absolutely fair and without prejudice. Since God expects God's children to be like God, we should never be respecters of persons. We should ever be impartial...even loving. There is no question that the early church got it. The Gospel was

taken to all nations...to the ends of the earth. We must be inclusive so that we can have the ability to proclaim an inclusive Christ/God. If we are racially exclusive we are blasphemers of the God of love.

The Gospel

All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

Romans 3:23

If anyone thirst let him come to me and drink. John 7:37

Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

Acts 2:21

…the power of God for salvation to everyone who has

faith. Romans 1:16

...stop trying to maintain your faith in our Lord Jesus

Christ…along with acts of partiality to certain ones…

James 2:1

The gospel of Jesus Christ, based on the New Testament, is clearly available to all people. There is inclusive language used over and over again. God's love is universally effective. Jesus tells anyone that will listen that God has come so that the thirsty might have drink. The word ‘anyone’ is of the utmost inclusivity. We are commanded by God to offer and proclaim the gospel in like manner, to ‘anyone’ and ‘all nations.’ Luke tells us in Acts that whoever calls on the name of God will be saved. Faith is the common bond that Paul says should make up our churches...not race. Faith

should be held in common with no partiality towards any individual. We must be welcoming and inclusive so as to unite the world. James tells us that it is incredibly sinful to say that you have faith and are partial/racist to anyone. These scriptures cannot be read any other way...racism...no matter how big or small...is unbelievably evil.

The Neighbor

You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Matthew 22:39

Would anyone who loved their self be exclusive of their self? It doesn't make sense. To not be inclusive is to violate one of the basic rules of morality that faith/ethics is based around. We cannot love God and hate the divine image in others. To deny our neighbor is to deny Christ/God. We must love our neighbor and invite them to dwell with us if we are truly to love Christ/God and invite God to dwell with us. Love of

Christ/God is directly connected to our love of neighbor. You cannot separate the two. To believe anything less than this bold proclamation of love and inclusion is to let evil win the battle for your soul. We exhibit that we love our neighbors through racial diversity. In fact, I don't know that God is present in spaces that are not diverse. We want people to know that we love every type of neighbor without exception...this is who God is.

"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of

them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me." John 17:20-23

These words are some of the most powerful in all of scripture. We cannot be one and be exclusive. We

are the body of Christ/God and a house divided against its' self cannot stand. We cannot be effective in this world if we are not effective in our own hearts. We must be God/love incarnate. Racial diversity provides a clear representation of the oneness of God. Unity and inclusivity is the highest priority of the church.

God protect us from ourselves.

Amen.

FEBRUARY 2, 2020.

Eldredge, John. *Wild at Heart: Discovering the Secret of a Man's Soul.* Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001.

Introduction:

It's a man's world...at least that's what John Eldridge thinks. *Wild at Heart* is a dangerous book. In fact, I think it's fair to call it the spiritual handbook of

toxic masculinity...although there really is nothing all that spiritual about it. Eldridge invites his reader into a mythical world of male dominance...complete with blatant misinterpretations of scripture, knights, valor, battles, warriors, sleeping beauties, chivalry shining armor and all sorts of amalgamations of silly shit...he calls God's will. To top it all off...I came of age in a space where people actually believed all of this foolishness.

One of my buddies pulled me aside. From the look on his face, I didn't know what he was going to say. Then, his voice got real low. "I'm in love. I'm so in love...and I'm going to tell her too. I'm not just willing to fight for her... I'm willing to die for her." I was stunned.

I really didn't know how to respond. Finally, I inquired, "Where did you get all of that language from?'" With no hesitation, he replied, "*Wild at Heart* of course." I didn't know what the hell he was talking about. Within a few months, everybody was talking about it.

The back says it all...

> *Every man was once a boy, and every little boy has dreams, big dreams: of being the hero, of beating the bad guys, of doing daring feats and rescuing the damsel in distress. Every little girl has dreams,*

too: of being rescued by her prince and swept up in great adventure, knowing that she is the beauty.

But what happens to those dreams when we grow up? Walk into most churches, have a look around, and ask yourself: What is a Christian man? Without listening to what is said, look at what you find there. Most Christian men are bored…

In Wild at Heart, John Eldredge invites men to recover their masculine heart, defined in the image of a passionate God. And he invites women to discover their purpose as well, as they discover the

secrets of a man's soul, and learn how to delight in his strength and wildness.

I can't explain it. Toxic masculinity spread like a disease. People were all over this shit. I resisted. When one sees the epidemic growing...you have to provide an antidote...i.e. the truth.

By the way, the woman he said he would die for...called him a dumbass.

Interaction and Exposition of the Text:

John Eldredge begins to carve out theological territory in the initial paragraphs of the book, calling God one who longs for adventures, battles and beauty. Doesn't this sound like a romance novel? The church's demands that men be responsible, sensitive, disciplined, faithful, diligent and dutiful are the road of good intentions that leads to hell (xi). Since when is sensitivity hellish? Before the book even begins, in earnest, Eldredge has staked his book on his ideas about what constitutes God and declared one's thoughts on manliness has direct effect on their eternal salvation. Manliness = salvation? The next page, xiii, drops

Matthew 11:12 in for affect: “The kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force.” You have to kick ass before God will love you. Give me a break...

The first chapter is all about the wilderness. It is the only place where he, or any other man, is truly able to find his heart and this, of course, has biblical reasons: “Adam…was created *outside* of the Garden of Eden, in the wilderness….Man has always been in and of the outback…(3)” Always? The text also illustrates that the most phenomenal biblical revelations always happened in the wilderness. Look at Moses, Jacob, Elijah, John the Baptist, and Jesus (5). Crucifixion/Resurrection? Christ

was not able to get his heart back until he went to the wilderness and found himself. As men, our purpose is to go and do likewise (6). Christ need a heart transplant? Eldredge's hermeneutical principles are incredibly suspect. In the first six pages, it is clear that he develops a purpose and then finds scriptures that meet that purpose, often at the expense of the totality of the text and what Christians have historically claimed about God. There is a further assertion in these pages that man is created at a higher order or more in God's image than females. For Eldredge, the scriptures become a weapon to perpetuate sexual violence to uphold patriarchy.

Sissy? "These guys are what is destroying Western Christianity…Who wants to hang out with a bunch of sissy nice guys? This is why there are no real men in our churches…(9)." He defines real men through a description of their three great needs or desires: "A Battle to Fight," "An Adventure to Live," and "A Beauty to Rescue." Eldredge begins with Exodus 15:3, "…the Lord is a warrior; the Lord is His name," to exposit why men love *Braveheart* and feel the need to prove themselves in battle. If God is a fighter then we are not living up to His image if we are not engaged in battle, "like it or not there is something incredibly fierce in the heart of every man (10-11)." God as movie star?

Eldredge then speaks to the boringness of church: “Compare how you feel watching James Bond or an Indiana Jones thriller to how you feel at Bible study… (12),” in declaring that every man needs adventure. “There is something wild in the heart of every man… (13)” Every? Eldredge uses a high school romance to describe how men grow out of being in love in order to be committed. “We all need a beauty,” he affirms (14-16). All? Eldredge writes this thing as if it's the latest work of movie fiction. The problem is that he sells is as truth.

Talk about mansplaining. Eldredge enlightens us with his definition of what it means to be woman:

> *“The world kills a woman’s heart when it tells her to be tough, efficient, and independent…The core of a woman wants a man to fight for her, to experience adventure with him, and for him to be captivated by her…Every woman wants a dangerous man…(17-18).”*

These are the assumptions about women that fuel the rest of the book. In fact, you couldn't write this awful book without oppressing women.

Gender/sexuality is incredibly static for Eldredge. Which leads to even more violence to more groups of

oppressed and marginalized people. These definitions of gender/sexuality are hell.

Eldredge uses his expositions of his insecurities to inform our perception of God. He uses scripture very selectively and only when it informs his opinion. Eldredge creates an excuse for violence...continued violence. He also seems to have been asleep for the past fifty years to the advancement of women and many other marginalized peoples. Independence is not a mark of an amazing woman...not a bad one. In order for his system to function, Eldredge has to go further.

"The Wild One Whose Image We Bear" is a discussion of what God must be like and how that

informs what men must be like. There is a particular focus on the movie *Braveheart* and its application to informing theodicy. Eldredge states: “I am convinced that Jesus was far more like William Wallace than he was Mother Teresa (24/29).” Killer or Healer? He then proceeds to use his categories to create a Doctrine of God. God definitely has *a battle to fight.* God is warring throughout all of scripture, Old and New Testaments, and Samson did not become a beast until “the Spirit of the Lord came upon him (26-27).” God is fierce. This is why we should fight for God’s kingdom and for romance at all times (29). Every page spews with misogynistic bullshit. “If you have any doubt that God loves

adventure then spend the night alone in the woods…He is not safe, but he is good…Safety and security is the anti-God…(29-30)" God risked the death of his son so that he might have the adventure of *fighting for the beauty* that is his church (32). This is one fierce, wild, and passionate guy (35). God has officially become like every thrill junkie and outdoorsman on the planet. No one could ever fit the paradigms he is creating. Surely, being human is more important than being a man. God didn't become a warrior...God became a child.

The words of Albert Schweitzer begin the third chapter: "The tragedy of life is what dies inside a man while he lives…(40)." Schweitzer would not have

approved of the use of this quote. Guaranteed. He was far too human for that. Eldredge's questions that are so haunting to every man include: “Am I really a man?” and “Am I fierce, wild, and passionate?” For women the primary question is: “Am I going to be able to find a true man? (42-43)” Watching pornography and sports are the substitutes for true battles for women, true adventure and true passion. Glory is placidly lived through a screen instead of experienced by the individual. Modern man is a failure of what it means to be a man (44). Man is afraid to live bravely, adventurously, and passionately primarily because man failed at the fall and didn’t take leadership over Eve. All

that most do now is live posing to be a real man (48-55). Lastly, nowadays most men are hiding behind women's skirts and don't have the courage to be who they need to be. The third chapter speaks of and illustrates his point that men are really messed up due to the fall and must get back to truly imaging God by being brave, adventurous, and passionate (59). Eldredge talks about pornography as someone who is very knowledgeable...not someone who is opposed. If manhood is the goal, then God is not. Eldredge keeps peddling visions of misogyny and calling them God. There is perfection in our pain. Wounds make us human not deficient.

"The Wound." Eldredge states the answer that sums up the life of a man is the answer to the question: "Dad am I a wild man?" Most men live their lives terrified they are not a man and intent on proving they are (62). True men always draw their identities from their fathers (63). All men want to know is if "their peckers are the right size for their age…" This is what gives men confidence and strength (66). "The Father Wound" is the largest gaping wound in the hearts of most men. Men's fathers either make or break them (74). If a father messes up then a child can be destroyed or paralyzed for life. They will either become gay, insecure, live without emotion, or be a horrible sissy

nice guy. Of course to be any of these things is worse than being dead (74-75). The chapter beckons a few questions: "What about the children who grow up just fine without a dad or religion?" "What about a gay man?" "Who defines masculinity?" and "Who are you to say that you have discovered the core of masculinity, are you not affected by the fall as well?" The entire book is based on dangerous straw arguments that can easily be blown over. The problem is that people would rather hear this than to know that they actually have to learn to simply be who you are.

"To give a man back his heart is one of the hardest missions on earth…," from the movie Michael

and the beginning of the chapter entitled “The Battle For A Man’s Heart (78).” The greatest problem in the west today is our domestication of males. Domestification? We take away manhood from a very early age. Our culture has got to realize, “if you want real men then you have to accept the danger of real men as well (83-84).” Real men? Domestication takes away the soul of a man and makes him less than human, because you are denying them the privilege of imaging God (86). Domestification? If you have already been domesticated, there is a way to get your heart back, but it is going to be a great battle (88). Domesticated? “I know there are battles all around, but the greatest

testing ground is the battle for the heart of a woman," Eldredge declares (90). Without the woman the man cannot feel full and alive. Homosexuality is a distraction and an attempt to repair the hole of the domestication with masculinity. You will not be able to go after the woman that makes you fully alive until you are wholly affirmed and that type of affirmation can only come from the father (95). Domestification? You must take all your hurts and questions to the father. In this chapter, Eldredge lays the groundwork for his idea of spiritual formation/finding God... "Be a man!" Jesus would've laughed his ass off at this ignorance.

‘“Who do we turn to in order to be wholly affirmed?/Who gives us our name? (102).” Psalm 139 makes it clear God has a particular ideal that he has created us to be and if we are not being a man then we are not living up to that ideal. God is trying to initiate us into this manhood, and fix are boring lives, if we will only let him (105). Initiate? God demands that we admit our masculine woundedness and then follow him to regain complete masculinity. Through thwarting the false self we have created, we are able to obtain the salvation of masculinity. Salvation of Masculinity? We fight back to regain control and the chains that bind our soul (112-113). Man chains? All that is wrong with

humanity has one source, Adam's choice of Eve over God. For centuries we have been choosing the woman first and this is where the world's problems begin. We must learn to choose God over Eve once again, because we will only find healing in taking our broken masculinity to God (116-117). Women are the devil? I thought this book was about uplifting everyone?

"Healing the Wound." Wendell Berry: "The task of healing is to respect oneself as the creature we were created, no more and no less (120)." Like he does the Bible, Eldredge is taking this quote completely out of context. We are "NOT" created to be one with the masculine God. Dependence is not something to be

ashamed of, but rather something to be embraced. Dependence on love? We have created a society that says real men are independent and reliant on no one. This is not how God has created us. It is no shame that a man needs healing, anybody that had been away from their father does (123-125). Eldredge states that the prayer of salvation is, “Jesus take me into my wound… Christ, of course, says ’Behold I stand at the door and knock…’ (130).” Next we must forgive the past, especially our fathers, and then allow God to be our father and our future masculinity (135-136). What about our mothers? When we begin to offer others our true selves then we are ready for the glory of battle

(138). Glory? War is hell. Our true self is being a manly beast? I know a great many people that will never fit such a paradigm.

"A Battle To Fight: The Enemy." A real man has vision greater than self (he does not seek to save his life) and is cunning (he knows when to fight and can sense a trap). Real man? We must never forget that the world is enemy occupied territory and that we must constantly fight against the devil (142-143). Satan gives the masculine heart insecurity to keep him from being a real man and conquering the world for God's purposes. Masculine heart? If one wants to be a real man of God then they must stop sabotaging their manliness and

embrace it. We defeat the devil by embracing our strengths (145-147). “We must let everyone around us feel the weight of who we really are as men and let them deal with it…We must embrace manliness and quit participating in the carnival of counterfeits- counterfeit battles, counterfeit adventures, and counterfeit beauties (149).” He concludes by exposing the birth of Christ as a wild battle of galactic good and evil using Revelation 12. “I am sick of these silly nativity scenes…There is a dragon out there, he tried to eat Jesus, and we must slay him (154-155).” Slaying the dragon? The fantasy myths only seem to grow with every page. In order to promote Jesus as a warrior he has to make Satan his

equal in battle. I think this is a severe misunderstanding of who Christ is. Jesus has already won. Christus Victor. Actually, Jesus won by not fighting.

The war continues as John Eldredge teaches men how to have a strategy to defeat Satan. The greatest indictment of the modern man is the lack of danger in his life. We insure our lives against everything, and nothing of real substance ever takes place, because we are terrified of what it would mean to fight (159-160). Insurance as spirituality? When we are immersed in evil, Satan's favorite line is "I'm not here, this is all you and you're to blame for whatever happens." This is not

true and we must learn to realize that all things bad that happen to us our not our fault. They are Satan's and we must learn to fight against him (163). Sometimes bad things are our fault. We must courageously believe that we our on the right side and never believe we are on the wrong side again, for this is true manhood (165-166). Belief? We win the battle of masculinity in the same way Jesus did, God was with him. If God is with us then we will have the strength to be real men (168). I don't think that means what you think it does. We need the weapons of war in order to be real men including the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the readiness of the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the

helmet of salvation, and the sword of the spirit. Do these sound like feminine items to you? (173) Weapons? War? We must never go into battle alone, but we don't need accountability groups, we need battalions of fellow warriors that are willing to fight and shed their blood with us (175-176). Man accountability? Eldredge then assures the reader that they will be wounded on this journey, but they must keep pressing on to the upward call of Christ Jesus. "Was Christ not wounded in battle?" he asks. Eldredge, as if he is Saint Peter himself, concludes by declaring: "If you want to live in God's kingdom then it is going to take every ounce of passion and forcefulness you've got, scripture even says so: The

kingdom of heaven suffers violence and violent men take it by force...(Matt. 11:12)." Remember, the kingdom is not, and never has been, inhabited by sissy nice guys (177-178). Violence? Sissy nice guys? One's disposition as a man has much to do with whether or not he will see heaven. Man heaven? Not only is the idea of man heaven asinine, it is completely contrary to the message of Jesus.

Eldredge uses the country group *Dixie Chicks* to begin his tenth chapter, "A Beauty to Rescue," reminding the reader of the lines "Cowboy take me away, closer to heaven and closer to you." The assertion of the song is that women's purpose and dream is to meet the cowboy

that will show them the way to God and to who they really are (180). I'm sure they created that song with Eldredge in mind. If masculinity has come under assault in modern times, then femininity has been brutalized. We have completely lost sight of the fact that women reveal the exotic beauty and mystery of God (182). Eldredge is the one doing the brutalizing. Satan/actually Eldredge...lies constantly to women telling them: *"You are not desired...You are not worthy... You will not be protected...No one will fight for you..."* Most women think they are going to miss being loved by a man because of these lies. Because its all about the man? Men must spill out their lives and fight for the

woman to counteract the lies (183-184). Women will never feel worthy unless they are fought for (185). Men are the only thing that can validate women? We must fight for the maiden in the tower and quit using women (187). What happened to the dragon? A real man is made to fight, love, and life for the heart of a woman (190). Real? Men must give their lives to this battle. Recognize this line? Eldredge has a very low view of women. He claims that they can only find wholeness when their cowboy comes for them. Furthermore, he really does not believe singleness to be the virtue that Paul claims it to be in the New Testament. According to Eldredge, a real man's entire romantic life consists of

rescuing the beauty from her insecurity. The woman is the real symbol of initiation into this salvation of real manhood. In turn, the battle for a woman's heart is a sacrament (on par with baptism or communion) in the thought and theology of Eldredge. From my perspective, it seems to me like the script should be flipped.

God has set the stage for a high stakes drama on this earth and called it "good." Movie? The world only works when we embrace risk and live by faith. A man will not be happy and will be unable to love God fully unless he has adventure in his work, in his love life, and in his spiritual life (200). Get your popcorn? "Two roads diverged in a wood and I took the one less traveled, and

that has made all the difference…(202)" Not Robert Frost too? The real man never takes the risky path and does not incubate himself against risk (203). "A man's life becomes transcendental when he embraces adventure and releases control on favor of the dreams of his heart," Eldredge dramatically states after two extended stories. Dreams of violence? Real masculinity can only be find in the wild and the seeker must go there (207). If God is everywhere why…? God is in the unknown and not in suburbia (208). "A man will never more of a man until he embraces an adventure beyond his control, or when he walks into a battle he is not sure of winning (213)." What about just talking about the

risk of love? God is adventure, so God is also what truly makes the man (215). Man God? The highest attribute of God to the male is not love (that is for females), but adventure. Women are secondary throughout the book and sometimes third or fourth or fifth. Misogyny really can make somebody crazy as shit.

Consequences, Reaction, and Concluding Thoughts:

John Eldredge is ignorant. He allows childhood fantasies to shape all of his gender realities. Surely, gender is a far more fluid concept than what Eldredge speaks of. It is wrong to say that any gender exhibits the

certain attributes of God better than any other...because we all image God differently. It is dangerous to say that a woman's purpose in life is to be rescued by a man. Is she simply supposed to sit back and take whatever comes? It should be revealing when you tell a woman that you're going to fight for her...such an assertion only seems to foreshadow violence. In fact, I would encourage anyone who hears these words to run as fast as they can.

The consequences of Eldredge's hearasies have been proven by the criminal enterprise La Familia Cartel in Michoacan, Mexico. They refer to beheadings and assassinations as divine justice and use *Wild at*

Heart as their proof text. Everyone who enters the cartel must read it and there are reports of cartel members forcing all school children in the area to read it. The Cartel makes it plain: "God's blood stained clothes in Isaiah 53...proves that sometimes we have to get real bloody to be like God." (*La Familia Moachoacan: A Deadly Mexican Cartel Revisited*, by George Grayson, Foreign Policy Institute/ *Focus on the Family Outreach*, June 2009).

The things that John Eldredge says on a theological level are absolutely blasphemous. Eldredge has created a Man Theology that centers the entire Bible and the entirety of one's spiritual life on being a man.

Salvation is not being redeemed of sin or setting the world to rights, but rather becoming the manliest man one can be. Finding and conquering the beauty becomes the sacrament. Life becomes not about the least, but rather preservation and gratification of manliness. The things that Eldredge says about God are horrific. In his mind, God has a big fat erect penis...looking to slay the world to prove his manliness. In his attempts to make God manly, he completely destroys Christian orthodoxy in favor of his own theology. Eldredge takes scripture out of context and manipulates it for his own purposes. He claims to be evangelical, but even the most radical Biblical scholars

exhibit more fidelity to scripture than he does. The one true God is not something off of a popular movie...but something that exists uniquely in the soul of all creation.

“Love the Lord our God with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength. And to love our neighbor as our self (Mark 12:29-31).”

NOT

"Love the Penis our God with all of our heart, mind, soul and strength. And love your Penis."

Come on folks... Surely, God is about more than penis religion.

Amen.

February 4, 2020

Dr. Jack Kevorkian: Friend of God

Do you believe in a "Right to Die"? For many years, I didn't...until I found the love of Jesus in a man

named Dr. Jack Kevorkian. His struggle for “Right to Die” has got to be one of the most loving crusades that has ever been led.

Starting in 1990, Dr. Kevorkian controversially...and later illegally...assisted over two hundred people in the taking of their-own lives. In 2011, after being free from prison on parole for about four years (from a 1999 murder conviction tied to one of his assisted suicide patients), Kevorkian succumbed to a long battle with Hepatitis C and kidney failure at William Beaumont Hospital in Royal Oak, Michigan (*CNN*, http://news.blogs.cnn.com/2011/06/03/report-dr-jack-kevorkian-dead/). Kevorkian's death brought

immediate reactions from those who had done battle against him and from others who championed his unorthodox stances and style.

Former Oakland County Prosecutor David Gorcyca, who prosecuted Kevorkian twice, passionately commented, directly into the television camera, “This is a monumental day of hypocrisy…The man who conned hundreds of people into taking their own lives died today the peaceful natural death surrounded by loved ones he denied so many others…He didn’t have the guts to do what he helped so many others do” (*Detroit Free Press*,

http://www.freep.com/article/20110603/NEWS05/110603029/Remembering-Jack-Kevorkian).

The Roman Catholic Diocese of Detroit issued a statement that, in part, read: “Jack Kevorkian leaves behind a ‘deadly legacy’ that has denied and continues to deny scores of people their fundamental right to a humane death” (*Detroit Free Press*, http://www.freep.com/article/20110603/NEWS05/110603062).

Dr. Maria Silveria, University of Michigan Professor of Internal Medicine and palliative care expert, proudly stated: “I would not be here if not for Dr. Jack Kevorkian…I chose to study palliative medicine due

to the attention he brought to the complex issue of dying…Dr. Jack did not seek out history but constantly succeeded in making it" (*The Michigan Daily*, http://www.michigandaily.com/news/u-medical-school-alum-kevorkian-dies-83).

Dr. Howard Markel, University of Michigan Professor of Medical History, remarked, "Dr. Kevorkian is unquestionably a giant of modern medicine" (*Detroit Free Press*, http://www.freep.com/article/20110604/NEWS05/106040427).

Geoffrey Fieger, Jack Kevorkian's lawyer throughout the 1990s, commented, through tears, "Dr.

Jack Kevorkian is a modern day patriot in the best possible way…Championing the right of all to end their lives , through their own decision, without pain and suffering...History will remember him as such" (*The Michigan Daily*, http://www.michigandaily.com/news/u-medical-school-alum-kevorkian-dies-83).

TIME magazine, published a week after Kevorkian's June 2011 death, stated in an editorial, "Dr. Kevorkian, though not completely successful in creating a nationally recognized and affirmed 'Right to Die,' did succeed in changing the way physicians treat and perceive the circumstances surrounding death…Relief of suffering is now a primary objective when treating

terminally ill patients…Millions will experience far less suffering at the end of their lives thanks, at least in part, to the discussions spurred on by Dr. Jack Kevorkian" (TIME, http://newsfeed.time .com/2011/06/03/jack-kevorkian-controversial-assisted-suicide-advocate-dies-at-83/).

Why is it always the people who claim to be serving others that judge the dying the most? You have to be a real asshole to want to further the pain of others. It shouldn't surprise anyone that the law and fundamentalist religion tried to team up to stop Kevorkian? Thankfully they didn't win...the quoted professionals provide historical evidence to that

fact...and it is also apparent that the world has changed. Thanks to Kevorkian, people are far more open to a "Right to Die" than they ever have been before. Now, numerous states have statues affirming a right to die under certain circumstances...morphine is often used to hasten the deaths of the dying...doctors are more honest about options when it comes to quality of life...death is often seen as a cure in and of its' self...while I could go on and on, I have no question that Kevorkian was put on this earth to alleviate suffering and he was beautifully successful at it. Isn't justice and true religion about alleviating suffering? Instead of judging people who

fight for a "Right to Die"...perhaps we should help them alleviate their pain. I know Jesus would.

Amen.

February 7, 2020

From Kevorian to Schiavo: Ethics at the End of Life

Over the last few weeks, I've been thinking about ethical dilemmas that find us at the end of life. Just yesterday, I wrote about Dr. Jack Kevorkian and assisted suicide. Earlier today, I stumbled across this paper about Terri

Schiavo that I wrote during my graduate studies in healthcare ethics at Creighton University. Though more of a historical paper, I think it helps further illustrate how agonizing end of life decisions can be. Dr. Kevorkian wanted to help people end their own life. Schiavo never got that choice...other people (with conflicting interests) were tasked with deciding for her. So which side was Jesus on? To answer such a question, you have to determine which side was working to alleviate her pain. When I was suffering...

<u>The Law and Refusal of Care in Dispute:</u>

Terri Schiavo and The Ethical Struggles of a Nation

Introduction:

The complexities of legal cases surrounding refusal of care decisions are monumental. These are desperate situations with desperate actors playing the roles of patient, mother, father, husband, wife, son, daughter, guardian, or advocate. In refusal of care legal opinions, no matter the source, one can feel the raw emotions of judges seeking to represent the ethical and legal interests of the state. In these decisions courts are asked to determine whether a citizen has the right to

live or die based on their desire or the desire of another they have entrusted. No refusal of care decision is alike and, as a result, judges are forced to make unique god-like decisions of final fate. There are always going to be different sides and someone is always going to lose, not just a legal decision, but, also, a decision of even greater consequence, the ability to determine the fate of someone loved and fought for. With these complexities and difficulties in mind, the past twenty years has seen no greater publicity, scrutiny, protest, or attention surround a refusal of care decision than the unique case of Teresa Marie “Terri” Schiavo. The ethics of a nation were on full display as Terri Schiavo lay reliant on a

feeding tube in a Florida Hospice, unable to communicate her desires, precariously suspended somewhere between life and death. This ethical drama is, indeed, a story of us all.

The Ethical Drama Unfolds:

In the early morning of February 25, 1990, Teresa Marie "Terri" Schiavo, a young vivacious insurance saleswoman, collapsed in a hallway of her St. Petersburg, Florida apartment. Paramedics, responding to her husband Michael's 911 call, found Mrs. Schiavo unconscious, not breathing, and without a pulse. On the

way to the hospital, paramedics were able to resuscitate her, finally, after 30 minutes, restoring oxygen to her brain. After initial emergency treatments to save her life, at Humana Northside Hospital, neurologist Dr. Garcia DeSousa grimly informed Michael Schiavo and gathered family of tremendous damage to Terri's brain and the need to insert a feeding tube. Within the first six months that followed, Dr. De Sousa, family physician Dr. Victor Gambone, and two other doctors each independently diagnosed Terri Schiavo as being in a persistent vegetative state. The attending doctors estimated Schiavo to be permanently and irreversibly

brain-dead. The family, however, refused to give up treatment or hope (Schiavo, 1-50/Schindlers, 1-60).

In November of 1990, Michael Schiavo took his wife to the University of California at San Francisco for experimental nerve stimulation treatment. Doctors and nurses worked with Terri for several months and were, ultimately, unable to stimulate any meaningful brain activity. In January of 1991, Terri returned to Florida and was admitted to the Mediplex Rehabilitation Hospital in Bradenton, Florida. While a patient at this facility, doctors were able to remove all artificial life-sustaining treatments from Schiavo except her feeding tube. This development allowed Terri to go out to the

park and other public places with her family. A few months later, in July of 1991, Schiavo was transferred to Saba Palms Skilled Care Facility where she would undergo neurological testing, speech therapy, and occupational therapy (Schiavo, 51-101/Schindlers, 55-85).

Terri's parents, The Schindlers, enjoyed a loving and productive relationship with their son-in-law, Michael, for the initial years of her stay at Saba Palms. The Schindlers encouraged Michael to get on with his life and start dating again. In the midst of these activities, Michael became Terri's legal court-appointed guardian and, after a urinary tract infection in

mid-1993, instituted a do-not-resuscitate order. The Schindlers, being highly opposed to this action, challenged it on the basis of the state's duty to protect life. In May of 1998, after years of legal wrangling with The Schindlers, Michael Schiavo filed a legal petition to have Terri's feeding tube removed. This action began what would become one of the most publicized and controversial protracted legal battles of a new century (Schiavo, 24- 121/Schindlers, 68-92/Fuhrman 167-189).

The Schindlers actively opposed Michael Schiavo's desire to remove Terri's feeding tube in court. Due to a lack of a living will, an outside guardian, Richard Pearse, was appointed by a Florida State Court

to help determine what Terri Schiavo's care should or should not be. Pearse determined that there was no possibility for Terri to improve, yet, recommended, based on Florida law, that treatment continue, due to economical conflicts of interest surrounding life insurance and probable inheritances on the part of her legal guardian and husband Michael, until the matter could be properly adjudicated (Schindlers, 125-171/Goodman, 25-78).

In late January of 2000, The Schindlers and Michael Schiavo went to trial to determine what Terri's wishes were regarding life-prolonging procedures. Testimony was allowed from eighteen different

witnesses. Numerous friends of Terri testified that they heard her say on numerous occasions that she would never want this type of life-prolonging treatment. Michael Schiavo claimed that Terri would never have wanted to be placed on a machine if her chances for recovery were miniscule. The Schindlers claimed that their daughter was a devout Roman-Catholic and would never have violated the Church's teachings on euthanasia by refusing hydration and nutrition. After weeks of testimony, in late February of 2000, Judge George Greer issued a ruling granting Michael's petition to remove Terri's feeding tube. The decision also stated that Terri was in a persistent vegetative state, had made

prior oral declarations she would not want a feeding tube, and could also not be forcefully orally fed. The decision was later upheld by the Florida Second District Court of Appeals and would come to be known as *Schiavo I* in later rulings (Caplan 1-255/Goodman 55-150).

The Schindler's immediately sought injunctive relief from this decision as they challenged Michael Schiavo's guardianship of their daughter. By this time, although, still legally married to Terri, Michael was in a committed relationship with Jodi Centonze and expecting his first child. Michael argued that he did not divorce his wife because he wanted to ensure her desire

to not be kept in a persistent vegetative state was honored. The Schindler's also argued that Michael stood to gain hundreds of thousands of dollars from Terri's death. Judge George Greer denied their request and determined April 24, 2001 to be the date Terri's feeding tube was to be removed. This action, while subsequently carried out, would only be the beginning of a longer protracted legal battle (Schiavo, 101-189/Schindlers, 155-205/Caplan, 1-255).

In late April 2001, The Schindlers filed a motion for relief based on new evidence of Terri's wishes. Judge George Greer denied the request. The Second District Court of Appeals remanded the case back to

Judge Greer to allow The Schindlers to file a new motion. In the mean time, The Schindlers filed a civil suit against Michael Schiavo for perjury, claiming he had lied in the previous proceedings, and Judge Frank Quesada responded by ordering the feeding tube reinserted while the issue was being adjudicated. Michael Schiavo appealed to The Second Court of Appeals to enforce Judge Greer's previous ruling and was denied. This sequence of events would come to be known as *Schiavo II* in later rulings (Caplan, 255-352/Fuhrman, 189-211).

In August of 2001, The Second Court of Appeals remanded the lawsuit to Judge George Greer. The

Schindlers were allowed to argue that new medical treatments might be able to restore significant enough cognitive abilities so that Terri Schiavo could decide for herself. The Court also heard new motions challenging Michael Schiavo's guardianship and asking that Judge Greer recuse himself from the case. Judge Greer denied all three new motions. The Second Court of Appeals upheld two of Greer's decisions, but ordered a new evidentiary on the claim that Terri might benefit from new medical treatments. This decision would come to be known as *Schiavo III* in later rulings. The Court of Appeals ordered Judge Greer to direct five neurologists to form a new opinion on the matter: two from The

Schindlers, two from Michael Schiavo, and one chosen by the Judge. The new panel determined in a 3-2 vote that new treatments would not be effective in restoring brain function to Terri Schiavo. In late 2002, Judge Greer upheld the panel's ruling and ordered Schiavo's feeding tube removed. This decision would come to be known as *Schiavo IV* in later rulings. The Schindlers were granted injunctive relief by another local judge around the time Terri's feeding tube was to be removed (Caplan, 255-352/Goodman 1-254).

The beginning of 2003 brought increased publicity to the case and activists began demonstrations outside of Terri Schiavo's hospice. On September 11, 2003, The

Schindlers asked Judge Greer to allow for “eight weeks of new therapy.” The Schindlers also presented evidence that Michael Schiavo had tried to euthanize his wife on several occasions by tampering with her sugar levels during visits. Two nurses also testified that Michael Schiavo remarked, “When is that bitch going to die?” on multiple occasions. Judge Greer, calling them “fantastical,” denied all new motions. On October 15, 2003 Schiavo’s feeding tube was removed after The Schindlers exhausted all of their appeals. Within the week, the Florida Legislature passed “Terri’s Law,” granting Florida Governor Jeb Bush the authority to intervene in the case. Bush immediately ordered the

feeding tube to be reinserted. The Florida Supreme Court intervened in late August of 2004 to rule "Terri's Law" to be unconstitutional. The Schindlers appealed to The U.S. Supreme Court and were denied a hearing about six months later. In February of 2005 The Schindlers filed a motion of relief based on thirty-three affidavits from doctors and nurses recommending further treatment for Terri. Judge Greer formally denied this motion and ordered the feeding tube removed on March 18, 2005 at 1:00pm (Goodman, 155-254/Fuhrman, 189-256).

Following Judge George Greer's order, Terri Schiavo's doctors and nurses removed her feeding tube

on March 18, 2005 at 1:00pm. The United States House of Representatives subpoenaed both Michael and Terri Schiavo to challenge this action. Jude Greer refused to reinsert the feeding tube to allow for this. On March 20th The United States Senate responded by unanimously passing a bill to remove the case from Judge Greer's court to federal court. The United States House of Representatives passed the identical bill ours later. President George W. Bush flew back from Texas to sign the bill into law at 1:11 am on March 21. Over the next few days, all of The Schindlers' federal petitions were denied and Terri's feeding tube remained out. The scene outside of Pinellas Park Hospice grew increasingly

restless as prominent activists, including both Jesse Jackson and James Dobson, marched to try to save Terri Schiavo's life. On March 24, 2005, Governor Jeb Bush ordered The Florida Department of Children and Families to take custody of Terri and transfer her to a local hospital for reinsertion of the feeding tube. Judge Greer forbade this action forcing Governor Bush to stand down. The legal battle was over. Teresa Marie "Terri" Schiavo died one week later at Pinellas Park Hospice on March 31, 2005. Michael Schiavo buried her underneath a tombstone that read: "I kept my promise…" (Goodman, 200-259/Schindlers, 200-251/Schiavo, 300-360/Fuhrman, 200-255).

Conclusion:

The Terri Schiavo case drew in a nation as ethical warriors lined up to do battle to fight for the fate of someone unable to fight for their self. Together we collectively watched as a mother and father fought their estranged son-in-law to determine the final fate of their daughter. I can think of no other refusal of care case in history that has so captured the attention of the American citizenry and forced the action of all three branches of the federal government, including The United States Congress, The President of the United

States, and The United States Supreme Court. In the passionate responses of the populace and their government a people collectively learned that these refusal of care cases speak not only of the desires of the individual players but, also, to the ethics of our collective self. In Terri Schiavo, her parents, and her husband we saw the best and worst of our selves and took sides based on the role we wanted to play, compassionate life-giver or merciful life-taker. This case speaks not only to a troubled family's personal battles, but even more so, represents our own individual collective discomfort with the ethics of dying. In Terri Schiavo we all came face to face with a decision we

hoped we would never have to make and, collectively, let out a long sigh of relief when the nightmare was over, scared to close our eyes, for fear that such agonizing discomfort might more personally revisit us at a later date.

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February 15, 2020

The Dalai Lama: Traditionalist or Modernist

What does the Dalai Lama offer us now?

The Dalai Lama represents a tradition existent since 1391. This tradition is intensely religious and highly irrational based on modern conceptions of logic and rationality. Any belief in reincarnation is certainly not a modern construct and challenges modern notions of what is logical. Religion is not a modern construct. Enlightenment sensibilities have ushered in a time of philosophical skepticism and aversion to belief in the religious or miraculous that has only grown with time. Industrialization places a premium on the human ability to usher in modern progress. The Dalai Lama

teaches that progress can only come through traditional virtues of love, compassion and sacrifice. There are two reasons for these competing constructs...the Dalai Lama is a product and beneficiary of a beautiful tradition yet his existential realities have required him to engage the modern world.

The Dalai Lama experienced an incredibly unique early life that shaped much of who he has become. Taken from his home at the age of two, raised by Buddhist monks in a palace, trained to be amongst the most intellectually capable Buddhists in the world, molded by a chance encounter with a westerner of unique intellectual charisma, supported by the military

might of major western industrial powers and finally forced to leave his home by an invasion of communists. The Dalai Lama has experienced both tradition and modernity in ways that perhaps only creative novelists could dream of.

The forces of tradition have shaped the Dalai Lama simply by the nature of his position. He has accepted that he is, and is considered by his followers to be, the complete embodiment of the Buddha's compassion. This is not a construct that will past muster with modern secular and rational forces. Yet, the Dalai Lama was taught how to speak to the outside world with the help of Heinrich Heller and has also become a

prophet for compassion the world over. Do all of those who read the Dalai Lama's books and treasure him as a modern sage accept that he is the embodiment of the Buddha's compassion? Certainly not, but they do believe him to be something incredibly special, as has been evidenced by his unending beatification around the world.

The Dalai Lama was unquestionably shaped by the numerous conflicts between Tibet and China. The early support of the CIA made the Dalai Lama the beneficiary of a modern economics and governance. His fights against the communist forces of China also made him an early hero of anti-communist capitalists

around the world. These factors gave him a large space from which to speak about peace and compassion. Had the Dalai Lama been some type of religious communist, I doubt that he would have had the same international platform from which to speak. History has always rewarded winners and, it does not seem to be the least bit strange, the Dalai Lama was rewarded the Nobel Peace Prize just as the Soviet Union was beginning to collapse in 1989. To make it plain...the Dalai Lama ended up on the right side of history and has reaped the benefits of his fortune.

Religion is often seen as a hindrance or the antithesis of modernity, most often due to the value it

places on the irrational and the miraculous. Tradition is the backbone of religion and modernity has requested a death to many traditional assumptions. These facts seem to point to a death or at the very least a decrease in the popularity of the tradition of the Dalai Lama. This has not been the case, and, perhaps, speaks to some of modernity's failures.

Modernity has championed secularization, rationality and industry as the chief ends of man. Modernity's promotion of reason as the means to deeper understandings of science, technology and the universe has often come at the detriment of religious explanations. In the midst of these great leaps of

progress, weapons of incredible destruction and impersonal economic systems have been created objects that have reaped massive destruction on human communities. The rejection of faith as blind and irrational, has led to a deep displacement of religious contentment in favor of a consumption. Time has led to the failure of modernity to provide happiness or contentment lasting beyond one's contemporary situation. In the midst of such failure, persons have sought out contentment and happiness that is lasting. For many, the simple traditional teachings of the Dalai Lama produce a source of comfort and direction in the midst of modern disorientation.

His Holiness has met both tradition and modernity and somehow become and spoken to both. Indeed, the Dalai Lama has met and conducted himself as both traditional guru and modern sage, making it difficult to categorize him as either. Maybe that's the point...his importance lies not in these categories but, rather, in his ability to provide prophetic words of encouragement to hold fast to that which is truly human in the midst of a modernity that seems to have stolen that which is humane. The Dalai Lama has become who he is, perhaps neither modernist nor traditionalist, because he is, indeed, a part of all that he has met. This is a model of resistance that we can all follow.

Amen.

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March 6, 2020

Darius Tarver & The Danger of Sensationalism

The story:

DENTON, Texas (CBSDFW.COM) — Denton police released video Thursday of an officer-involved shooting that killed a 23-year-old college student in January. Police Chief Frank Dixon said he did not want to release the video, but did so to avoid civil unrest after weeks of public protests demanding more transparency from the department about what happened to Darius Tarver...

https://dfw.cbslocal.com/2020/03/05/denton-police-release-video-footage-of-unt-student-darius-tarvers-fatal-shooting/

The response:

Darius Tarver is dead. Say it. Let it sink in deep into your bones. This is more than a news report. This is a tragedy beyond comprehension. This is the death of brilliance. Don't turn away. Look at Darius dying on the pavement. Look at we lost that night. Look!

Once you have taken a long look...and only after you have taken a long look...I invite you to think critically about how this tragedy unfolded.

Now, I want to quite frank. For many years, I have given my life to the effort to combat police brutality. Institutionally, I hate the police. With that affirmed, I love truth more than anything I hate. For weeks, local activists have told us that Darius Tarver was a victim of police brutality. Today, the video clearly revealed the truth.

Darius had weapons that he used. Darius was given commands that he ignored. Darius did not respond to nonlethal efforts. Darius stabbed an officer. Darius charged toward the officers. Darius was shot after multiple attempts at a nonlethal outcome.

Why did this happen? I don't know...but I do know that we don't get to just make it up as we go.

Tonight, I'm angry. Not at the police...for once. I'm angry at those who peddled false narratives to the detriment of other factual instances of police brutality. Hollow sensationalism doesn't bring about justice...it foments

injustice. Darius Tarver deserves to be remembered for who he was...not for the caricature that local activists want him to be.

Amen.

March 17, 2020

"Ethics matter." / "CoronaEthics Matter"

The world is not ending...unless we destroy it.

Down on her luck, all the woman had was WIC tonight. Eventually, she made it to the milk. The kids were screaming. Looking at the shelves, all of the WIC-approved milk had already been bought (the program controls what you can buy). Trying to control her emotions, she pushed on to the rice. The woman turned the corner. Down at the bottom, there was one small bag of WIC-approved rice. Wondering how she was going to feed her kids, she pressed on. Growing weary, the woman decided to make one last stop at the dried

beans. When she realized that all of the WIC-approved beans were gone, she broke down in tears. Trying to keep it together, she went to the checkout line to get the small bag of rice. She couldn't help but notice that everyone using cash/credit seemed to have their carts full of WIC-approved items. The woman was incredulous that people would take all of the food from the poor so that they could have more.

Our ethics will determine whether people starve in a time of COVID-19.

Struggling, a family with multiple medical issues was unable to pay their utility bill for a considerable amount of time. Eventually, the city came and turned the water off. Though people kept saying that they didn't think anybody should worry about their utilities right now, nobody stepped up to help. The family faced the difficult decision of leaving the house and exposing themselves to the virus or functioning without water.

Our ethics will determine whether people thirst in a time of COVID-19.

Quickly, the virus spread to the homeless population. Nobody was willing to open their doors. One by one, homeless persons began to die. People kept talking about how sorry they felt for them...but nobody was willing to help.

Our ethics will determine whether people are homeless in a time of COVID-19.

Stores were closed to prevent further spread of the virus. A young mother was unable to find clothing for her newborn. All she had were the few articles that she brought home from the hospital. While the woman

washed what she had, the infant had to go naked. Repeatedly, people told her that they had clothes for her...but nobody was willing to leave the house for fear of the virus. The infant was left to go naked.

Our ethics will determine whether people have clothes in a time of COVID-19.

For the fourth time, a man was arrested for a DUI. This time, the bond was too high. There wasn't going to be a quick out this time. Over the course of a few weeks, other prisoners started getting sick. Then, the virus came for him. The man knew that nobody was coming

to help an outcast like him. Dying, he couldn't get help but think, "Since when did a DUI carry a death sentence?"

Our ethics will determine whether the lives of prisoners/outcasts are valued in a time of COVID-19.

The ER was a nightmare. Pushing. Screaming. Fighting. Hurting. The elderly man did the best he could to make his way to the front. Once he told them that he had the virus, he was led to a chair. The man seemed to grow sicker with each passing second. Right in front of him young people kept on being escorted back to rooms.

Finally, a nurse came over and told him that they wouldn't be able to treat him because he was too old.

Our ethics will determine whether all lives are valued in a time of COVID-19.

The world is not ending...unless we destroy it.

March 20, 2020

The Death of the Advocate

Multiple officers descended on a murder suspect. Before giving him an opportunity to surrender, the officers opened fire. Bullet after bullet pierced his young body. Falling to the pavement, the young man managed, "Why?" Though the officers rendered aid, it was of no use...he was dead before he hit the ground. Officers on the scene tried to absolve their actions. They kept saying that they thought he had a gun. It worked

for a time. However, lies can't live forever. When the videos were released to the public, it was very clear that these officers murdered the young man. Every scene demanded justice. Somebody had to do something. Who was that somebody going to be?

Over the last few years, police brutality has brought together coalitions of people to fight for justice. Thousands would march in the streets. Rage would fill the chambers of government. Advocates would use every mechanism of resistance they could muster to achieve justice. In the midst of these moments, the names of the brutalized were shouted over and over

again. Progress always seemed possible. We no longer live in such a time.

There were no marches. Everybody was scared of getting sick. There were no enraged speeches. Nobody wanted to get out. The mechanisms of justice were all turned inward. People just wanted to survive. The officers got away with it...not because they were innocent...but because the advocate was dead.

It doesn't have to be like this. Resurrection is possible. The questions are calling us out of our graves/homes. How much are we willing to sacrifice for justice? How

much are we willing to sacrifice to save the lives of others? The brutalities are not going to stop...unless we stop them. Now more than ever, the world needs advocates. Come back! We cannot let death win.

Amen.

March 20, 2020

Did you create Coronavirus? / Just Take Me Back to

Genesis

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters.
And God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day.

And God said, “Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” And God made the firmament and separated the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament. And it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.

And God said, “Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. And God said, “Let the earth put forth vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit

trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, upon the earth." And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, a third day.

And God said, "Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, and let them be lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light upon the earth." And it was so. And God made the two great lights, the greater light to rule the day, and the

lesser light to rule the night; he made the stars also. And God set them in the firmament of the heavens to give light upon the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, a fourth day.

And God said, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the firmament of the heavens." So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful

and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." And there was evening and there was morning, a fifth day.

And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds: cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds." And it was so. And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the cattle according to their kinds, and everything that creeps upon the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and

over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have

given every green plant for food." And it was so. And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, a sixth day.

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work which he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all his work which he had done in creation.

Genesis 1/2 (RSV)

I have read the creation account thousands upon thousands of times. I don't see a damn thing about no Coronavirus. So where did this shit come from? God has some explaining to do. Don't shortcut me with that forbidden fruit / fall bullshit. I want to know where you were when this shit was forming. Did you create it? I thought you were everywhere? I thought you could do it all? So why are you letting thousands of people die? Maybe the Coronavirus is a Godvirus. If it's not I'd love to hear from you tonight. +Just take me back to Genesis. I promise I won't give you any more trouble.

Amen.

March 21, 2020

Dr. Li Weinlang: Martyr of the Faith

Strange things seemed to only get stranger. Stories kept on leaking out about a new respiratory illness that was similar yet more deadly than the SARS virus of years past. Wuhan just seemed to be ignoring it. Afraid for the health of his colleagues in medicine, Dr. Li Weinlang started to investigate what was going on. Fairly quickly, it became apparent that this was a nightmare situation.

On a Chinese messaging service, Dr. Weinlang set out to tell his colleagues about what he had discovered. Warning them to make sure that they wear all protective gear available, Weinlang went about his business of trying to help his patients. Almost immediately, local authorities caught on to his warnings. It wasn't long before Weinlang was brought before the police and charged with disseminating false information. Despite the risk to his life, Weinlang kept warning people. He refused to be silenced. In short order, large numbers of people started dying. It became apparent that Weinlang was right. Unfortunately, there wasn't time for him to be completely vindicated. After

giving everything he had to love his neighbors, Weinlang was diagnosed with the newly named COVID-19 and admitted to the hospital in critical crondition. From his bed, Weinlang continued to send out messages warning people about COVID-19. With every passing day, he grew more ill...until finally, the warnings stopped. Even up to his last conscience moments, he was still concerned about those struggling with the illness in the outside world. Unable to breathe, Dr. Li Weinlang died on February 8, 2020 at 2:58am. Throughout the world, he was hailed as a hero of monumental proportions. For many in Wuhan, he was

just the loving neighbor that kept them from getting sick.

The message of God passed down through the ages is simple...love. In the midst of such a message, there is no greater love than giving your life for others. There is no question that Dr. Weinlang did just that. In fact, I believe he would be alive today if not for his deep love for others. To be quite frank, I don't know anything about Weinlang's spirituality...I just know his actions...I just see the sacrifice he made in death. That is enough for me. Dr. Li Weinlang is a Martyr of the Faith because he is a Martyr of Love. Make no mistake, Weinlang is

not dead...he lives in the struggle against this deadly virus...he lives in us.

Amen.

March 23, 2020

Press Release: On Religious Liberty & Quarantine Civil Disobedience

Religious Liberty / Civil Disobedience

Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood

jeffrey.k.hood@gmail.com

In recent days, our governments have repeatedly issued orders to prevent the spread of COVID-19. These are scary times. Restrictions are necessary. The problem arises when preventative actions begin to flippantly infringe upon basic rights. From the foundation of our

nation, religious practice has been something to be protected at all costs.

Make no mistake, these latest restrictions are very dangerous...and I believe unconstitutional (they are not the least restrictive means necessary). There are varieties of religious groups who have to be physically together in order to practice their religion. Now do we just tell them that their religion is not important? Do we give them no other options? Churches have long been refuges for the struggling. Now we're supposed to just give them a locked door? Ministers perform essential roles in our society. What about the congregant that

needs help? Our rights are such that it is not the role of government to restrict any of these basic societal functions. RELIGIOUS LIBERTY IS FUNDAMENTAL TO WHO WE ARE.

With such affirmed, I CALL FOR CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE. Religious leaders should invite their congregations to carefully continue performing their essential social role in our society. To do anything else...is to lose who we are/who we are called to be...lovers of our neighbors. In the midst of such blatant insensitivity toward marginalized and oppressed people, we must stand

firm/fight back. Keeping the faith means holding fast to our rights / and the rights of others.

Liberty is too important to be trifled with by anybody. Don't give away what is already yours. God is with you/us.

Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood

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March 30, 2020

Denton County Judge Andy Eads.

As a citizen of Denton County, I am writing to ask you to cease and desist use of part of your COVID-19 emergency declaration.

Definition/section 2.b.VI, "Providers of Basic Necessities to Lower Income Populations" you define such entities as "Businesses, including non-profit organizations that provide food, shelter, and social services, and other necessities of life for economically disadvantaged or otherwise needy individuals."

The problem with this definition/section is that it criminalizes the social services that churches (religious institutions broadly) provide everyday (food pantries, economic assistance and all sorts of emergency matters that churches assist needy persons with). Churches are not businesses. Churches are not non-profits. Churches

are something else entirely. While I am sure such a mistake was a simple omission, the language as it stands now criminalizes the social service work of churches. Tarrant County worded their order broad enough to include churches...

Definition 15.d.V, "Providers of Basic Necessities to Economically Disadvantaged Populations. Social services and charitable organizationsthat provide food, shelter, and social services, and other necessities of life for economically disadvantaged or otherwise needy individuals; that provide food, shelter, and social

services, and other necessities of life for economically disadvantaged or otherwise vulnerable individuals."

With such pointed out, I am simply asking for a quick amendment striking the words "Businesses,including non-profit organizations"and replacing them with "Social services and charitable organizations." Such language would remove any possibility that churches (or any other religious institutions) would be harassed or criminalized for their social service work. I know that you are a strong supporter of religious liberty and I wanted to give you/the court the opportunity to make this simple fix for the sake of local churches before any

further action is necessary. May God continue to bless your leadership in this most difficult hour.

Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood

Denton, Texas

404-210-6760

April 2, 2020

Religious Liberty Matters: Fighting Back Against Unlimited Restrictions

"Go different routes." "Don't tell anybody." "Be as discreet as possible." "Don't wear bright clothes." "Just tell them that you're going to see a friend." "Don't ask for directions." "Knock five times on the door." Stay quiet." "Close the curtains." "Don't turn the lights on." "Light the candle." "Only one person speaks at a time." "Our lives are at stake." "Don't leave together." "We will leave one at a time every thirty minutes." " Don't turn around."

The entire experience was more than surreal.

China outlaws religious movements that it finds disagreeable. In fact, the Chinese government would argue that these "unlawful assemblies" are a "threat to public health." The extended quotes are from my time with a secret house church there many years ago. I will never forget multiple members of the core families telling us about how they'd spent extended time in prison for simply going to church. In every case, the charges were the same, "unlawful assembly" and "threat to public health." In recent days, I have found my soul festering in those moments.

For the first time, the government has told me that I cannot freely go to church. While prevention of COVID-19 is certainly a legitimate concern, one has to wonder where this is going. Tinkering with religious liberty is always a very dangerous game.

Just a few days ago, Pastor Rodney Howard-Browne convened his Tampa, Florida megachurch in direct violation of local COVID-19 orders. Not long thereafter, Pastor Howard-Browne was arrested for "unlawful assembly" and "threat to public health." There are stories of government enforcement trickling out of different places as well. Full disclosure, I think it is

reckless for churches to meet right now (unless done under the strictest adherence to CDC guidelines). You cannot love your neighbor and expose them to a deadly virus. With that said, I am sickened by this spectacle of arresting pastors...or anyone else gathered for church. I see it as completely unnecessary. Government can and should set guidelines (social distancing for example) as to how to push back against this virus...but government should never constrict churches that can/do hold their services within these guidelines. Unlimited restrictions are a violation of religious liberty.

We do not live in China. Our government is required to use the least restrictive means necessary during times of emergency. We are not experiencing the least restrictive constraints with regards to religious liberty.

So what other civil liberties are up for unlimited restriction?

Are we prepared to sacrifice a free press next?

I hope not.

I hope that people realize that religious liberty is fundamental to maintaining all of our other liberties.

Amen.

*As always, the word "church" includes all religious institutions for me.

April 3, 2020

Loving the Least in a Time of Pandemic : On Religious Liberty & the Social Services of Churches

*As always, the word "church" includes all religious institutions for me.

Though I find the political views of both Governor Abbott and Attorney General Paxton to most often be detestable, I have worked very hard and am very thankful for their recent order and interpretation declaring churches to be an essential service/business.

Though they probably didn't consider it this way, they are going to save the lives of countless marginalized and oppressed people by putting the social services of churches unquestionably back in business.

"In accordance with guidance from DSHS Commissioner Dr. Hellerstedt, and to achieve the goals established by the President to reduce the spread of COVD-19, every person in Texas shall, except where necessary to provide or obtain essential services, minimize social gatherings and minimize in-person contact with people who are not in the same household. 'Essential services' shall consist of everything listed by the U.S. Department of Homeland

Security in its Guidance on the Essential Critical Infrastructure Workforce, Version 2.0, plus religious services conducted in churches, congregations, and houses of worship."

-Texas Governor Greg Abbott, Executive Order GA-14

“This guidance provides clear direction for houses of worship to protect the health and safety of Texans as they continue to hold religious services, exercise their religious liberty, and serve their faith communities"

“The CDC currently recommends that if a community is

experiencing substantial community spread of COVID-19, then the houses of worship in that community should cancel all in-person gatherings of any size."

"A church may hold Easter services in its parking lot, with attendees remaining in their cars (windows down), parked in every other parking spot, with the minister using amplification to preach…Or because Executive Order GA 14 permits drive-thrus to operate, then a house of worship may, according to their faith practices, provide communion or a blessing through a similar drive-up service. Or pastors with smaller congregations may consider conducting multiple services of 10 people or

fewer in their sanctuaries, so long as they maintain appropriate social distancing, properly sanitize the building between each service, and provide hand sanitizer."

"Under the extraordinary circumstances in which we temporarily live, these restrictions do not violate the religious liberty of houses of worship because the government has a compelling interest for implementing the rules(stopping contagion) and the rules are the least restrictive means of burdening religious practice (they allow houses of worship to stay open for ministry, but suggest ways that help stop the spread of COVID-19)."

-Texas Governor Greg Abbott / Texas Attorney General

Ken Paxton Joint Interpretation of Executive Order GA-14

For the past few weeks, I have been constantly engaged in the struggle to open churches back up. I have called/messaged whoever would listen. Repeatedly, those I spoke to had failed to consider the social impact that churches have on marginalized and oppressed people. Social services rather than church services have always been my primary concern...but you can't talk about one without the other.

"It doesn't have to be like this. Resurrection is possible. The questions are calling us out of our graves. How much are we willing to sacrifice for justice? How much are we willing to sacrifice to save the lives of others? The brutalities are not going to stop...unless we stop them. Now more than ever, the world needs advocates. Come back! Get creative! We cannot let the Coronavirus/death win."

-J. Hood, Patheos, 3/19/20

"Our ethics will determine if all lives are valued in a time of COVID-19."

"The world is not ending...unless we destroy it."

-J. Hood, Patheos, 3/21/20

"I CALL FOR CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE. Religious leaders should invite their congregations to carefully continue

performing their essential social role in our society. To do anything else...is to lose who we are/who we are called to be...lovers of our neighbors."

-J. Hood, Patheos, 3/23/20

At least one Dallas-area activist would like to see more people rebel against what he described as an unconstitutional overreach by the government.

"Make no mistake, these restrictions are very dangerous ... and, I believe, unconstitutional," the Rev. Jeff Hood wrote in a news release to Dallas media.

Religious leaders ought to have the choice to open their doors to the sick, said Hood, a Baptist pastor and author.

Hood told The News that while public worship is important, "I'm most concerned about the church being there for those who are being overlooked in this pandemic."
He doesn't want the government to shut down the ability of churches to help people in need.

“If a person in need knocks on the church door, should it be illegal for a person of faith to open the door and help that person?” Hood asked. “How is it helpful for the government to restrict those things?”

-Dave Tarrant, Dallas Morning News, 3/26/20

"The church is the largest provider of social services in our country. Dallas County and various other counties have criminalized such work. Repeatedly, churches and their ministers are not included as essential to our

society. The language is all about businesses. While there is room given for churches to meet "virtually," churches can't do the vast majority of their work over a computer screen. More lives will be lost if the church stops being the church. I can't accept this. We must love our neighbors. We must stand up for the marginalized and oppressed. We must. To do anything else would to not be the church. When someone asks for the help of churches, I encourage you to help them...no matter what any authority says. Civil disobedience might be the hallmark of our faith at this point."

-J. Hood, OpEd, 3/30/20

Denton County Judge Andy Eads.

As a citizen of Denton County, I am writing to ask you to cease and desist use of part of your COVID-19 emergency declaration.

Definition/section 2.b.VI, "Providers of Basic Necessities to Lower Income Populations" you define such entities as "Businesses, including non-profit organizations that provide food, shelter, and social services, and other

necessities of life for economically disadvantaged or otherwise needy individuals."

The problem with this definition/section is that it criminalizes the social services that churches (religious institutions broadly) provide everyday (food pantries, economic assistance and all sorts of emergency matters that churches assist needy persons with). Churches are not businesses. Churches are not non-profits. Churches are something else entirely. While I am sure such a mistake was a simple omission, the language as it stands now criminalizes the social service work of churches...

-J. Hood, Letter to Denton County Commissioners Court, 3/30/20

"The Rev. Jeff Hood, a Baptist pastor and author, said he believed it was an unconstitutional overreach by the government to shut down religious institutions."

"But he said on Thursday that he still wants faith leaders to be responsible and halt mass gatherings."

-Hayat Norimine, Dallas Morning News, 4/2/20

"Just a few days ago, Pastor Rodney Howard-Browne convened his Tampa, Florida megachurch in direct violation of local COVID-19 orders. Not long thereafter, Pastor Howard-Browne was arrested for "unlawful assembly" and "threat to public health." There are stories of government enforcement trickling out of different places as well. Full disclosure, I think it is reckless for churches to meet right now (unless done under the strictest adherence to CDC guidelines). You cannot love your neighbor and expose them to a deadly virus. With that said, I am sickened by this spectacle of arresting pastors…or anyone else gathered for church. I see it as

completely unnecessary. Government can and should set guidelines (social distancing for example) as to how to push back against this virus…but government should never constrict churches that can/do hold their services within these guidelines. Unlimited restrictions are a violation of religious liberty."

J. Hood, Patheos, 4/2/20

After weeks of work, Texas is now in a place of the least restriction possible (as far as religious liberty is concerned). Now, the question shifts back to the role of persons of faith in loving their neighbors.

Remember...just because it is legal don't mean that it is love. Except in the most extreme of circumstances, churches should not be holding services. Let me make this perfectly clear. Except in the most extreme of circumstances, churches should not be holding services. With that said, the hearts and doors of churches should be safely and creatively open to loving the marginalized and oppressed of these moments. Now that the law is right, every inch of your heart/soul should be right...firmly extended in the direction of love. There is no other way to follow Jesus.

Amen.

April 7, 2020

COVID-19: Jesus is Dangerous.

There will be those who say that I sound angry...they would be correct.

"Can you help me?"

We hesitate every single time. We don't know how much such a request is going to cost. We just can't give someone our all. We want it to be on our terms. We want to know that we will walk away unscathed. Ultimately, we don't actually want to help. We just want to appear helpful.

For years, I have watched my colleagues find safety in their identities as pastors. In fact that's what it always seems to be about...safety. The fluffy messages. The cautious finances. The refusal to talk about social injustices. The comfortable salary. The growing pension. The constant affirmation. The sweet

tranquility of irrelevance. Daily, I prayed for difference. Daily, I've been disappointed. When COVID-19 hit, I just knew that my colleagues would rise to the challenge. Man, was I wrong. While there are always exceptions...for the most part...I have seen coward pastor after coward pastor sit on their asses at home and offer no help to the most desperate situations. Safety matters more than people to most pastors that I know.

"Can you help me?"

Multiple nights ago, I received a call from an abused woman that needed immediate help. I couldn't help but instantaneously think about the risks of COVID-19...but I knew that I couldn't say no. Due to an outstanding warrant, she was unable to call the police. Before I knew it, I was in the car speeding to help. By the time I arrived at the house, the abusive husband was passed out drunk. Quietly, I helped the bloodied woman and her kids out of danger. By the time I dropped them off at a hotel, there were many tears. I didn't think about COVID-19 again until I was almost back home. Though I instictively took every precaution, love was all that I had

to keep me safe. Regardless of what became of me, I knew that I'd followed the way.

"Can you help me?"

Illustrating a growing trend in this time of quarantine, I got another call this morning to help a neighbor who was being abused by her husband. Putting on my clothes, I went to the home to do what I could to keep the situation from blowing up again while she packed up her things. While this situation was not nearly as volatile as the previous one had been, there were real COVID-19 risks. Thankfully, the abused woman packed

her things and got away. Though we live in a time of pandemic, this woman didn't have time to wait until this was all over.

"Can you help me?"

Once I got home, I turned on my computer to watch a church service. Pastor after pastor offered words of sympathy...but few offered words of actual help. There was a "Don't call us...God will call you" theme that seemed to repeat over and over again. This continued after the services and on into the comments and further messaging. In post after post, pastors criticized each

other for failures to social distance...disinfect spaces correctly...speak loudly enough...quarantine appropriately...take things seriously enough...and on and on and on. Safety was the theme of the hour not the needs of the most desperate amongst us. I shouldn't be surprised. Their God has always been and will always be...safety. So, what does it mean to risk everything to love our neighbor? Don't ask any of these dumbasses...they are too busy recording a meaningless sermon to make their listeners feel safe. There is little safety in the message of Jesus. Salvation comes through a cross.

"Can you help me?"

The answer is always yes.

Love is too important to hesitate.

Now, go.

Amen.

April 25, 2020

Jesus is Dead: COVID-19 and the Death of Salvation

I haven't blogged recently. I haven't felt much reason too. The times have weighed on my soul. The stories of COVID-19 have revealed many questions and supplied few answers.

Strangers in a strange land they traveled. Despite the difficult circumstances, they pressed forward. They knew that the baby was coming faster than they anticipated. Finally, they reached their destination. There was no room for them upon their arrival. They

were forced to sleep out in the cold. Though the smell of shit lingered in the air, they didn't care. Their focus remained on the arrival. After a few scares, the baby finally came. The beauty of the moment was unbelievable. Signs kept arriving to declare the child the Son of God. They both repeatedly pondered all of these things in their heart. Despite the improbability of it all, they had faith...until they didn't. Five months later, the child began to cough...and didn't stop. Days turned into weeks, COVID-19 was finally unmasked. Brutally, the child died. The Son of God was no more. Salvation was gone.

John the Baptist waited.

Lazarus rotted.

Demons possessed.

The blind stayed blind.

The least of these remained alone.

Matthew kept collecting taxes.

Mary Magdalene kept being abused.

The thief on the cross was executed without hope.

Nicodemus was institutionalized.

Soldiers kept fighting.

Thirst grew.

Pain festered.

Hope had expired.

Love was dead.

War raged.

COVID-19 changed everything. The Son of God is dead...and now we are fucked. There is none greater than the one we lost.

The Daughter of God died in New York City yesterday. Her name was Jay-Natalie La Santa. She only lived five months. The Daughter of God is dead...and now we are

fucked. COVID-19 has taken our salvation. Think about all we will miss by missing the Daughter of God...this little girl.

God is either cruel or nothing in this moment.

I'm praying that there is another answer.

Then again, I don't even know the question.

Amen.

May 17, 2020

The Fruit of the Virus: A Personal Account

The quarantine shocked us all. Nobody expected the world to be shutdown. Of all things, people raced to acquire toilet paper. One evening I saw a local pastor, filling her cart with as much toilet paper as she could carry. Later, I saw her post on social media that she would be completely unavailable. In that moment, I realized that wiping her ass was much more important to her than loving her neighbor. Unfortunately, she was

not alone. In other posts, I saw pastor after pastor declare that they were unavailable. Deeply convicted, I made a covenant with God that wherever there was a need I would go.

There was the abused woman trying to move her stuff out of her house. I wonder if I got it from the screaming husband.

There was the fleeing woman that needed my assistance finding a place to hide. I wonder if I got it from the front desk clerk.

There was the troubled man who was suicidal and just needed a friend. I wonder if I got it from some of the others who came to help.

There was the homeless man who had nothing to eat. I wonder if I got it from someone in the restaurant.

Despite wearing every type of protection I could get my hands on, I still got it.

In interview after interview, I called on other pastors to take the same risks I did to help their communities. Few heard me. Many even had the nerve to criticize me

when I was diagnosed with the virus. These worthless vessels of godlessness had the nerve to attack the sick guy rather than actually getting out and helping the sick.

Early in the week, I developed a slight fever...then came the headaches...then came the coughing. Despite the pandemic, I was positive that I just had a routine sickness. I figured it was just a minor case of the flu or a sinus infection. In the past, I'd just been able to sleep any sickness off. When I started being unable to get out of the bed, I realized that things were getting serious. Still, I tried to convince myself that I could handle it. I was wrong. Ultimately, I started having trouble

breathing...I couldn't stay hydrated...I could feel my kidneys not working properly. Early one morning, I knew that I couldn't take it anymore. In the midst of the pain, I drove myself to the hospital and was immediately admitted. The diagnosis was COVID19. I was told that I likely contracted the disease from some of the people that I'd helped. For three days, I precariously laid in a hospital bed alone. During those long hours, I prayed and prayed. Visions came and went. Repeatedly, God revealed to me that God runs to the sick and not away from them. This beautiful affirmation was the fruit of the virus for me.

Amen.

May 25, 2020

When a MOUSE becomes 4% HUMAN.

"Come just as you are..."

As the invitational music played, she started coming down the aisle. Everyone was speechless. When she got down to the front of the church, the pastor didn't know what to do. She raised up on her back legs and declared,

"What must I do to be baptized?" Everyone froze. Eventually, the pastor got the courage to ask, "Do you want to follow Jesus?" She responded, "I do." Reaching out his hand, the pastor grabbed her paw and led her up the steps. Looking into her eyes, the pastor managed to ask, "Where did you learn to talk?" "I am the product of recent scientific breakthroughs. In fact, I am just over half human." As they walked down into the water, fur floated everywhere. After a profession of faith, the pastor baptized the dog/human.

Think I'm crazy as shit?

For some time now, scientists have been experimenting with injected human cells into animal embryos. Just this past week...in a major breakthrough...researchers at the State University of New York at Buffalo and the Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center announced that they have created a mouse embryo that is right at 4% human (https://www.cnn.com/2020/05/21/us/human-mouse-chimera-hybrid-scn-trnd/index.html). Deep questions are here.

What percentage of human equates to the image of God?

How human does something have to be to qualify as human?

Can something that is a percentage human accept salvation?

Can a small percentage hybrid be baptized?

How human does a hybrid have to be to ethically have intercourse with a human?

Are we to bless the marriages of hybrids and humans?

At what point is a hybrid human?

Are we required to do unto a hybrid as we would have them do unto us?

There are millions of questions that come with these developments. We are not far from needing to answer them. If scientists are at 4% right now...how long will it take them to get to 20%...40%...60%? I don't know...but I do know that hybrids are already here. We have some tough theological questions to answer. The lines of humanity are growing increasingly blurred. Despite the

strange nature of these developments, I hope the lines of love will not.

Amen.

* I did graduate work (MS) in bioethics at Creighton University many years ago. When subjects such as this arise...I realize how important such study is to following Jesus/love in our present age...and in the age to come.

May 27, 2020

George Floyd's Final 300 Prayers

Imagine... the same prayer for 300 seconds. George Floyd prayed it over and over again. In the midst of the terror, I believe that Jesus was there...I believe Jesus heard Floyd's prayer...I believe that Jesus died with a knee on his throat praying 300 times, "I can't breath." We cannot know love/progress/justice without going there ourselves. I invite you to meditate on George Floyd's last thoughts. For 300 seconds, think/say "I Can't Breath." Let the intensity/your connection to Floyd

grow until those final seconds. Jesus will meet you there...

First. I Can't Breath.

Second. I Can't Breath.

Third. I Can't Breath.

Fourth. I Can't Breath.

Fifth. I Can't Breath.

Sixth. I Can't Breath.

Seventh. I Can't Breath.

Eighth. I Can't Breath.

Ninth. I Can't Breath.

Tenth. I Can't Breath.

Eleventh. I Can't Breath.

Twelfth. I Can't Breath.

Thirteenth. I Can't Breath.

Fourteenth. I Can't Breath.

Fifteenth. I Can't Breath.

Sixteenth. I Can't Breath.

Seventeenth. I Can't Breath.

Eighteenth. I Can't Breath.

Nineteenth. I Can't Breath.

Twentieth. I Can't Breath.

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Two hundred fifty-seventh. I Can't Breath.

Two hundred fifty-eighth. I Can't Breath.

Two hundred fifty-ninth. I Can't Breath.

Two hundred sixtieth. I Can't Breath.

Two hundred sixty-first. I Can't Breath.

Two hundred sixty-second. I Can't Breath.

Two hundred sixty-third. I Can't Breath.

Two hundred sixty-fourth. I Can't Breath.

Two hundred sixty-fifth. I Can't Breath.

Two hundred sixty-sixth. I Can't Breath.

Two hundred sixty-seventh. I Can't Breath.

Two hundred sixty-eighth. I Can't Breath.

Two hundred sixty-ninth. I Can't Breath.

Two hundred seventieth. I Can't Breath.

Two hundred seventy-first. I Can't Breath.

Two hundred seventy-second. I Can't Breath.

Two hundred seventy-third. I Can't Breath.

Two hundred seventy-fourth. I Can't Breath.

Two hundred seventy-fifth. I Can't Breath.

Two hundred seventy-sixth. I Can't Breath.

Two hundred seventy-seventh. I Can't Breath.

Two hundred seventy-eighth. I Can't Breath.

Two hundred seventy-ninth. I Can't Breath.

Two hundred eightieth. I Can't Breath.

Two hundred eighty-first. I Can't Breath.

Two hundred eighty-second. I Can't Breath.

Two hundred eighty-third. I Can't Breath.

Two hundred eighty-fourth. I Can't Breath.

Two hundred eighty-fifth. I Can't Breath.

Two hundred eighty-sixth. I Can't Breath.

Two hundred eighty-seventh. I Can't Breath.

Two hundred eighty-eighth. I Can't Breath.

Two hundred eighty-ninth. I Can't Breath.

Two hundred ninetieth. I Can't Breath.

Two hundred ninety-first. I Can't Breath.

Two hundred ninety-second. I Can't Breath.

Two hundred ninety-third. I Can't Breath.

Two hundred ninety-fourth. I Can't Breath.

Two hundred ninety-fifth. I Can't Breath.

Two hundred ninety-sixth. I Can't Breath.

Two hundred ninety-seventh. I Can't Breath.

Two hundred ninety-eighth. I Can't Breath.

Two hundred ninety-ninth. I Can't Breath.

Three hundredth. I Can't Breath.

Amen.

May 29, 2020

God in the Flames: Reflections on the Riots

We watch as violence engulfs our cities...and we have no idea what to do. Maybe there is nothing to do. Perhaps love is dead. Maybe there is no us left. Perhaps I is all that is. While the answers to such propositions are fleeting...perhaps there is more of an answer than you realize...crackling there in the flames.

Variations of the idols of injustice are everywhere. Daily we are asked to worship. Racism? Sexism? Capitalism? (Don't forget that this all started over some suspected counterfeit money.) Transphobia? Xenophobia? Ageism? Homophobia? Ableism? The

lists of marginalizations and oppressions are endless. We know them well. We spend most of our time kneeling in front of them...either by our actions or our inactions. We don't have to. The idols are a product of our acquiescence to their objectives. They have no power on their own.

Many years ago, three seekers/protestors were faced with a difficult choice. They were told that they could either worship the idols of injustice or face the flame. While none of them wanted to die, they had also made the decision that worshipping idols was no way to live. Boldly, they declared that they were ready to face the

flames. The keepers of the idols salivated over the moment. They were going to make an example out of each one of them. With a violent rush, they pushed them in. Nothing happened. The keepers of the idols had kept everyone in line by threatening them with the flames and here were the three seekers walking around unharmed. As they looked closer, they noticed there were now four people in the flames...with the fourth glowing as the incarnation of justice/love. On that day, there was proven to be something more than injustice...something more than idols...an answer.

In the midst of all of the idol/injustice worship constantly going on all around us, I want you to stare deeply into the flames of this moment. Look into the rioting... Look into the anger... Look... Realize that these seekers/protestors are not alone. The answers to the questions that trouble our souls are found in the destruction of idols...and the realization that God is standing in the flames.

Amen.

May 30, 2020

Dallas: I'm Ashamed

The hour is late. I can't sleep. Tonight, I've watched the nation burn. Theologically, I don't have a problem with the destruction of the property of the oppressor. Jesus destroyed everything he could get his hands on in the Temple. In the midst of this moment, I don't believe that Jesus would hesitate to torch a police car...or even destroy a predatory business. The problem is that current rioting is indiscriminate. In the chaos, people

are destroying the very necessities that they need to survive. Such reactions are not the fault of the oppressor...they are the fault of organizers/community leaders who are bringing people together with no idea how to achieve anything resembling justice (who are ultimately becoming oppressors in and of themselves). George Floyd didn't die for rioters to burn down the only source of food/medicine that a community has. George Floyd didn't die for random people to beat the shit out of each other in the streets. George Floyd didn't die for this.

The most disturbing set of images that I saw tonight came out of Dallas. I didn't go tonight for one primary reason. The organizer of the event is an arrested/indicted/convicted/repeated abuser of both women and children. In time, I've realized that violent people create situations of violence that spare no victims. From my home, that is exactly what I witnessed. Instead of sticking around to demand limits on the chaos, the organizer/and other local leadership were nowhere to be found. In their absence, I watched something that I never want to see again. I haven't given my life to the cause of justice for this.

In the midst of a stalled intersection, multiple young black men attacked an older black man. Within seconds, they had ripped the older man out of his vehicle and were beating the shit out of him. Punch after punch and kick after kick connected with their intended target. Some cheered. Others gawked. Nobody did anything to help for a considerable amount of time. Within seconds of his life, he managed to escape. George Floyd didn't die for those punches. George Floyd didn't die for those kicks. George Floyd didn't die for any of that shit.

Beating innocent people has nothing to do with justice.

I am ashamed that there are people in Dallas who thought that it did.

Amen.

June 8, 2020

White Christians are Theologically Compromised

These are crazy times. Folk don't know what to do...especially white folk. Within the white folk arena, there is one group that seems to have lost all sense they might ever have had on reality...white Christians. On the daily, I've been bombarded by bizarre statements/actions that white Christians are making/taking in the name of helping. These bombardments provide a textbook example of what things look like when helping hurts. I've tried to refrain from having this conversation. Initially, I dismissed white Christians as harmless...then...I started reading their theologically compromised bullshit.

"There are no white people in the Bible. Take all the time you need with that."

Just today, I saw/heard this quote at least a dozen times. Each time I encountered it, I thought about someone seeing it, thinking it was clever and excitedly sharing it. Of course, this is how dumbassticity spreads...and it is far more deadly than any virus.

"Americans believe in the reality of ‘race’ as a defined, indubitable feature of the natural world. Racism—the need to ascribe bone-deep features to people and then

humiliate, reduce, and destroy them—inevitably follows from this inalterable condition. In this way, racism is rendered as the innocent daughter of Mother Nature, and one is left to deplore the Middle Passage or Trail of Tears the way one deplores an earthquake, a tornado, or any other phenomenon that can be cast as beyond the handiwork of men. But race is the child of racism, not the father."

-Ta-Nehesi Coates, Between the World and Me (7)

White is not an indubitable feature of the natural world.

White is a modern construct.

White is a sickness.

White is a child of racism.

White continues to be and will forever be a racist construct...because it was created to oppress.

"There are no white people in the Bible. Take all the time you need with that."

Though white people created many of the modern categories of race...they don't get to put that construct into an ancient text as if the writers would have had any idea of such a construct. It is yet another manifestation of racism/unleashed modernism.

On the other hand... While it is true that there are no white people in the Bible, the statement is misleading. There are no white people because the construct of whiteness as a racial category did not exist. The rise/racism of colonialism created more and more of a need for people of fairer complexion to use the racist

category of white. With that said, taking white people out of the Bible is also problematic.

White Christians just don't need any more encouragement to separate themselves from Biblical moral principles. They have been successful enough at that already. In fact, I believe we must always make sure that white people understand that the oppressors/marginalizers/haters in the scriptures are their kin folk no matter whether they are their skin folk or not.

So, I encourage people to be more concerned with how white people are acting rather than whether or not you can fit their modern construction of race into an ancient text.

Ok...I've taken all the time I need with this...

Stop putting this kind of ignorant bullshit out there. When you think something is clever...make sure it is theologically sound first.

Maybe instead of sharing a bunch of shit there is a need to embrace the heat...and get your ass out in the street.

Jesus will meet you there.

Amen.

++ In terms of our modern understanding of race, there are also no black people in the Bible...although they do live out Biblical principles (especially of love/justice/forgiveness) much better than white folk do.

June 9, 2020

Defund the Police? Skepticism in a Time of Sloganeering.

The days are unkind...hopeless...evil. Just when you think you've seen the last video for a little while...another officer kills another citizen. What are we to do? The situations are not always the same...but they deliver the same indictment. We train our officers to kill and then expect them to not to kill in the field. We can't have it both ways. Violence births violence over and over again. We created this monster. We have

birthed the violence that is modern policing. So... How do we kill it? Defund the police?

Some of the things that I've been told...

"If they start taking away officers...whose neighborhood do you think they are going to take them out of? They ain't going to shortchange all those rich white neighborhoods. Nope... What am I supposed to do about the crack house next door? We don't need a damn psychologist for that shit...we need somebody to come down here and lock their asses up. I am all about reforming the police...but don't start defunding and take

away any remote sense of safety that I might have. I'm 82 years old. I can't do it by myself."

"The young black folk that come to work here at PD do so because this is one of the best paying jobs that they are going to get. I know...because I was one of those young black folk at one time. I didn't have anywhere else to go. Are you going to take that opportunity away from many of the marginalized and oppressed people that you claim to want to save? Defunding is going to hurt the people that look like me the most."

"It wasn't a few months ago that activists were calling for more police. Do you think that things are going to get better with less money? It is inevitable that certain communities will experience more oppression and marginalization if we go down this defunding route."

"Gay men can't even walk to their apartments at night. While everyone is out there chanting for the police to be defunded...I am out here getting my ass beat for my wallet. If their chants become reality... Who's going to be there for us?"

"'Trans Women of Color Matter.' So, who is going to help us solve all of these murders?"

I hate the police. For decades, officers have been allowed to function with impunity. Drastic reform is long overdue. Hiring must be centered on rigorous psychological evaluations. Training must focus on deescalation techniques. Functioning must constantly be evaluated by the highest moral/ethical standards. Departments need to hire psychologists...social workers...local experts...and all sorts of other persons to help engage communities in positive ways and stunt violence before it starts. Surplus military equipment

has got to go. There is no reason for citizens to be gassed in the streets...ever. The problem is that a considerable amount of the reforms that people have called for...cost money. While I love the idea in theory, I just don't understand how all/any of these reforms could happen by defunding the police. I am all about taking hard looks at budgets and moving money around to use it in more progressive ways...but I am not interested in defunding...or even abolishing...type actions that cause the marginalized and oppressed to suffer more than they already have. While I realize that "Defund Police Culture" doesn't sound as good as "Defund the Police"...but I think that is exactly what we need to do.

In fact, I think that's the only path to create a just society

while truly protect the least of these amongst us.

Amen.

You called me out.

Asked me to go.

I didn't know...

I was part of the show.

Words were fierce.

I was mad too.

This was are moment...

To do what we had to do.

Someone gave me a bullhorn.

I shouted loud.

Then somebody took it...

Said I wasn't allowed.

The night went on.

The march was tense.

There was no room...

To sit on the fence.

There was a must.

There was no trust.

Then came the trap...

My arrest was the aftermath.

I should have known.

What I know now.

Truth is hiding out there.

You must trust what you feel.

The struggle is real...

June 19, 2020

The Good Samaritan: For Our Moment

On one occasion a theologian stood up to test Jesus.

“Teacher,” she asked, “what must one do to no longer be racist?

“What have your studies told you?” he replied. “What does it say in your books?”

She answered, “‘I guess it begins with... Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.'”

“You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “This is the cure for racism.”

But she was certain that it wasn't that simple, so she asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

In reply, Jesus said: “An older man was traveling through a large city, when he was attacked by rioters. They beat him mercilessly and left him for dead. Content to keep protesting, activists saw the man and passed by on the other side. Desperate to save their stores, business owners didn't even look in his direction. Scared for their lives, the police ran by. Just when it

seemed that all hope was lost, a young man came to the aid of the older man. His heart full of love, the young man began to bandage his wounds as best he could. Since it was impossible to get help where they were, the young man dragged him to his car and took him to the hospital. Until the older man was better, the young man stayed by his side. When it came time for the old man to go home, he looked at the young man and said, 'I owe you my life...I never thought that someone who looked like you would be willing to help someone who looked like me'"

“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of rioters?”

The theologian replied, “The merciful one. But what has that got to do with race?”

Jesus told him, “Everything.”

Amen.

August 6, 2020

Leaving Dallas

Life changes. Rapid developments demand rapid responses. Such is how we got here.

I guess there are many first times that change us forever. This moment was no different. I was asked to speak to a huge crowd of people. I stood and delivered. Repeatedly, I called churches to account with regard to their records on race and involvement in the movement

against police brutality. Throughout the night, I followed the leadership of the evening. Towards the end, we were led into a trap. While the leadership kept on marching, we were put in the back of a police van. The movement moved on without us. Until, our mug shots were needed to illustrate the sacrifices that people were making. If a sympathetic local attorney hadn't helped us, we all would have probably done time. Once I got out, I left Dallas.

Over the years, I have worked with family after family to bring about justice. The details of the cases haunt me. Every situation involved the most marginalized and

oppressed people in the community. I don't care what identity the perpetrator or the victim might be...I demanded justice. Repeatedly, I demanded that leadership get involved in these cases. No...we don't do undocumented folks...we don't do homeless folks...we don't do white folks...we don't do Transgender folks...we don't do drug addicts...we don't do lesbians... The list goes on and on. I became a leader in the movement...not because anybody appointed me...but because I was willing to work on the cases that nobody else would. I always felt like this is what Jesus would have done. Still do...actually. Despite my best efforts at inclusion...people were angry that I was taking all these

cases. On multiple occasions...based on threats of violence...I had to leave Dallas.

I was there. Then, I wasn't. Then, I was back. Those shots will stay with me forever. I had just led thousands of people through the streets of Dallas. There was a beautiful energy in the place. The gun shattered it all. In the distance, I saw the officers go down. Blood ran down the street. Bullets ricocheted. I prepared to be shot at any moment. For multiple days after, I gave interview after interview. I wanted to make sure that the message of love and justice triumphed over the message of hate. The rest of the leadership did not. As

their message of division set in, I began to suspect horrible things of those that I had been with earlier that night. The threats started coming in that night... When I was forced to met them viscerally...and was told that my family was in danger...I left Dallas.

The work continued. I marched. I wrote. I spoke. I refused to leave anything in Dallas.

Violence interrupted again. Movement leadership started to be repeatedly accused of domestic violence. I couldn't sit by as women were getting their asses beat. I

stepped in. I knew what the consequences would be. I left Dallas.

I tried to stay involved. Then, I saw innocent people of all races getting brutalized in the streets. Such actions had nothing to do with justice. Such actions had nothing to love. Such actions had nothing to do with Jesus. Regardless of the reason, it was all evil. I had to leave Dallas.

Though I am proud of the over seven years I have given to the struggle...and the many accomplishments that

have been made...leaving Dallas was not a hard decision.

In fact, I think it's the only way I could have made it out alive.

Amen.

August 15, 2020

Racist Tropes: On Tomahawks

We were up late. Atlanta had never seen anything like this. The Braves were on the cusp of the World Series. We were full of nervous energy. This was Game 7. Francisco Cabrera was pinch-hitting. The Braves needed two runs to win. Almost effortlessly, Cabrera hit the ball into a hole in left field. We jumped up on our feet and started screaming. David Justice scored the tying run. Right behind him, Sid Bream slid into home to win the game and secure a trip to the World Series. We did the "Tomahawk Chop" all night long. It is one of the more joyful moments of my life. I can remember every second. Those guys were giants to me.

Our teacher didn't give us any context for the film...she just pushed play. Over the next two hours, I was exposed to some very troubling facts about our history. We raped Native women. We destroyed Native culture. We tortured Native people. We committed genocide against our Native neighbors. In those moments, I thought about us doing the "Tomahawk Chop." In the midst of what I was learning, I realized that disrespectful was an understatement.

*I'm sure that many who read this will quibble with my use of the pronoun, "we." To you I say, if you are the

beneficiary of these evils then you are intrinsically connected to them. Whether you were physically present or not is of no consequence, when you reap the harvest of injustice you are one with the sower of injustice. Make no mistake, we still live on Native lands taken from Native peoples through what ultimately became a genocide of Native peoples.

Even though I still love the Braves, I don't do the "Tomahawk Chop" any more. I feel like God has guided me to a different place...a place of justice. The message of Jesus in these matters is clear (and most other major world religions say something similar). We are to love

our neighbors as we love ourselves. Love always begins with repentance...a turning of the heart. So, in this moment I ask you to turn to love...I ask you to turn to justice...I ask you to stop disrespecting Native peoples who have been constantly mistreated/violated/slaughtered since nonNative peoples arrived. We can change. We can repent. We can love.

With all of this said, surely now is the time to consider a change to the name of your newspaper. There is nothing respectful about the name, "Tomahawk." In fact, I would say that it is a form of violence that further

compounds historical violence. Surely, your readers and the wider community would benefit from a lesson in love and justice. I have no doubt that there are plenty of other names for your newspaper that better speak to the standard of journalism you are trying to maintain. May these words ignite a spark of radical change that can touch even the hardest of hearts. There is so much more to you/us than racist tropes.

Amen.

August 16, 2020

A Theology of Stigmata

Blood poured forth from the body of the incarnate God. Depression smothered his consciousness. Mania rattled his being. Psychosis toyed with his understanding of reality. Even in the midst of such sickness...of such disease...Jesus continued. Based on his own words, the biggest physical wounds of the passion event were in his mind.

Since the advent of the church, reports of stigmata...or spontaneous supernatural appearances of the wounds

of Christ on his followers...have surfaced throughout the world. Occurrences of such wounds began not long after the resurrection. The Apostle Paul even declared in Galatians 6:17, "...for I bear in/on my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." Perhaps the most known person to have experienced stigmata is St. Francis of Assisi. His experiences brought the experience into the wider consciousness of the church. Throughout recent centuries, various orders of monks in the East have reported receiving the wounds. In modernity, Italian Roman Catholic Friar Padre Pio carried the wounds throughout his life. The Friar's bloody gloves celebrating communion have become almost

synonymous with ideas of stigmata. In the present, well known Croatian Roman Catholic priest Father Zlatko Sudac perpetually experiences the wounds of Christ. Images of a bloody cross on his forehead bleeding down his face are particularly stunning. While I am sure that belief in these phenomenon is not necessary for salvation, I am sure that these occurrences are a form of the inbreaking of salvation...a gift that can draw us closer to God. The problem with historical understanding of stigmata is not the reality of it...it is the assumption that stigmata only occurs in certain outward ways.

If we are talking about the physical wounds of the crucifixion or passion event, then we must understand that the wounds had both outward and inward manifestations. Without question, I believe that stigmata manifests in people's brains as well. In the experiences of depression...mania...psychosis that Jesus experienced there is a wellspring of salvation to be found. How many people are out there experiencing a mental form of stigmata and have no reference to describe what is going on? How many saints have we missed because we have just assumed that stigmata only have outward manifestations? God is bigger than the limitations of our minds. God is interested in the

boundless potential of the grace that can flow from our souls. Maybe there are countless persons experiencing stigmata in mental hospitals/institutions all over the world. Surely, this is a phenomenon that is taking place in all sorts of people who love God.

Just over a decade ago, I met a woman named Angela while I served as a mental health chaplain. Before I stepped into her room, I read her chart. Her diagnosis was religious mania/psychosis. Upon entering, I immediately recognized the words. Over and over, Angela was reciting the words of the passion. When I asked her what was going on, she told me that she was

mentally experiencing the passion incessantly. What the doctors called mental illness, started to look like something phenomenal. Over time, I was able to name what I saw...stigmata. Before she was discharged, I wanted to make sure she was going to be ok to handle going back out into the world with her gift...she told me not to worry... "God is with me."

Stigmata should never remain private. Such an experience is given to the recipient in order for them to share that gift with the world. Surely, we must recognize a spiritual gift when we see it. Bodies oozing blood are important...but so too are minds eternally

connected with the mental anguish of Jesus. There is salvation to be found there. Open your hearts my friends. ALL of the gifts of God are for the people of God. Open your eyes. Come Lord Jesus.

Amen.

August 20, 2020

COVID-19: On Disability Discrimination

I couldn't breathe. I literally couldn't breathe.

I was hospitalized. I was so sick. Those days were probably the closest I've ever come to death. Each breath seemed to grow more precious than the last. Everything seemed to be shutting down. Kidneys. Lungs. Joints. Brain. Slowly, my health improved to the point where I was released to recover at home. I have traveled out of the woods...but the woods have left their scares. Though it has been four months, I still struggle. My doctor tells me that I always will. The most direct

way of saying it is that COVID-19 has left a deep impression on me.

I can't breathe. I literally can't breathe.

I needed an oil change. I didn't think it would be that big of a deal. I'd been going to the same shop for over a decade. When I dropped off the car, I got a little winded as I was walking to the counter. The manager of the joint asked where I'd been. Without thinking much of it, I told him that I'd been sick with COVID-19. The colorless expression on his face said it all. Right then and there, he told me that they could not change my oil.

When I told him that it had been months since I had it, he asked me to leave. It was an incredible heartbreaking moment. Instead of sitting in it, I called the corporate offices. After threatening to go to the media...and sue the shit out of them...they relented. Needless to say, I got my oil changed. However, I am still amazed at the ignorance that the people in the shop exhibited. Their fear triumphed over their humanity. I will fight against injustice.

I can't breathe. I literally can't breathe.

I thought it was over with. I thought that people had become educated enough to quit doing this shit. I was wrong. Just yesterday, I was in mailing/packaging store. In passing, the clerk commented that I looked like I was staying healthy in the midst of COVID-19. Without thinking much of it, I told him that I'd already been really sick many months ago. Instead of a word of encouragement, he told me that I needed to leave the store. With my package in hand, I went outside and called the corporate office of the establishment. It wasn't long before the same clerk was forced to send my package. I was amazed at his ignorance. Fear was the

only thing he knew anything about. I will fight against injustice.

I can't breathe. I literally can't breathe.

I just need to get my oil changed.

I just need to send a package.

I just need to breathe.

Amen.

August 22, 2020

Racist Tropes: On Tomahawks

We were up late. Atlanta had never seen anything like this. The Braves were on the cusp of the World Series. We were full of nervous energy. This was Game 7. Francisco Cabrera was pinch-hitting. The Braves needed two runs to win. Almost effortlessly, Cabrera hit

the ball into a hole in left field. We jumped up on our feet and started screaming. David Justice scored the tying run. Right behind him, Sid Bream slid into home to win the game and secure a trip to the World Series. We did the "Tomahawk Chop" all night long. It is one of the more joyful moments of my life. I can remember every second. Those guys were giants to me.

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against our Native neighbors. In those moments, I thought about us doing the "Tomahawk Chop." In the midst of what I was learning, I realized that disrespectful was an understatement.

*I'm sure that many who read this will quibble with my use of the pronoun, "we." To you I say, if you are the beneficiary of these evils then you are intrinsically connected to them. Whether you were physically present or not is of no consequence, when you reap the harvest of injustice you are one with the sower of injustice. Make no mistake, we still live on Native lands

taken from Native peoples through what ultimately became a genocide of Native peoples.

Even though I still love the Braves, I don't do the "Tomahawk Chop" any more. I feel like God has guided me to a different place...a place of justice. The message of Jesus in these matters is clear (and most other major world religions say something similar). We are to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. Love always begins with repentance...a turning of the heart. So, in this moment I ask you to turn to love...I ask you to turn to justice...I ask you to stop disrespecting Native peoples who have been constantly

mistreated/violated/slaughtered since nonNative peoples arrived. We can change. We can repent. We can love.

With all of this said, surely now is the time to consider a change to the name of your newspaper. There is nothing respectful about the name, "Tomahawk." In fact, I would say that it is a form of violence that further compounds historical violence. Surely, your readers and the wider community would benefit from a lesson in love and justice. I have no doubt that there are plenty of other names for your newspaper that better speak to the standard of journalism you are trying to maintain.

May these words ignite a spark of radical change that can touch even the hardest of hearts. There is so much more to you/us than racist tropes.

Amen.

August 29, 2019

When Justice Kills Truth

Who are we?

Are we just guessing?

Truth still matters right?

Evidence should dictate the response right?

Assumptions shouldn't be the basis of judgment right?

"In that moment...you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free..."

Cases of police brutality are complicated. We hand out guns and expect the police to eliminate threats. The problem is that we don't tell them exactly who the threats are. So, responses to explosive situations are based solely on the officer's judgment. Those who are on the receiving end of these decisions are not always easily characterized. Some are hardened criminals. Some are just having a bad day. Some are violent. Some

simply lack the mental capacity to interact with anyone in a healthy way. Some are just in the wrong place at the wrong time. Some are just plain innocent. The bottom line is that people are complicated. Yet, we expect complicated to meet complicated in a way that is not complicated...so we simplify it. We create scenarios based on assumptions and run with them. On very few occasions do we know the truth/all of the facts right away. After more than a decade working dozens and dozens of police brutality cases, I can't think of one case where there wasn't many twists and turns during the reconstruction of what actually. However, waiting often feels so violent in the midst of perceived injustice. We

want justice now. So, we go with what we got with the expectation that we are/or we are going to be right. Unfortunately, sometimes we're not...and such failures only lead to the silencing of more voices.

A few years ago in North Texas, a woman claimed she was brutally rapped by a state law enforcement officer. Since we all hated the police, we believed her...and asked few questions. Immediately, I began to organize. No justice, no peace. One of the more famous civil rights attorneys in the country picked up the case. We were ready for war...as we should have been in a case like this. Just before we prepared to respond in the media,

evidence was released that made it very clear that this woman made the entire story up. While I am sure that officers commit sexual assaults, they didn't this time.

Just this afternoon, I was contact by a fellow activist and told about police in Minneapolis gunning an innocent man down. On social media, people were calling for violence. At the scene, a riot was brewing. In conversation after conversation everybody was sure that they knew what was happening...and told anyone who would listen. Later, other videos were released that made the situation much clearer....though still very tragic. The innocent man had actually been involved in

a murder earlier in the day. The police didn't shoot him. Images clearly show that the young man shot himself. Until more evidence was released, destruction of a city that has already been destroyed was probable...if not guaranteed.

We cannot love our neighbors as we love our self without truth. Though situations are complicated, love is not. Love is about justice...real justice...not cheap justice. Our work cannot be completed without facts. Those who create facts out of assumptions...or even the assumptions of others...make the task of justice much more difficult. Reality is important. Evidence is

important. Truth is important. If not, the movement is already dead.

"The assumptions come only to steal, kill and destroy; truth has come so that you may have justice, and have it everywhere..."

Amen.

August 29, 2020

When the Movement Executes/Cancels the Individual

In 1968, a teenager left his home in Florida. Desperate for something more than his previous life had to offer, he headed to New York. Upon arrival, he became involved with the Black Panther Party. Over the short time he was involved, he functioned on the periphery of the organization. With little evidence (and perhaps because of his youthful lack of commitment), Party leadership began to suspect that he was a snitch (police informant). In 1969, he was violently transported to Party headquarters in New Haven, Connecticut. In a small room, he was strapped to a bed and tortured. Boiling water was poured on him until he was prepared

to tell them whatever they wanted him to say. After multiple coerced tearful confessions, Party members drove him to a marsh in Middlefield. As he begged for his life, Party members shot him twice (execution style / to both the head and the chest). To this day, there is still no evidence that the teenager ever told law enforcement anything.

His name was Alex Rackley.

On multiple occasions, I've engaged fellow activists about this historical event. Most often, I get the following response, "Sometimes it is necessary to

sacrifice an individual for the good of the movement." I find such an assertion to be beyond horrendous. Although, I've seen such thinking take place in activist circles for a long time.

Though I don't think activists are summarily executing fellow activists across the country (although I certainly wouldn't put it past some participants), I do think that every "cancel" solidifies this idea that individuals are less important than the movement. Not only do I find such actions/thinking to be blatantly unjust, I also find them to be counterproductive to the justice that everyone says that they're trying to achieve. The

elimination of individuals (whether physically or mentally) creates an explosion of injustice that keeps any movement from happening. You cannot "cancel" you're way to justice.

Truthfully, Alex Rackley is not just a historical tragedy...he is a present warning.

If you leave anyone behind...or force anyone out of the way (physically or mentally)...you are slowly eroding the mechanism for achieving what you want.

The methods by which you have judged will eventually turned on you.

The Black Panther Party lost much influence and slowly eroded after the trials of members for the death of Rackley. Modern "cancelers" will too. Eventually, they/you will find themselves surrounded by the ruins of possibility.

Individuals are important...in fact they are the only mechanism capable of creating change. "For the good of the movement"-type destruction/violence has consistently proven to be "for the bad of the movement."

Sacrifice is necessary...but the sacrifice should come from within...not by sacrificing others.

Surely...justice is a collective effort...that can only be full realized by the collective.

For every individual has sinned and fallen short of the glory of the movement.

Amen.

August 31, 2020

angels amongst us?

When I was an early teenager, I worked across the street for my neighbor. I cut. I mulched. I sweat. I pruned. I pushed. I edged. I did it all. In spite of the miserable pay, I enjoyed it. There is something about doing something alone that is redemptive at that age. Early one rainy morning, I put on my coat to run across the street to collect my money. I didn't realize how

blinding things had got. When I was in the middle of the street, I heard a loud horn. The van skidded at me. I just knew that I was dead. The world seemed to stop in those moments. The wet grill was almost touching my face. Rain seemed to hang in the air. Before I could react, I felt something pick me up and throw me across the street. There is no possible way that I could have escaped certain death on my own. It wasn't a force. I felt the hands. From the ditch, I looked up and absolutely nothing was there. I was so shaken up that I forgot to get my money. Regularly, my mind wonders back to that day. Why didn't I die? Why am I still here? What was the force that grabbed me? Why isn't such a

power evident in all of the injustices apparent in the world? I don't know. I simply know that we need more of whatever it was that I experienced that day...and we need it fast. Everybody should be spared. Everybody deserves peace. God is capable. No more police brutality. No more killings. No more hate. God!!! Please!!! Send us some angels...or more than we got. Whatever happened to me, I pray will come to pass for all who face danger. Such intervention is beginning to seem like our only hope. Perhaps, it always was.

Amen.

September 3, 2020

Micah Johnson / Kyle Rittenhouse : The Same Demon

I write about it more than I ever imagined I would. I guess I could have never imagined experiencing it in the first place. There is no doubt that I am still there. I know what I saw. I can still see it. Every step brought me deeper into another world.

"Does tonight feel differently to you?" "What do you mean?" "I just have a bad feeling about all this?" What do you mean?" "Something evil is here."

For many years, I was skeptical of ideas of demons. Such thoughts seemed to only be relics of the past. I will never forget sitting in seminary...and one of my professors angrily shouting out... "If you want to talk about demons...this ain't the place...we don't talk about fantasy here." Over time, I experienced enough situations that I changed my mind. However, I'd never experienced evil unleashed like I did that day.

The shots. The blood. The smell. The pain.

There is no denying who did that shit.

In the name of black nationalism...

On July 7, 2015, Micah Johnson killed five Dallas, Texas police officers.

There was a demon there that night...and it was in him.

He was black.

I saw it.

Those who saw it will write about it more than they would ever imagine they would. I'm sure that they could have never imagined that they would see what they saw. Those who remain know what they saw. They will never forget it. Whether they know it or not, they experienced another world that night.

"Those guys are really scaring me." "Don't pay those racist assholes any mind." "I bet those guns aren't even loaded." "There is something evil in our midst."

I'm sure most of the people there were skeptical about ideas of possession. Nobody expects to witness/experience the incarnation of evil. Regardless of what they expected, evil visited them.

The shots. The blood. The chase. The death.

There is no denying who did that shit.

In the name of white nationalism...

On August 25, 2020, Kyle Rittenhouse killed two people protesting in Kenosha, Wisconsin.

There was a demon there that night...and it was him.

He was white.

They saw it.

In our age of hyper identity politics...

It's interesting that demons are willing to empower whoever they can to perpetuate evil/killing.

I wish that we had the courage to empower whoever we can to perpetuate good.

Surely we can be more open than the demons.

It seems that our hyper identity politics are killing us.

Amen.

September 11, 2020

Cancel Culture & the Gospel of Jesus Christ

There once was a man named Matthew. The community hated him. Day and night he robbed them of their money. Though he called them taxes, they were really indulgences. To say that he was canceled would be an understatement. Most wanted nothing to do with him at all. The only people who stuck around were people who'd also been shunned. Then one day...a man named Jesus walked by. Drawn to the canceled/cancelled, Jesus called to Matthew. Witnesses were astonished. Nobody could believe that Jesus was even talking to him. After conversation about the power of grace, Matthew invited Jesus to his home for dinner. Quickly, the house filled

with people who had also been canceled/cancelled. When people found out about the dinner, they declared, "Anybody that would eat with all of those assholes must be an asshole too." It didn't take long before people started to say/spread that Jesus was also canceled/cancelled. Upon hearing of their viral accusations, Jesus replied...

“It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. Go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”

Just a few days ago, I published a piece saying that Micah Johnson (the domestic terrorist who ambushed five police officers in Dallas four years ago) had a demon in him to have committed such an atrocity. Unfortunately, there are many in Dallas/and perhaps elsewhere who romanticize his actions and call him a hero. Upon the publication of my piece, many of those folks came after me. Of all of the threats/responses...there was one from an ignorant young man I've encountered many times before that said; "I thought we canceled this guy last year." I was amazed that he thought that he/his we could cancel me or anybody else. In that moment, I realized that people

only have the power to cancel anybody if we give them that power. Cancelers need our prayers not our assent to their evil.

The message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is clear. We are not called to cancel anybody...no matter the circumstance. We are called to love/restore the canceled/cancelled. The story of Matthew is one of many that illustrate that Jesus loves the canceled. In fact, Jesus loves the canceled/cancelled so much that Jesus is willing to be canceled/cancelled with them. Justice is found in love not judgement.

In our age of cancel culture, I encourage you to think about all of those who have been canceled/cancelled in our society...and pray for their healing/restoration. Don't forget that Jesus always sides with the powerless...not the powerful. For those who continue to believe in cancel culture...

I call on you to repent.

For the realm of God is at hand.

Amen.

September 14, 2020

Perpetrator Shooting. Deputies Dying. Activists Cheering. : Where is God?

* This post was written over the period of a couple of days / from the time that I found out about the shooting until now.

Just a few hours ago, two deputies from the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department were ambushed and shot

multiple times in Compton. The deputies were sitting in their patrol car taking a break. Not long after the attack, two families were informed that a stranger had just brutalized someone they love. Presently, the two deputies are fighting for their lives.

Somewhere, there is a person pondering their deeds. For a long time, the person had been waiting for the right time to complete this perceived task of revolution. Now, the deed is done...and everything is exactly the same. In time, a family will be informed that someone they love is either dead or charged with murder.

In the economy of God, there are three victims in this situation. Evil brutalized all three. Unfortunately, very few people will be able to engage this story in this way. They will need to place blame and work to cancel the perpetrator. But...God has told us to pray for healing...to pray for our enemies...to pray. In the midst of such awful situations we are nothing without prayer. However, prayers that lack love for all parties involved are nothing. God loves. Such is the essence of faith. We are nothing without a wide/deep love for all people.

As the perpetrator was walking up to the patrol car, God was there. With all divine strength, God pushed on their

shoulders to keep them from such evil. Loudly, God begged them to stop. They didn't. The pain was so real. The clouds darkened. The heavens wailed in mourning. Then, the perpetrator pulled the trigger.

In the car, two victims gushed blood as the perpetrator ran. Struggling to hold on, the victims were rushed to the hospital. Both have endured numerous surgeries and are not out of the woods yet.

Today, activists gathered outside the hospital and cheered the events. "Death to the Police!" "Smells like Bacon!" "More!" "Fuck the Police!"

Believe it or not, God was with these ignorant pieces of shit as well. In their midst, God was desperately trying to pull them to a place of love. They didn't listen. God keeps trying.

Prayers for the shooter.

God has not left them.

Prayers for the deputies.

God has not left them.

Prayers for the activists.

God has not left them.

Prayers for us.

God has not left us.

Amen.

September 16, 2020

Ashe County, North Carolina: Racism Definitely Lives Here.

You wouldn't think it would matter that much...it does. For close to ten years, we lived in a place where all we had to do to dispose of our garbage was roll it down to the curb. Since we moved up in the mountains, we have to drive our garbage to a collection site. I probably go a couple of times per week. Interestingly enough, these collection sites can turn into a social gathering. One day, I spent no less than twenty minutes talking to an older woman about her health problems. On another

occasion, a young man let my kids play with his small dogs. These types of encounters seem to happen every time I go. In the midst of trash, something beautiful happens...until it doesn't.

"Hey boy! Do I know you?" Startled, I turned to get a better look. The driver wasn't familiar to me in the slightest. "I don't guess so. We just moved here two months ago." The man leaned in further. "Where are you from?" Thinking this would turn into an encounter like all the others, I replied... "We just moved here from Texas two months ago." The man turned off his truck. "What brings you here?" Still thinking nothing of it?

"My wife is a professor at Appalachian State." Then, he got out of the truck. I began to realize that this was not an encounter like the others. This man was not interested in having any type of community with me. "Quit the bullshit. I know why you're here." I gave him the strangest look that I could muster. "Why?" As he leaned in, I noticed how red his face was for the first time. "You're the one that got those cops killed in Dallas...screaming and shouting and all that other bullshit. Here in Ashe County, we don't tolerate no blacks or wannabe blacks. Don't start no shit here. Do you understand me boy?" Courage came. "I am a follower of Jesus. I will fight for justice and equality as

long as I have breath... and I want to make sure that you understand me... your words here this afternoon have only affirmed what is going to be required of me." As I turned and began to head toward my car, the man loudly shouted... "We'll come burn your house down if we have to...with you in it." Right before I got into the car... I turned and said... "Bring it on you racist asshole." As the guy stumbled toward me, I just drove off.

This encounter is actually an amalgamation of two encounters at two different locations (though one happened specifically at the collection site). Both

happened in our new county of residence...both were intense...and both involved the person recognizing me from my prior work/specifically my wide media exposure following the Dallas Police Shooting of 2016. To be quite frank, I expected this county to be hostile to any type of difference at all. Although, I didn't expect the hostility to begin before I have even done anything remotely close to activism or organizing (we really are just beginning to get all of the boxes opened). However, I do believe that God moves irrespective of our expectations. Though my location has changed, my calling has not. I look forward to many more

encounters with racist assholes. In fact, God has made it pretty clear that's why I'm here.

Amen.

September 20, 2020

A Path for White Activists // A Celebration of the Life of The Rev. Robert (Bob) Graetz

Impossible. One simply could not grow up in Atlanta without knowledge of the Civil Rights Movement. We

were the epicenter of it all. From the earliest of ages, I knew that something very special had happened in my hometown.

First Grade. I was in the class of the first/only black teacher at my elementary school, Ms. Ellington. Throughout the year, she'd told us stories about the Movement. I couldn't get enough. With every word, she cultivated in me a belief that people of faith can truly change the world. While I doubt any of these encounters could have been planned/approved by the administration, from time to time old activists would stop by. I was amazed at their stories. Through it all, I

wondered if there were any good white people involved. One day I got the courage to ask. The response astounded me then...as it does now..."Without the help of white people we would have never made it."

Fast forward. I sat in a college classroom. As everybody around me dozed off, I listened intently. Though I'd heard many of the stories before, I wanted to hear them again. It seemed like new beauty found me every time I heard them. As the teacher closed out her lecture, I knew there was something missing. Before she could dismiss the class, I raised my hand. "Did you leave out the pivotal white activists?" Her response was cold and

direct. "There were no white activists in the Movement." I knew she was wrong.

Emory. In the midst of one of my graduate degrees in theology, I started to delve into the stories of white movement veterans. I was determined to learn as much as I could. I felt like their words could guide me into the future. One certainly did.

The Reverend Bob Graetz. Trinity Lutheran Church in Montgomery, Alabama was an all black congregation. I doubt Graetz knew what to expect when he was called as their pastor...and I doubt they knew what to expect

when they called him. Though people/particularly black people questioned his ability to pastor a black congregation, he went anyway. Once the people saw his courage, deep trust was built. From the inception of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, Graetz was one of it's earliest leaders. Though people/particularly black people questioned having a white person so close to the leadership of the Boycott, Graetz led anyways. On multiple occasions, the Graetz family were victims of conastant violence/including two bombings of their home. Regardless, Graetz kept pushing. Eventually, they succeeded. Not long after, Graetz moved on to other churches. Though his prominence quickly waned,

no matter his location he stayed involved in the Movement. Throughout it all, Graetz never took orders...he simply did what he felt like God was calling him to do.

Since. For decades, Graetz was forgotten. Any student of the Movement, quickly realizes that many of these white veterans are inconvenient heroes. In time, Graetz took control of his own story and wrote numerous books...all of which have inspired me tremendously. There were some who said that a white veteran shouldn't lend prominence to their story. Graetz just kept on writing. I'm so glad he did. In what would be

one of his last fights, Graetz courageously led Lutherans in his denomination to demand full inclusion of LGBT people. There were many people black/white/LGBT who told him that he shouldn't be doing this work. He didn't care. He could hear the voice of God calling him forward. In time, Graetz got to witness the realization of full inclusion. Though Graetz was never afraid to listen/collaborate, he was most interested in knowing God. Such independence is what made his life so meaningful.

Though he died earlier today (at 92), Graetz has left white activists with some powerful lessons. We must

work for God alone...in a spirit of love for each other. It is our job to figure out where God is going and help lead the way. Independent people are able to do independent things (like support black and LGBT equality). It is our job to remain independent enough to be able to do the work that we are called to do. There is nothing wrong with collaboration. There is something wrong with domination. One does not need permission from anybody to fight for justice. We are responsible only to the dictates of our conscience. One cannot be shamed or forced to become an activist. Love is the only true formation of an activist. White activists occupy a peculiar place in the Movement...sometimes viewed as a

traitor to their own race and other times viewed as a usurper of another. While such a dichotomy may seem insurmountable, Graetz showed us that it is the only way of salvation.

Amen.

NY Times Obituary:

https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/20/obituaries/robert-graetz-dead.html

September 22, 2020

The Burning Brush

There was a brush fire on Mount Horeb. Moses was stumbling around grazing some animals when God found him. The call was not soft. In fact, the call couldn't have been much louder. Moses started to approach the noise. Was he going crazy? Could he trust such sounds? Was he hearing things? I don't know that

he knew. Honestly, I don't know that he cared. I think the only thing that he was certain of is that he had never been so certain of wanting to know something more in his entire life. Gingerly, he stepped. When he saw it, the noise shouted out for him to... "Remove your shoes." The light was blinding. Moses hid his eyes. The flames of the brush did something...they pulled at him like he had never been pulled at before. Challenges burned before him. Immediately and unmistakably, God became God. Moses was in the presence of the great, "I AM." In those moments, God gave Moses a mission...to be the great liberator of his people. The flames still burn.

There was a brush fire in a rural Iowa ditch. The flames were touching the sky when authorities arrived. This was no normal fire. There was something pulling from within. After the flames were extinguished, it became clear that there were human remains within the ashes. In time, those remains were identified as a black resident of an overwhelming white community, Michael Williams. Though it eventually came out that he was killed at the hands of people he engaged with socially, the fire still burns. From it, God...Michael Williams...is asking us about the senseless violence that plagues our communities...and calling us to be the great liberators

that our communities so desperately needs. The flames still burn.

There is a brush fire burning in Terre Haute, Indiana. The execution chamber is in flames. Daniel Lewis Lee. Wesley Ira Purkey. Dustin Lee Honken. Lezmond Charles Mitchell. Keith Dwayne Nelson. William Emmett LeCroy, Jr. The federal government has killed these six men this year. In fact...the better way of saying it is...we (US citizens) have killed these men this year. Did you know that you are a murderer? God calls out to us from the brush... "I was in prison and you didn't visit me." "I was in prison and you didn't save me." God is

calling us to be the great liberators of our enemies. God is declaring his love for even the vilest amongst us. God is asking us to liberate our neighbors. Though we have killed these men... The flames still burn.

One doesn't have to study Exodus to have an encounter with God. There are brush fires everywhere...and God is still calling out to us from the flames.

Amen.

September 27, 2020

Threats & Consequences at 3:20am: An Update from Ashe County

It is the dead of night. I can't sleep. I thought I had escaped living like this. Now, I know this will never be true. The clock ticks. The huge plate glass window seems to be my only comfort. The authors of various evils lurk in the darkness. I can hear their words. I know they're close. They have been close since we got here. I thought that life would be simpler here. I was wrong. The darkness tells me that. I position myself in the middle. I want to be easily seen. If my elimination

is what these people want, I am offering them a target. My only hope is that I will be enough. I imagine my family sleeping in their beds. If something happens, I know that I am the only life that will suffice to keep them alive. I sit. I pray.

God comes. The rifle rises. The finger squeezes. The shooter smiles. The bullet shatters the window. I see the glass fall. I see the bullet coming...it stops in front of my eyes. Nothing moves. God remains.

I'm not afraid to die. The pursuit of justice is dangerous. Some might call me a fool. I simply know that I am called.

The threat and actualization of violence has always been a part of my work. There are people who want to kill me. Strangely, such people legitimize my work. They let me know that I am close to the evil that they want to protect. So, on some level these threats are helpful. I'm used to them. They're part of me.

We moved to North Carolina two months ago. From the beginning, people began to recognize who I was and

started making threats (most recognize me from organizing the rally before the July 7, 2016 police shooting in Dallas/and the subsequent media firestorm that followed and some from knowledge of my more recent work). Now, things have escalated. This past week, numerous neighbors started posting pictures of our house and our address...with the implicit encouragement (from both comments and from the original poster) to, "Get the trash out of Ashe County." Not long after that, I realized that our children had been compromised. Good people throughout our community contacted us to warn us that we are at great risk. After

realizing that things had escalated beyond just me, I surprised myself by contacting the Sheriff's Department.

Early this morning, I filed a criminal complaint against the woman who was orchestrating all of this evil. Though I often tolerate threats against me (with the belief that my grace should be endless), I will not tolerate threats against my family. That is my line. Cross it...and there will be consequences.

The darkness remains.

Sleep comes quickly.

In my final moments of luminosity, I hear the sweet words, "Lo, I am with you always..."

Amen.

October 4, 2020

The Tree of Life: Remembering my Friend, Mitch Mitchell: Reporter for the Fort-Worth Star-Telegram

Earlier today, I delivered a brief electronic eulogy at his funeral.

Death is not a respecter of persons. It comes for us all. Sooner or later, we will die. Of this we can be sure. Mitch Mitchell was not unaware of this fact. In fact, he embraced it. Every day, he treated each encounter as if it might be his last. Unafraid to love, Mitch recklessly embraced those that society shunned. Mitch believed that all people matter and that is what set him apart. We would do well to follow his lead.

The Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood

Theologian and Activist

Such words feel like bullshit in comparison to the friend that I have lost.

I struggle to discuss the loved ones that I have lost. Sometimes, I just don't see the point of all of the compounding. You see...pain discussed is often pain exponentially more visceral. Regardless, I know that I must discuss.

God has died once more. I'm not talking about the image of God. I'm talking about the very presence of God. I'm talking about love. I'm talking about oxygen. I'm talking about the very essence of our survival. I'm not well. I can't breath.

The mind is a horrible place to hold the departed. There is no resolution there. Death is too final for that. Despite my best efforts, Mitch has run circles around my mind for days. The night I met him under the bridge. The morning we prayed together. The day he called to warn me about threats to my life. The midnight that he called to make sure I was still alive after the shooting.

The afternoon that he encouraged me to hold on. The interviews. The conversations. The messages. I couldn't let them go. I couldn't shake them. I was just overcome.

Due to the limitations of finances and distance, I was unable to get to the funeral. Instead, I decided to take a hike on the side of the mountain we now call home. In the midst of unsteady terrain, I began to think about my friend. Something began to draw me to a place that I'd never been. When I arrived at the top of a ridge, a huge tree greeted me. I was invited into a relationship. The closer I drew...the more I could feel my friend Mitch.

After some moments to try to figure out what was going on, I looked up to see a dark hole. One of the main pieces of the tree had fallen off. Instantly, I thought about Mitch's death. Then, I looked up. The tree shot up into the sky...as far as mine eyes could see. That place of darkness did not keep it from growth...did not keep it from majesty...did not keep it from the light. In the secrets of that place, I will keep you my friend. I promise to visit you often.

Amen.

October 5, 2020

There is No God. There is only God. : A Short Systematic.

Confusion is all we know.

In the beginning...God created.

In the beginning...God birthed.

In the beginning...God condemned.

In the beginning...God rejected.

The Genesis.

In the Exodus...God saved.

In the Exodus...God killed.

In the Exodus...God led.

In the Exodus...God commanded.

The Exodus.

In the Psalms...God protected.

In the Psalms...God destroyed.

In the Psalms...God redeemed.

In the Psalms...God declared.

The Psalms.

In the Ecclesiastes...God confused.

In the Ecclesiastes...God hid.

In the Ecclesiastes...God remained.

In the Ecclesiastes...God retreated.

The Ecclesiastes.

In the Gospels...God healed.

In the Gospels...God loved.

In the Gospels...God died.

In the Gospels...God resurrected.

The Gospels.

In the Apocalypse...God arrives.

In the Apocalypse...God fights.

In the Apocalypse...God saves.

In the Apocalypse...God concludes.

The Apocalypse

Such words have lost their meaning. They are no longer in the present. They belong to history...not us. Theism is dead. The Bible is dead. The descriptions are dead. The themes are dead. The absence of life cannot lead us to life. Such mechanisms can never describe God...and they should have never tried. All mechanisms are useless. However, there is still something. God is not...yet somehow God is. When we are looking into a mirror dimly...perhaps our best option is to shatter the mirror....and dare to look beyond...into the void that

is...beyond the restrictions that were. Dreams birth deeper dreams there.

There is no God. There is only God.

Amen.

October 7, 2020

PSA: Friends don't let friends befriend the police.

Based on his many friendships with police, it's not hard to imagine that Jonathan Price was relieved to see the blue lights pull up. For some time, Price had been trying to help a woman who was being brutalized in a domestic situation. An officer that he did not know jumped out. Despite his best intentions to explain, Price was immediately a suspect/target. A short time later, he was dead. The hero quickly became the victim.

Wolfe City, Texas Officer Shaun Lucas murdered Jonathan Price. The facts are clear. The certainty of justice is not.

In the mean time, the politics of respectability distort the situation.

Did his friendships with police get him killed? From report after report, it is obvious that Price's family and friends don't think so. Yet, it seems that Price believed that police would act justly in such a situation. When the officer rolled up, Price assumed that the police were going to do the right thing...something we all should be able to assume. I can assure you that Lucas had no such intentions...he was definitely not a friend.

Make no mistake...respectability/friendships with the police are a very dangerous proposition. They blur lines that are needed to keep us alive. One misunderstood word/misperceived step/misplaced look and you end up on the ground bleeding out just like Price. We must understand the potential consequences of every single encounter with the police. When someone approaches you that can immediately access lethal force, you are always going to be a potential target. Instead of teaching our kids these lessons, we encourage them to befriend the man with the gun. We do the same with our peers. Consequentially, such actions only draw

them closer to their potential demise. Friendships did not save Price and they will not save us.

Just the other day, I was talking to a tenured police officer that I have known for a long time. He patrols the neighborhood that he grew up in. When I asked him about what it was like to deal with people he knew/loved...he replied, "I would shoot my own mother if the situation required it." The look on my face revealed my shock. "What? That's my job."

DARE. Community festivals. Explorer programs. Breakfast with a cop. Back the Blue. Volunteer

auxiliaries. Benevolence associations. All of this shit exists to make you think that you can trust the police. We believe such lies at our own peril.

There is no doubt that Price is a martyr...he was trying to help this woman...he was trying to do the right thing...he was trying to live a life of love...he is a martyr of our better angels. Unfortunately, the police seem to be making sure that none of our better angels survive.

PSA: Friends don't let friends befriend the police.

Amen.

more info:

https://www.texastribune.org/2020/10/06/jonathan-price-texas-police-killing/?fbclid=IwAR0dP4cbacZ3j40KMgPl2Phc_vbIe1Zm8Dj5BV9K1zKzwsxFnAWlfmA4RoM

October 16, 2020

The Morning Blast: Continued Harassment in Ashe County

Ashe County, North Carolina

Exhaustion crept in. I resisted the urge to stop. I just wanted to get home. Every sign brought me closer and closer. I'd drive eleven hours to see my grandfather before his next chemo treatment. Though I'd do it all over again in a second, I needed sleep. Pulling up to our home...and barely taking the time to turn out the lights...I drug myself to my bed. Sleep was almost instantaneous. Before I could even get to a deeper cycle of sleep, my kids woke me up to start the day. Though I was still exhausted, the next day belonged to them. We played outside. We played inside. We went to the park.

We went up in the woods. We ate lunch. We ran errands. We ate dinner. We did it all. At the end of the day, I was determined to get some sleep. I felt like a zombie roaming the halls of our house. When I got in the bed, I experienced one of the deeper sleeps of my life. In the midst of such rest, I don't wake up. In fact, I have never found an alarm clock that can wake me up in such times. Then, it happened.

Around 5:38 am, I was awoken by a shotgun blast right outside of our home. Shooting up in bed, I raced to check on the kids. Immediately, I knew what the sound was. Initially, I couldn't find our dog. Looking into one

of the bedrooms, she slowly came out of one of the closets. I have never seen her so terrified. After a short time, I went outside to see if anyone was still there. On some level, I prepared to get blasted. Trying to make sure I wasn't mistaken, I looked all over for another cause...before I was reaffirmed in what I knew that I heard. My wife and I discussed the situation and realized that there was nothing we could do...except to make sure that all of the kids and the dog were safely with us. I stayed awake until daylight (which couldn't come fast enough)...then, I went back to sleep. Later on the next day, I filed a police report/documentation of the incident. I still don't know what else to do.

There is no question in my mind that the blast is a continuation of the harassment we have constantly faced here in Ashe County. The threats online and in person have created a situation that is incredibly dangerous for our family. The blast could have easily struck one of our children. I guess this is how it works here. Life has little value until these locals get what they want. Regardless, I think it's important to make something very clear. I will not stop my divine vocation. I will continue to fight for the marginalized and oppressed. If one day my life is required of me, so be it. At the end of the day, we are a family that knows the

risks. We are not going anywhere. Despite the evil that is close, let there be no doubt that God is with us.

Amen.

October 20, 2020

Problematic Early Voting in Ashe County or Voter Intimidation in the High Country

We were prepared. We registered weeks ago. We researched the candidates. We got up early this

morning. We argued a bit. We drove for almost an hour to get to the county seat of Jefferson. We pulled into the parking lot. We located the building. We put on our masks. We got in line. We social distanced. We waited for a moment to get into the building. We moved forward. That's when the trouble started.

Not too far in front of me. I saw a group of people laughing and pointing. I couldn't figure out what was going on until one of them moved and exposed a huge government portrait of Donald Trump. While it is fairly normal for these types of portraits to exist in government buildings, this one was located a few steps

from the voting booths. Due to the fact that you can't campaign that close to the voting booth, I found the portrait to be really problematic. BUT what I found to be the most problematic piece of the entire situation was that people were laughing and pointing at the portrait. There was even a woman of color that came in behind us and left based on what was going on. While I don't know if shenanigans like this are normal in Ashe County, I do know that they are illegal.

After I voted, I took a second to pray. I knew what I needed to do.

Late this afternoon, I filed a complaint with the North Carolina State Board of Elections.

From what I was told, the Ashe County Board of Elections is currently under investigation.

It seems to me that the smartest thing that they could is to take down that damn portrait.

Ashe County is wild y'all.

Amen.

October 22, 2020

Leon Prince: Serial Sex Offender / Almost My Rapist

Not long after I left college, I moved to Montgomery, Alabama. For a few months before I went to seminary, I worked as the interim youth director at a drug and alcohol recovery program. Though I was burdened for all of the young people that I met, there were a couple who particularly affected my life. One such person was a young adult named Sean. From the moment I met

him, it was very clear that he had many more issues beyond substance abuse. He had trouble forming complete sentences. His behavior was incredibly erratic. He often had issues going to the bathroom on his self. Perhaps the most worrisome part of all of this for me was that Sean was about to age out of our program. I had no idea where he was going to go. In the final months of my residency there, Sean started hanging out with a guy named Leon that had started coming to the program for adults (that met at the same time). Knowing that Sean didn't have many friends, I tried to be encouraging. One night, Leon randomly took my picture. Though I found it odd, I decided to let it go.

The next week, he brought the picture to me and told me how much he had enjoyed spending time with it. I guess I was just ignorant (I was just 22). Though I thought it was strange, I again let it go. Before I left the job, Leon gave me a hundred dollars to thank me for my work. At the time, I was honored that someone would think so highly of me. Later that night, I got a phone call from Leon. Unsurprisingly, Sean gave him my number. He told me that he wanted me to come over to his place for a time of prayer...he said he wanted to, "lay hands on home." Thankfully, I had wised up to the weirdness of it all at that point. Driving down the road, I threw the money out the window. I hope that someone benefited

from it. Though I tried to help Sean get away from Leon, he wouldn't listen. Months later, I got a call from a friend telling me that Sean had finally gone to the police and claimed that Leon had held him as a sex slave for months. In the investigation, Sean was never able to formulate the details of the story in such a way that the police could bring charges against Leon (they ultimately/erroneously claimed that the relationship was consensual). Later, I was told that Sean got away from Leon for good. As time went on, I tried to erase all of it from my mind. I was successful until today.

Randomly scanning the news from Alabama, I stumbled on this headline from just yesterday...

"Alabama Sunday school teacher who raped 7-year-old girl in 1972 denied pardon"

When I saw the picture, I knew exactly who it was. Stepping outside, I threw up. The guy that I knew as Leon was actually a guy named Leon Prince...a serial sex offender. There was no doubt in my mind...if I had gone over there that night...I would have been one of his dozens upon dozens of rape victims (the article says 52 victims but I imagine it is much higher than that). Sean

wasn't so lucky. I wish I could have done more to help him (though I've been told that he has become a healthy/happy adult). I don't consider myself a victim in the visceral way that others are. However (15 years later), I know that I'm having trouble processing all of this rushing back into my mind. The only thing I know to do is pray.

May grace abound.

Amen.

article:

https://www.al.com/news/2020/10/alabama-sunday-school-teacher-who-raped-7-year-old-girl-in-1972-denied-pardon.html

October 26, 2020

"Somebody's In Our House!" Continued Escalating Harassment in Ashe County.

I've long believed that people are intrinsically good. I've long believed that all people carry the undefiled image of God. Moving to Ashe County has certainly tested those beliefs.

Nights are tough. Days are spent taking care of our children. Nights are for working.

Every night, I have a similar ritual. After most (hopefully all...) of the children have gone to bed. I sit down at our kitchen table and dream. I work on articles. I work on books. I work on correspondence. I work on my vocation...following Jesus/changing the

world. It is always a very spiritual time for me. I stay up most of the night and then I do it again the next day. I can't stop. I find the work too important.

The front of our house is made up of sliding glass doors. In the dark, it is easy to see in...and hard to look out.

Last night, it took me some time to get to my normal spot. The kids weren't cooperating... Such is the nature of parenting. My writing is of course the least of their concerns. After everything settled down, I went to my library and gathered some commentaries on the Gospel of Luke. In the midst of our current societal chaos, I've

been dreaming about new birth. Such dreams have repeatedly taken me to Bethlehem. The birth of Christ has long made me think about the nature of radical interruptions of oppression and marginalization. So for a few hours, I prayed/typed...worked. Early the next morning, I was still at it. In fact, I might have been more productive then than I was earlier in the night. Life was quiet...until it was violently interrupted.

The hallway to enter our house is behind our kitchen.

In the midst of my pounding on the keys, I heard the knob on our front door turn. I knew immediately that

there was something very wrong. Throwing my chair back, I raced to check on the rest of the family. "Somebody's in Our House!" When I opened the door to the bedroom, one of my oldest sons ran out to see what was going on. The door behind the kitchen was wide open. My oldest son saw a young white man with cropped hair racing up the mountain behind our house. The entire side of the house smelled of sweaty cheap cologne. The dog was barking incessantly. After making sure that our family was ok, I took the dog outside to give chase. Of course, it was of no use. The guy was long gone. In fact, I later found fresh tire marks on a road up the mountain/behind our house.

Even though I am very skeptical of engaging law enforcement, I did call 911. The Sheriff's deputies arrived about 30 minutes later (we live out to say the least). Though they were kind and professional, they told me what I knew already...there was little they could do. After taking a report and trying to affirm our family, they left. One of the deputies actually stayed near our house for most of the night.

I couldn't sleep. How can you sleep after some bullshit like that? I just watched our whole family finally sleep and wondered what following Jesus might require next.

Late this afternoon, I met with the Ashe County Sheriff and his Chief Deputy about our situation and other concerns I had about the department...again...they were very kind and professional. Together, we came up with something of a plan. I hope it works before the situation escalates even more.

With that said, I want to make something very plain to the pieces of shit terrorizing our family that might read this. You have made it very clear that you want me (you hate my past work/you hate my present work/ and you hate my future work)...so come get me...and leave my

family alone. I am not afraid of the consequences of pursuing justice.

Further action will be forthcoming. This situation has escalated to the point that it is necessary to take it to the streets. The entire community/county should not be able to ignore what is happening.

Amen.

+Per the firm instructions of my wife...we are installing a security system and cameras.

November 1, 2020

The Existential Threat: God or Government? / President Trump as Antichrist

I met a man on the road that was consumed with the dumbass this morning. Though professing to be a firm believer in both God and Trump, it didn't seem to me that he really knew anything about either. For, his God was Uncle Sam and his Trump was the incarnation of such. After he blubbered about for a few minutes, I asked him about the relationship between Ceaser and

God. What type of church would host a political candidate like this? It was clear that he didn't know what in the hell I was talking about. Shit, I might as well have been talking about Littler Ceaser's as far as he was concerned. Then he took it to the next level, I don't know much about all of that...but if you keep protesting next to my driveway...people are going to think that I'm a homosexual. To which I quickly replied, I don't think you have anything to worry about sir.

“Give therefore to the government the things that are the government’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”

-Matthew 22:21

The separation of church and state should be amongst the most sacred beliefs of any Christian. We serve a much higher cause than politics...namely love. However, there are times of chaos that force us to choose between our most sacred beliefs and love. We are now in such a moment. There is nothing loving about professing neutrality as evil is committed all around us...in our names as citizens.

I've chose to refer to President Trump as the government so as not to leave out all of those who have helped him in his reign of terror.

Hundreds of thousands of people have lost their lives based on the promulgation of a virus that could have been contained if our government had listened to the experts. Black people are being systematically killed in our streets by rogue police officers...who are encouraged by racist statements from our government. Persons on our federal death row have been executed at a rate not scene in years by a government that doesn't value human life. Sexual assault has been encouraged by a

government that jokes about it. The government is pooring the poor to death. LGBTQ persons have been treated like animals by a government that seems to love hate more than anything. The list goes on and on. When government becomes so evil that to support it is to become evil, then it is time for government to change. Love demands it.

This morning, I came face to face with our government. The weather was cold and rainy. I should have worn warmer clothes (I've actually caught a cold...). I think I just forgot...I was thinking about whether I needed to go or not. I have always been quintessentially opposed to

endorsing political candidates...but I came to the conclusion that I was condemning hate much more than I was endorsing anything. With my robe on and holding my cross, I stood across the street from Alliance Bible Fellowship...where Vice President Pence was speaking. For hours, I prayed that the evil before me would be vanquished...not by violence...but by the coming election.

While I still deeply believe in the separation of church and state...and by no means see Joe Biden as a savior (or anything close)...I can't remain quiet...love demands more. President Trump is evil {.} His actions have been

and will be antithetical to the Gospel of Jesus Christ...we call such persons Antichrist. There is absolutely no way to love your neighbor and vote for this man. This is an existential moment for so many. How can we stand by as so many more people die? Love demands more. Whose side will you be on? God or government? Choose wisely....for love is at stake.

Lastly, while I pray for the man I met this morning...I pray that his God gets his ass kicked on Tuesday.

Amen.

November 5, 2020

Jesus or Trump: A Short Note to Fellow Christians

Below is a transcript. This is not just any transcript.

This is a transcript of the President of the United States

repeatedly telling lies that undermine our democracy.

Such lies are very likely to incite violence if the election

maintains its' current course and Trump loses the presidency. In fact, earlier today Trump's friend/former advisor Steve Bannon's YouTube account was suspended and he was banned from Twitter because he encouraged COVID19 response leader Dr. Fauci and FBI Director Wrey to be beheaded and their heads to be placed on spikes in front of the White House (https://www.newsweek.com/steve-bannon-kicked-off-twitter-beheading-fauci-video-1545301). All over the country, people are preparing for war because they feel like Trump is telling them to (https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2020/11/05/facebook-trump-protests/). Tonight, the three major

television networks (ABC/NBC/CBS) all cut away from his address due to the amount of lies that were being shared (https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/05/business/media/trump-tv.html). Fact checkers have almost universally declared that the majority of Trump's words this evening were false (https://www.11alive.com/article/news/verify/trump-post-election-speech/507-c38a54fc-d0b6-45f8-ad59-814a6fa3f644). This is no ordinary transcript. This is evidence...evidence that Trump is prepared to do whatever it takes/tell whatever lies are necessary to maintain power. Tonight, we have arrived at an hour of

decision...Jesus or Trump? Choose wisely. The integrity of your soul/and perhaps our faith hangs in the balance.

Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood

November 5, 2020

Trump Press Conference

Source. Rev.

https://www.rev.com/blog/transcripts/donald-trump-white-house-press-conference-as-election-counts-continue-transcript-november-5

Donald Trump: (00:02)

Thank you very much. Thank you.

Donald Trump: (00:08)

Good evening. I'd like to provide the American people with an update on our efforts to protect the integrity of our very important 2020 election. If you count the legal votes, I easily win. If you count the illegal votes, they can try to steal the election from us. If you count the votes

that came in late, we're looking to them very strongly, but a lot of votes came in late.

Donald Trump: (00:36)

I've already decisively won many critical states, including massive victories in Florida, Iowa, Indiana, Ohio, to name just a few. We won these and many other victories despite historic election interference from big media, big money, and big tech. As everybody saw, we won by historic numbers, and the pollsters got it knowingly wrong. They got it knowingly wrong. We had polls that were so ridiculous and everybody knew it at the time.

Donald Trump: (01:06)

There was no blue wave that they predicted. They thought there was going to be a big blue wave. That was false. That was done for suppression reasons. But instead there was a big red wave, and it's been properly acknowledged actually by the media. They were, I think, very impressed, but that was after the fact. That doesn't do us any good.

Donald Trump: (01:26)

We kept the Senate despite having twice as many seats to defend as Democrats, and in a really much more competitive states. We did a fantastic job with the Senate. I think we're very proud of what's happened

there. We had many more seats to defend. They spent almost $200 million on Senate races in South Carolina and Kentucky alone, two races, and hundreds of millions of dollars overall against us.

Donald Trump: (01:57)

At the national level, our opponents major donors were Wall Street bankers and special interests. Our major donors were police officers, farmers, everyday citizens. Yet for the first time ever, we lost zero races in the House. I was talking to Kevin McCarthy today. He said he couldn't believe it. Zero racist, very unusual thing, zero, and actually won many new seats with, I think, many more on the way.

Donald Trump: (02:24)

This was also the year of the Republican woman. More Republican women were elected to Congress than ever before. That's a great achievement. I won the largest share of non-white voters of any Republican in 60 years, including historic numbers of Latino, African American, Asian American, and Native American voters. The largest ever in our history. We grew our party by 4 million voters. The greatest turnout in Republican Party history.

Donald Trump: (03:00)

Democrats are the party of the big donors. The big media, the big tech, it seems, and Republicans have

become the party of the American worker, and that's what's happened. And we're also, I believe the party of inclusion. As everyone now recognizes, media polling was election interference in the truest sense of that word, by powerful special interests.

Donald Trump: (03:25)

These really phony polls, I have to call them phony polls, fake polls, were designed to keep our voters at home, create the illusion of momentum for Mr. Biden and diminish Republican's ability to raise funds. They were what's called suppression polls, everyone knows that now, and it's never been used to the extent that it's been used on this last election.

Donald Trump: (03:51)

To highlight just a few examples, the day before election, Quinnipiac, which was wrong on every occasion that I know of, had Joe Biden up by five points in Florida, and they were off by 8.4 points and I won Florida easily, easily. So they had me losing Florida by a lot and I ended up winning Florida by a lot. Other than that, they were very accurate.

Donald Trump: (04:22)

They had him up four points in Ohio and they were off by 12.2 points, and I also won Ohio, great state of Ohio very easily. And the Washington Post said, “Biden up 17 points in Wisconsin,” and it was basically even. They

were off by about 17 points, and they knew that, they're not stupid people. They knew that. Suppression.

Donald Trump: (04:49)

There are now only a few states yet to be decided in the presidential race. The voting apparatus of those states are run in all cases by Democrats. We were winning in all the key locations by a lot, actually, and then our numbers started miraculously getting whittled away in secret and they wouldn't allow legally permissible observers.

Donald Trump: (05:15)

We went to court in a couple of instances and we were able to get the observers put in. And when the observers

got there, they wanted them 60, 70 feet away, 80 feet, 100 feet away or outside the building to observe people inside the building. And we won a case, a big case, and we have others happening.

Donald Trump: (05:33)

There are lots of litigation, even beyond our litigation. There's a tremendous amount of litigation generally because of how unfair this process was, and I predicted that. I've been talking about mail-in voting for a long time. It's really destroyed our system. It's a corrupt system and it makes people corrupt, even if they aren't by nature, but they become corrupt. It's too easy. They want to find out how many votes they need, and then

they seem to be able to find them. They wait and wait, and then they find them, and you see that on Election Night.

Donald Trump: (06:09)

We were ahead in vote in North Carolina by a lot, a tremendous number of votes, and we're still ahead by a lot, but not as many because they're finding ballots all of a sudden. "Oh, we have some mail-in ballots." It's amazing how those mail-in ballots are so one-sided too. I know that it's supposed to be to the advantage of the Democrats, but in all cases they're so one-sided.

Donald Trump: (06:34)

We were up by nearly 700,000 votes in Pennsylvania. I

won Pennsylvania by a lot. And that gets whittled down to, I think they said now we're up by 90,000 votes and they'll keep coming and coming and coming. They find them all over and they don't want us to have any observers. Although we won a court case, the judge said, "You have to have observers." Likewise in Georgia … And they're appealing, actually they're appealing. We want a case that we want people to watch and we want to observers and they're actually appealing, which is sort of interesting. I wonder why they'd appeal? All we want to do is have people watch as they do the vote tabulations.

Donald Trump: (07:16)

Likewise in Georgia, I won by a lot, a lot, with a lead of over getting close to 300,000 votes on Election Night in Georgia. And by the way, got whittled down and now it's getting to be to a point where I'll go from winning by a lot to perhaps being even down a little bit.

Donald Trump: (07:37)

In Georgia, a pipe burst in a far away location, totally unrelated to the location of what was happening and they stopped counting for four hours. And a lot of things happened. The election apparatus in Georgia is run by Democrats. We also had margins of 300,000 in Michigan. We were way up in Michigan, won the state. And in

Wisconsin, we did likewise fantastically well, and that got whittled down. In every case, they got whittled down.

Donald Trump: (08:12)

Today, we're on track to win Arizona. We only need to carry, I guess, 55% of the remaining vote, 55% margins, and that's a margin that we've significantly exceeded. So we'll see what happens with that, but we're on track to do okay in Arizona. Our goal is to defend the integrity of the election. We'll not allow the corruption to steal such an important election, or any election for that manner. And we can't allow silence, anybody to silence our voters and manufacture results.

Donald Trump: (08:46)

I've never had, I've been doing a lot of public things for a long time, I've never had anything that's been as inspirational by people calling, talking, sending things to us. I've never seen such love and such affection and such spirit as I've seen for this. People know what's happening and they see what's happening and just before their eyes, and there are many instances which will be reported very shortly.

Donald Trump: (09:16)

There's tremendous litigation going on, and this is a case where they're trying to steal an election. They're trying to rig an election and we can't let that happen. Detroit

and Philadelphia, known as two of the most corrupt political places anywhere in our country easily, cannot be responsible for engineering the outcome of a presidential race, a very important presidential race.

Donald Trump: (09:39)

In Pennsylvania, Democrats have gone to the State Supreme Court to try and ban our election observers and very strongly. Now we won the case, but they're going forward. They don't want anybody in there. They don't want anybody watching them as they count the ballots, and I can't imagine why. There's absolutely no legitimate reason why they would not want to have people watching this process, because if it's straight,

they should be proud of it. Instead, they're trying obviously to commit fraud. There's no question about that.

Donald Trump: (10:20)

In Philadelphia, observers have been kept far away, very far away. So far that people are using binoculars to try and see, and there's been tremendous problems caused. They put a paper on all of the windows so you can't see in, and the people that are banned are very unhappy and become somewhat violent.

Donald Trump: (10:41)

The Eleventh Circuit ruled that in Georgia, the votes have been in by Election Day, that they should be in by

Election Day, and they weren't. Votes are coming in after Election Day. And they had a ruling already that you have to have the votes in by Election Day. To the best of my knowledge, votes should be in by Election Day, and they didn't do that. Democrat officials never believed they could win this election honestly, I really believe that. That's why they did the mail-in ballots, where there's tremendous corruption and fraud going on.

Donald Trump: (11:15)

That's why they mailed out tens of millions of unsolicited ballots without any verification measures whatsoever, and I've told everybody that these things

would happen because I've seen it happen. I watched a lot of different elections before they decided to go with this big, massive election with tens of millions of ballots going out to everybody. In many cases, totally unsolicited.

Donald Trump: (11:43)

This was unprecedented in American history. This was by design. Despite years of claiming to care about the election security, they refuse to include any requirement to verify signatures, identities, or even determined whether they're eligible or ineligible to vote. People are walking in there, they have no idea. They just take in the numbers. They're writing down things, the

workers, and doing a lot of bad things. And we have a lot of information coming and litigation that you'll see that will shake even you people up, and you've seen it all.

Donald Trump: (12:16)

The officials overseeing the counting in Pennsylvania and other key states are all part of a corrupt Democrat machine that you've written about. And for a long time, you've been writing about the corrupt Democrat machine. I went to school there and I know a lot about it. It hasn't changed since a long time ago and hasn't changed. It has gotten worse.

Donald Trump: (12:36)

In Pennsylvania, partisan Democrats have allowed ballots in the state to be received three days after the election, and we think much more than that, and they're counting those without even postmarks or any identification whatsoever. So you don't have postmarks, you don't have identification.

Donald Trump: (12:56)

There have been a number of disturbing irregularities across the nation. Our campaign has been denied access to observe any counting in Detroit. Detroit is another place, and I wouldn't say has the best reputation for election integrity. Poll workers in Michigan were

duplicating ballots. But when our observers attempted to challenge the activity, those poll workers jumped in front of the volunteers to block their views so that they couldn't see what they were doing and it became a little bit dangerous.

Donald Trump: (13:32)

One major hub for counting ballots in Detroit covered up the windows again with large pieces of cardboard, and so they wanted to protect and block the counting area. They didn't want anybody seeing the counting, even though these were observers who were legal observers that were supposed to be there.

Donald Trump: (13:49)

In Detroit, there were hours of unexplained delay in delivering many of the votes for counting. The final batch did not arrive until 4:00 in the morning. And even though the polls closed at 8:00 o'clock, so they brought it in and the batches came in and nobody knew where they came from.

Donald Trump: (14:06)

We've also been denied access to observe in critical places in Georgia. In multiple swing states, counting was halted for hours and hours on Election Night. With results withheld from major Democrat run locations only to appear later, and they certainly appeared and

they all had the name Biden on them, or just about all. I think almost all. They all had the name Biden on them, which is a little strange.

Donald Trump: (14:34)

I challenge Joe and every Democrat to clarify that they only want legal votes because they talk about votes and I think they should use the word legal, legal votes. We want every legal vote counted, and I want every legal vote counted. We want openness and transparency, no secret count rooms, no mystery ballots, no illegal votes being cast after Election Day. You have Election Day and the laws are very strong on that. You have an Election Day and they don't want votes cast after Election Day

and they want the process to be an honest one. It's so important.

Donald Trump: (15:09)

We want an honest election and we want an honest count and we want honest people working back there because it's a very important job. So that's the way this country is going to win. That's the way the United States will win, and we think we will win the election very easily. We think there's going to be a lot of litigation because we have so much evidence, so much proof, and it's going to end up perhaps at the highest court in the land, we'll see. But we think there'll be a lot of litigation because we can't have an election stolen by like this.

Donald Trump: (15:43)

And I tell you, He trum Small elections were a disaster. Small, very easy to handle elections were disastrous. This is a large scale version, and it's getting worse and worse every day. We're hearing stories that are horror stories, absolute horror stories, and we can't let that happen to the United States of America.

Donald Trump: (16:11)

It's not a question of who wins, Republican, Democrat, Joe, myself. We can't let that happen to our country. We can't be disgraced by having something like this happen. So it will be hopefully cleared up. Maybe soon, I hope soon, but it'll probably go through a process, a legal

process. And as you know, I've claimed certain states and he's claiming states and we can both claim the States, but ultimately I have a feeling judges are going to have to rule. But there's been a lot of shenanigans and we can't stand for that in our country. Thank you very much.

Crowd: (16:49)

Mr. President [crosstalk 00:16:50]

Speaker 3: (16:49)

Why are you undercutting this process, sir?

Speaker 4: (16:51)

Are you being a sore loser?

Speaker 3: (16:52)

Haley, why is the president undercutting this process?

Speaker 4: (16:54)

Haley, are you ...

November 10, 2020

The Creation of God: A Vision

The future is a question.

God is the question.

The past is the future.

The future is the past.

Time is fiction.

"God, you have violated the laws of the cosmos! For your sins, you are hereby sentenced to disintegration." The cosmic jury had spoken and their ship began to travel closer and closer to the fiery star. When the heat became unbearable, God was shot into the middle of the star. Watching through powerful viewing devices, everyone waited for God's forgone demise. The problem was that God disappeared into the silence. Assuming

that they just missed the disintegration, everyone blasted off into different directions. Out of sight out of mind. Whether they noticed or not, everyone knew that something had changed. Space seemed so lonely. Darkness grew darker. The planets no longer shined. Was this the end? Then, the star began to shake and quake. There was a beautiful light coming from the center. Then, the star exploded. Light overwhelmed them all.

There had never been anything brighter. This was the light. This was the source of all light. Universes filled with promise. There were no dimensions unexposed.

All of creation heard the boom. "Lo, I with you always..." They were no longer alone.

The light is still speaking. Do you remember? The boom cannot be silenced. Can you see it? Words are written in the stars. Explosions of magic are as clear today as they were then. Can you still hear them? Touch the present. God is there. Touch the future. God is there. Touch the present. God is here. Touch the future. God is here. In the economy of God, present is future and future is present. God is. A journey into our future is a journey into our present. There is no time. There is only future. There is only God.

Amen.

November 11, 2020

Jesus & Justice: An Evening Conversation Between a Father and a Son

Late this evening, my son asked me to go for a walk around our property with him. I knew something was on his mind. The air was cool and crisp. Not wanting to rush him, I waited on him to speak. After a few

minutes, he asked, "Dad, what comes next? We've had threats, a gun blast and somebody in our house. Dad, what comes next? Am I going to die?" Of course, he was speaking of the people who have terrorized us since we moved to Ashe County...for months. As my son looked expectantly into my eyes, I carefully formulated, "Honestly son, I don't know what comes next. I do know one thing..." In that moment, I paused. I was trying not to scare him...but I knew what I had to say. "What Dad? What is it?" Knowing that I couldn't hold back now, I opened my mouth, "I don't know what the future holds...but I do know that we are going to follow Jesus wherever he leads us..." After a few more steps, he

came back, "Even death?" With tears in my eyes, I managed to get out, "Even death." As I regained my composure, we walked a little bit further. A bird was the only sound that met us. Finally, my son methodically said, "Pursuing justice is expensive...but it's worth it..." I didn't respond. I just let the words ruminate in our hearts. As I held his hand tightly, I prayed for strength for the journey. In the wind, I heard a familiar whisper, "Lo, I am with you always..." With that, we walked ahead into the approaching darkness.

Amen.

November 15, 2020

"Trust the Process"...and You Will Die

Now it was the governor's custom at the festival to release a prisoner chosen by the crowd. At that time they had a well-known prisoner whose name was Jesus Barabbas. So when the crowd had gathered, Pilate asked them, "Which one do you want me to release to you: Jesus Barabbas, or Jesus who is called the Messiah?" For he knew it was out of self-interest that they had handed Jesus over to him.

While Pilate was sitting on the judge's seat, his wife sent him this message: "Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him."

But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed.

"Which of the two do you want me to release to you?" asked the governor.

"Barabbas," they answered.

"What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called the Messiah?" Pilate asked.

They all answered, "Crucify him!"

"Why? What crime has he committed?" asked Pilate.

But they shouted all the louder, “Crucify him!”

When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. “I am innocent of this man’s blood,” he said. “It is your responsibility!”

All the people answered, “His blood is on us and on our children!”

Then he released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.

Matthew 27:15-26

New International Version

"Just trust the process." I can't tell you how many times I've heard that phrase right before a moment of death. There was my friend who was erroneously strung along in a denominational ordination process. There was the counselor who kept me coming back for nothing. There was the young man on trial who was advised foolishly. There was the lawsuit that was supposed to go our way. There was the election that didn't end well. There was the execution that was carried out as planned. There was the relationship that never got better. There was the abusive pastor. There have been so many times. "Just trust the process."

The people who repeat this phrase don't know what they're talking about. In fact, these people are murderers.

When Jesus was placed before the crowd, I can just imagine multiple disciples hiding and reassuring each other, "Just trust the process." When you tell someone to trust the process, you're telling them that the system is fair. Truth be known, the system wasn't fair and never will be fair. We live in a fallen world. An unfair system killed Jesus. Our unfair systems kill people all the time. To all that were unsure of what was happening, Pilate spoke as the system folks do now, "Just trust the

process." If you value your life, I wouldn't...because that will be the last phrase you hear before somebody slits your throat...aka crucifies your gullible ass.

Amen.

November 17, 2020

The Dead Fish

The weather was very cold. I didn't have on the right clothes. My feet were freezing. My face burned. My

nose was running. I couldn't figure out why God had brought me out here. Truth be known, I was growing more miserable by the second. Right at the end of the dock, I just stood waiting. The expectation is what kept me from leaving. I knew I was supposed to be there. I'd felt it before. I just didn't know what I was looking for. Then, I saw mist coming up from the middle of the pond. It seemed to be rising faster and faster. The mist grew larger and larger...until a huge orb of water was suspended over my head. I couldn't take my eyes off of it. Though I expected it to fall on my head at any moment, I didn't move. The beauty held me in place.

After some time, I looked down and saw a great multitude. Dead fish were everywhere. There was no life in them at all. I couldn't believe my eyes. As I looked closer, I saw the names of the great religions, philosophies and ideologies written on their sides. I recognized the names of so many words and phrases that I had put great trust in. Now they were all gone...all dead.

I started to gasp for air. I knew that something was very wrong. The orb of water disappeared. The fish disappeared. Before I knew it, I was suspended high in the air. I still couldn't breathe. Then, I remembered

that God alone is life. Breath came back quickly. I slowly descended back to earth. I was amazed at what I found. The water had refilled the pond. The fish had returned alive. Though the great names were on the sides of the fish, they mattered less than they ever had before.

Amen.

November 24, 2020

The Latest Ink: *High Country Theology*

For the last few months, I've been wrestling with what a liberation theology of the High Country (Western North Carolina and beyond) might look like. The collected visions and stories are contained in my newest (44th published)+ book, *High Country Theology*. Below are a few excerpts...

Countless years passed. Few mountain people remained. Most sold themselves to the highest bidder. The owners of paradise became slaves of the outsiders. No one remembered the name of God. The mountains were dead.

People grew anguished. People grew sick. People died. This was not what the bidders had promised. The mountain people were broken…and imprisoned.

…

Slowly, the people forgot God.

Despite the waywardness of their neighbors, two women remained faithful to both God and each other. Incessantly, they were shamed for their love. Through it all, they remained strong. Jealous of the love that they

shared, their neighbors demanded that they leave each other or face the consequences.

Desperate, one woman turned to the other and said,

"Please leave me. I don't know what I would do if anything happened to you."

In a fury, the woman replied,

"Don't urge me to leave you! Where you go I will go. Where you die I will die. Our love will never fail!"

As the two kissed, their neighbors walked away in shame.

Thus is the nature of love.

...

This is the prayer of the mountain,

"God has to be in these mountains.

I shall not want.

The endless pastures whisper of love.

The cleansing waters flow through me.

It all restores my soul.

God guides me to the questions.

I shall not want.

Though death comes near.

I fear no evil.

I feel you with me.

I know your touch.

You keep my enemies behind me.

Your leaves anoint my heard.

Surely your shadow will be with me.

As my soul rests in these mountains forever."

...

I still don't believe what happened.

The hand of God was upon me. Behold, I found myself high upon a mountain. Pointing down, God showed me that the valley was full of bones. I knew them and they knew me. In the midst of my bewilderment, God turned to me and said, "Can these bones live?" Scared to speak, I simply said, "Only you know."

God raised the mighty hands of divinity and demanded, "Preach to the bones!!! And I will raise them up!"

So I preached as I was commanded. The ground began to shake. The world turned upside down. God called from the four winds. All of a sudden, flesh started to grow on the bones...breath entered the bodies...eyes opened...mouths began to praise. The valley was full a vast army of justice.

Then God said to me, "These are the people of the High Country."

The project of the liberation is to place the oppressed and marginalized at the center of the message of God. Thus,

struggling mountain people are the very essence of God.

The High Country is where God lives.

Amen.

November 24, 2020

Evening Thoughts On the Road Ahead

evening grows quiet there is no sound here there never

is just something more something beyond something

visceral something real something near bowing my

head to pray I ask for God to take my sins away this is not my home this is not my day this is only something or someone that I once knew yet here I am here I dream what will tomorrow bring

things grow harder as the hours pass why I am I not asleep death stalks me from the outside I can't let it in there is more to say more to do more to love the air grows thinner and thinner grows thinner there is no food here only hunger is this how we are supposed to live is this who we are supposed to be I am ready to eat I am ready to be more than just a moving sack of skin however it is night everything is asleep except

something that is not lurking in the shadows something that is stalking me something that is real something that is invisible death always finds me during nights like this I ponder the journey home

miles birth miles birth miles birth miles birth miles will it ever stop why am I going where am I going do I know the way the way the truth and the life god is close or at least closer than she was before prayers shoot out the window like exhaust from the backside what will I say what will I do is there life out there hope of some kind I drink the wine and taste the bread were you there I can only cling to what I know but where is your faith I think

I left it at the last gas station I just drive then I drive and then I drive and then I drive everyone be quiet now we're almost there death will meet us at the door and we will know him and he will know us for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever and ever and ever and ever and ever

Amen.

December 14, 2020

The Final Prayer. / On the Death of Jack Dillard. / My Grandfather.

My grandfather died a few weeks ago.

I've been hesitant to write about it.

Sometimes words just can't capture the totality of loss.

The tumult of disagreement never destroyed our relationship.

Throughout it all, we spoke as often as we could.

Though often imperfect, I never doubted his love.

In the end, I was afforded one last visit.

This was our final prayer.

God

We come to you

We are doubtful

Death is near

We need you

Break into our lives

Silence any distractions

Take over this very moment

God

We come to you

We are scared

Death is near

We need you

God break into our lives

God silence any distractions

God take over this very moment

God

We come to you

We are hardened

Death is near

We need you

God fill us with your faith

God fill us with your hope

God fill us with your love

There is salvation in faith

There is salvation in hope

There is salvation in love

Do you believe in faith?

Do you believe in hope?

Do you believe in love?

Yes.

We believe in faith.

Yes.

We believe in hope.

Yes.

We believe in love.

God

Hear us

Right Now

Hear us

Through the affirmation of faith

Through the affirmation of hope

Through the affirmation of love

There is salvation.

Do you believe?

Yes.

We believe.

Upon your confession of belief...

I declare you to be full of faith.

I declare you to be full of hope.

I declare you to be full of love.

From this moment forth...

Let there be no doubt

God is your faith.

God is your hope.

God is your love.

God is yours.

The world didn't give it.

The world can't take it away.

God is all that you have needed.

God is all that you need.

God is all that you will ever need.

God is all.

The mystery is in the magic.

The magic is in the mystery.

You don't have to understand.

Just go.

Eternity is yours.

I love you.

Amen.

I kissed him gently on his forehead...and told him that I'd see him again soon.

Driving away, I wished that I could stay there forever...but life doesn't work that way.

Now, all that I'm left with is the hope of resurrection...and that is enough for now.

Amen.

December 16, 2020

Faith is NOT Certainty and Certainty is NOT Faith

"How can we have certainty in any historical narratives? It seems that everything that we're doing is based on our construction of a false or at least imperfect narrative." I thought it was a good question...but it got all over my professor. "This is graduate school Jeff...you should have moved beyond silly questions like that." Unfazed, I went further. "I'm just concerned that we are

calling something certain that we have no idea whether it is certain or not." The veins in his next started to bulge. "Evidence creates certainty Jeff. If you can't get on board with it then you need to study something else...or even better...go ahead and admit yourself to an insane asylum." Trying to calm things down a bit, I tried to restate my point. "I'm just saying that certainty is a very high bar...that historians are simply not ever going to be able to meet. In the midst of such a paradox, faith seems like a much better way of talking about history." The response had the opposite effect. The professor grew angrier by the second. Standing up, he screamed. "Do you think this is a damn church Jeff? Do I look like a

priest to you? You know what... Forget it. I'll show you real. I'll show you certainty. I'll show you something that you can be sure of. Get the hell out of my class!"

Struggles with certainty have long plagued my academic career. I can assure you that this explosion was not my first such encounter and certainly wasn't/won't be my last. For many, doubt is the greatest enemy of knowledge. For me, doubt is the only path to knowledge. How can I be certain? I can't. I guess I just walk by faith and not by sight...but let us never forget that faith is not certainty...it is faith. To call it anything else is to undermine the beauty of belief. From faith we

have our beginning and to faith we shall return in the end. How can anyone be certain? You can't. If you were, you wouldn't have faith. Don't trust in certainty. Trust in faith. I have faith that God will meet us there.

Amen.

December 17, 2020

Larry: The Birth of the Christ

In terms of the magic of theology, what's in a name? If Jesus was not named Jesus, would the story be different.

The nature of myths is that they are real no matter whose name is in the text. Theology is about the miracle of the incarnation or the revelation of God that is beyond explanation or name. So what happens when you switch the name or ponder something different? Does the story lose its' meaning? Is the Christ event attached to a name?

Now the birth of Larry the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public

disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Larry, for he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

“Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,” which means, “God is with us.”

When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Larry.

Seems to me that such a birth narrative can be more contextual if we are willing to believe that incarnation of God is not limited to the name Jesus. The magic of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus is that it is constantly repeated throughout time and space. The life, death and resurrection of God is not a one time event. The beauty of the story stands on its' own...beyond description. Make no mistake, whether it

is Ghandi or Martin or Teresa or even Larry...Christ lives...and the birth of God is bigger than a name...for language and place always have their restrictions and God does not. New is not a divine descriptor...for God doesn't change...surely the incarnation of love real doesn't either...no matter what name we give it. "Christ" (though incompletely) describes a divine event that can never be contained. Why would we want to? "Christ"mas is too beautiful for that. Larry is too beautiful for that.

Amen.

January 8, 2020

Officer Brian Sicknick Speaks! : Trump/Trumpsters Condemned from the Grave

"And we fight. We fight like hell." The hair on the back of his neck rose up. "And if you don't fight like hell, you're not going to have a country anymore." Something in him snapped. "Let's go!!!" He was activated. "Let's show those bitches whose boss!" Fists in the air, he started to run. "There's Hawley!" By responding with a raised fist, the Senator assured him

that everything he was planning to do was right. "God is with us!" He raced up to the line. "Push!!!" When the police line fell, he trampling officers under his feet. "Break the window!!!" He never hesitated. "Up the stairs!!!" In the midst of it all, he pushed harder. "Get him!!!" With no restraint, he was beating a police officer. "Hell yeah!!!" Everybody started to chant... "Trump!!! Trump!!! Trump!!!" Nobody took the time to hear his screams. "Hey Trump's on television..." The President called everyone who had just beat the police officer special. "He's one of us!" Everyone was so proud. "We did it all for Trump!!!" Hours later, Officer Brian Sicknick was dead. "We did it all for Trump!!!"

For a long time, I wondered how far Trump's supporters would go. Now we know that they will kill for him. As I think back to all of the things that Trump's supporters told me over the years, one thing in particular stands out. "Trump backs the blue!" If he was able to speak, I wonder what Officer Sicknick would say about that?

Not surprisingly, there was Christian symbolism littered throughout the rioters. In the midst of this, someone asked me, "Where was Jesus in the midst of all of this?" To which I quickly replied, Jesus was there with Officer Sicknick as the followers of Trump beat him to death.

For years, many Christians have repeatedly stated that God is with Trump. For years, they have made claims that he was the candidate of life. From the grave, Officer Sicknick clearly declares that they were all full of shit.

Amen.

RIP

Brian Sicknick

Ashli Babbitt

Benjamin Philips

Kevin Greeson

Rosanne Boyland