On Football.

I experienced my first football game at Ole Miss not too long ago. Buying into the national advertising campaigns and recent attempts to modernize campus symbolism, I expected to see a modern multiracial environment. What I saw was quite the contrary…
I arrived in The Grove to see thousands of white people celebrating their money and football with exotic drinks, expensive clothing, and the finest tailgating tents money can buy. I stopped at my first tailgate to hear discussion of the joys of not being from Utah. To which a young man, donning a pledge pin from a large campus fraternity, replied, "…at least they don't have all these n******." Honestly, looking around, I had no idea who

he was talking about. The only persons on The Grove were members of Mississippi's white privileged elite. The Mississippians this young man seemed to be speaking of are unable to afford the tickets or comforts he and his buddies enjoyed. Somewhat shaken, I continued to journey toward the stadium. Upon gate arrival, I became more frustrated when I saw African-Americans filling most of the menial/servant tasks of cleanup and security. I bought a program from a vendor and wasn't surprised to see most of the players were also African-Americans. When I got to my seat, I noticed the crowd around me was all white. The longer I sat the more I realized where I was…the Roman Coliseum. Mississippi's white elites scream for blood as mostly young African-Americans place their lives on the

line (see Bennie Abram) for collective white entertainment. I left knowing, despite trite cosmetic efforts to the contrary, the historical traditions of oppression are alive and well at Ole Miss.

The entire experience made me wonder when people will get as upset about inequality as they do loosing football games.

Jeff Hood

September 30, 2011

On Spiritual Direction

Direction.

God is never more distant than when talk of spiritual direction arises.

Darkness touched every crevice of the room. We had come to have an experience with God. This was our weekend. Spiritual direction weekends were common

in the world I grew up in. I never wanted to go. I never felt like anything was real. Then, things popped off. Light flooded the stage. The music pounded. I could feel my organs jiggling around inside my body. Ricky Rufio ran on stage pumping his fists. As all attention focused on Rufio, the entire room started to chant repeatedly, "Jesus! Jesus! Jesus! Jesus! Jesus! Jesus!" I can still hear it. Before Rufio started talking, we flailed our hands wildly in praise. Rufio pointed directly at us and declared, "You need a standing appoint me with God." For just under an hour, we were pounded with ideas of spiritual direction. Then, the music kicked back up. As the guitar chords cycled repeatedly in our ears, we were called to the front. "If you want to commit to a standing appointment, run down to this altar and declare it to

God." I did. We all did. We wanted a closer relationship. We felt like we needed it. The night began a period of searching for me. After keeping a quiet time of prayer, scripture meditation and solitude for a few weeks, I knew that shit wasn't for me. Scripture meditation reminded me of why I didn't read the Bible more often. Solitude only made me feel lonely. Quiet only made God feel more absent. I walked away from it all.

Spiritual direction is often spiritual destruction.

Different theologies offer different paths. Whatever I had wasn't working, so I decided to try something new. "Beat your faith into submission." I remember my

spiritual director repeatedly telling me that I needed discipline. The words always felt so violent. I assumed that they were the words of God. For a number of years, I tried hard. I fasted on a regular basis. The only thing I experienced was hunger. I practiced rest. I just got bored. I tried stillness. I lost my mind. Eventually, I realized that none of this was about God.

There is nothing organic about traditional spiritual direction.

I walked into the room. Candles were everywhere. The spiritual retreat was the first time I'd tried anything dealing with spiritual direction in a very long time. The leader of the gathering walked in. For about an hour,

she hummed. I couldn't figure out when she was going to start/stop. When she did, she said, "In order to listen to God, we're going to be silent for the rest of the weekend." I knew that I was done. Slowly, I stood up and started to make my way toward the door. Before I could get out unnoticed, the director of the spiritual retreat looked up and questioned, "Where are you going?" I replied, "Silence doesn't work for me. I just don't do well with silence." In fear that her entire retreat was going to fall apart, the woman snapped back, "Those who don't do silence...don't do God." I knew that was it. I left and never looked back.

Spiritual direction has always been forced. God is not forced. God simply is.

Spirituality is about pressing into the "isness" of God.

We are the "isness" God. We are made in God's image.

We are spiritual. We are enough. We don't need more direction. We need more being.

Being is about learning who we have always been.

There are twelve practices I think would be help in our struggle to reclaim our being.

Movement is about refusing to be still.

Noise is about refusing to be silent.

Engagement is about to refusing to give in to the temptation of solitude.

Eating is about eating correctly and refusing to fast.

Being is about refusing to pray.

Deconstruction is about pushing back against the idea of meditating.

Immolation is about setting the being on fire with celebration and refusing to be caught up in external worship.

Risk is about refusing to be chained to ideas of trust.

Pain is about realizing that complete wellness is not possible.

Becoming is refusing to stay where you are.

Action is about rejecting ideas of rest.

Pushing is about exercising spiritual force to transform the world.

God is about movement. Our spiritual disciplines have long given us reason to stop when we should have been moving. Spirituality can be so much more than it

currently is. Spirituality can transform the world. What we are currently doing will not.

Our ideas of spiritual direction shit on the marginalized and oppressed people in our world. They don't have a damn thing to say about the transformation of our world. Someone could use spiritual direction to avoid any and all responsibility for injustice. God isn't present in avoidance. Spiritual direction should be about finding God within so that one might find God without...in the marginalized and oppressed.

Make no mistake.

We need direction.

We just need a wildly different direction.

The people of God have to know how to move. The people of God have to know how dance. The people of God have to run to fight injustice as if there is fire crackling under their ass. Spiritual direction is about sharing the flame.

Calling.

The language of calling feels contrived.

I don't believe God calls people.

I believe God makes people.

"When did you first feel called by God?" The first question at my ordination council stirred around in my head. As I looked out at the assembled men, I realized that there was a great disconnect between them and I. The gap wasn't one of age. The gap was one of theology. The assembled believed that God created a hierarchy of men to serve the church. The language of calling had to do with maintaining control. The language of calling had to do with homogenized thinking and being. I resisted. The best that I was able to come up with was, "I don't believe I was called to anything. I believe I was created to be a minister."

I've always loved origin stories

Though I have strong suspicions concerning the language of calling, I love the language of origins.

Origins seem to be about real people with real creations in the image of God.

Comic books seem to illustrate this principle better than most. Think about the story of Superman. Born on the planet Krypton with amazing powers and sent to Earth as the last of his species, Superman is raised in Kansas and becomes the great savior of his new world. I think about Spider-Man and that infamous spider bite. The change in Bruce Wayne to become Batman after he saw

his parents murdered. Think about the Gospels. From his actual birth in Bethlehem to his lineage to the great lines of the Word being God, the comic books that are our Gospels tell the amazing origin stories of Jesus. The language of origin gives room to talk about special powers and the seed of God that blossom throughout our lives.

I am not called to spiritual direction.

I was born into it.

Gifts.

"Do you believe in Santa Claus?"

I remember being asked the question in third grade. Sitting in the lunchroom before our lime green lunch trays, we all leaned in waiting for each person to respond to the speculation of the season. Initially, Mary declared, "I believe." Then, Mary decided to change her answer to, "I think there is..." Next, Mercedes declared, "No, I don't believe in Santa Claus." Antonio jumped in and declared, "I believe in Santa Claus with all my heart." The answers kept flowing. Finally, it was my time. I felt like the entire table was staring into my soul. After taking a few deep breathes, I boldly replied, "Belief

makes things real. My belief in Santa Claus is what makes Santa Claus real." I still believe that.

We must believe in our abilities before we can act into our abilities.

The language of gifts also reminds me of Christmas. I think about packages wrapped up under the tree. We race to tear open the paper to see what's inside. Even if we are really excited about what we find, we usually only use the gift for a short period of time before we eventually sell it at a yard sale. Gifts are most often fleeting. Gifts don't typically last a lifetime. I don't know that it would be helpful for me to talk about something that is perishable. The imperishable nature

of who and what God created me to be in the first place seems to be what an essay like this is calling for.

I believe we are called to blur our way to God.

Queer theory has saved my soul. I have realized that the only way forward is through blurring the boundaries, identities and categories that hold us back. Transcendence happens when we step over lines. I believe my work is about helping others learn what it means to journey back to their origins and live into the person that God created us to be in the first place. I God is there.

The destruction of the institutional church is beyond necessary.

Our denominations, structures and institutions are the greatest impediment to God that has ever existed. God does not go to church. God is outside of the church...with those who have always been left out. We are out busting down walls and kicking over altars until there is no impediment to God left. So many souls are choking to death in these spaces. Without demolition there can be no fruition of the fullness of the beauty of God in the land of the living. I am a demolition artist.

Justice should be our only aim.

I don't see how you can claim to follow Jesus in our present age without a fierce pursuit of justice. Where are we when the people are gunning people down? Where are we when immigrants are dying to get to across our borders? Where are we when people are dying in poverty? When injustice thrives, our faith dies. I believe in placing my body between the forces of evil and the marginalized and the oppressed. That's what Jesus did to.

Justice is my only aim.

Jeff Hood

July 28, 2016

On Police and Civil Liberties

Chief David Brown and I marched together and talked. With every step, we exchanged life. I talked about my dad serving as fire chief of two metropolitan departments. He talked about his pride in being part of the march. Before the conversation ended, I was surprised that I'd grown to like Brown. Strengthened in hope, I prayed the chief would be the one to end police brutality in Dallas.

Milwaukee is in flames. Though the name of the city has changed, the recipe for chaos is the same.

Shots are fired. Bullets ignite the anger of oppressed peoples. Officials rush to the nearest camera to express disbelief. The pain of the community is on full display. Everyone calls for discourse.

The problem is that no one can imagine a future different from the past. Ultimately, the chaos becomes manageable. Speech that arises from the flames is squashed. In a time of forced unity, dissent is simply too costly.

Already, just a month removed from the July 7 police ambush, we see it in Dallas.

But first, let's go back even further, to a different Dallas rally, in June. After 49 people were killed at the Pulse nightclub shooting, hundreds gathered here for the Orlando to Dallas Vigil and March.

Beautiful words filled the air. Rain gently fell. People seemed united in their desire to end the hate. By the time the march started, I saw numerous law enforcement officials I knew -- and one I'd never met before.

For a second, I hesitated. As an outspoken critic of police brutality, I'd spoken very harshly of the Dallas Police Department. Despite the unity at the event, I still believed all my criticisms. Regardless, I needed to take a chance on loving my neighbor. Turning around, I said: "Chief Brown. I'm Jeff Hood."

Chief David Brown and I marched together and talked. With every step, we exchanged life. I talked about my dad serving as fire chief of two metropolitan departments. He talked about his pride in being part of

the march. Before the conversation ended, I was surprised that I'd grown to like Brown. Strengthened in hope, I prayed the chief would be the one to end police brutality in Dallas.

As the month passed, the world seemed to grow only more frightening. Police brutality was on the rise. Anger was growing. I helped organize a march on July 7 to provide people a chance to respond. The rhetoric was hot. I was particularly incensed; it seemed that across the nation, black and brown bodies were piling up by the hour.

Throughout the event, the Dallas Police Department protected our civil liberties. I worked with an officer the entire time. Toward the end of the march, the officer and I were talking about how peaceful the event was

when the shots went off. Immediately, the officers sprang into action. Chaos ensued. When the smoke dissipated, it became clear that Brent Thompson, Patrick Zamarripa, Michael Krol, Lorne Ahrens and Michael Smith died protecting our civil liberties.

The next day, Brown said at a news conference: "Police officers are guardians of this great democracy; the freedom to protest, the freedom of speech, freedom of expression. All freedoms we fight for -- with our lives."

On this, Brown and I are in complete agreement.

Since the shooting, I've committed myself to honoring the sacrifices of the fallen officers by continuing to exercise my civil liberties. I encourage the community to do the same.

I'd thought Brown and I were on the same page, so I was surprised to hear that the chief was negotiating with activists to give up their civil liberties in order to secure a meeting with him. He demanded that they call off a planned protest. "What's more important than our officers' safety. ... Cancel it and don't schedule anymore in the downtown area. ... I insist," Brown wrote. As the precondition of a meeting with a public official, these words should frighten anyone who values living in a free society. I'm still praying the chief simply misspoke. In this community, our civil liberties have been bought with blood. None of us who survived the July 7 shooting did so only to have those liberties exchanged for a meeting. The cost of freedom is too high for such a concession.

Amid the dangers of our world, let's take the opportunity to open our doors and meet with each other. Let us put aside differences and dialogue, as Chief Brown and I did when we first met. Then, let us march forward together in the unity of justice. Is progress not what our civil liberties are for?

Jeff Hood

August 17, 2016

On Confederate Flags in De Leon, Texas

Beauty reaches out and grabs you. I experience it every time. I see it. I feel it. I hear it. The land speaks. The fields sway. The sky never stops. I could go on and on. Make no mistake…De Leon is a beautiful place.

Unfortunately, everything turned ugly on our last visit. We were driving through town when we started seeing the Confederate flag everywhere. We saw the flag on houses. We saw the flag on businesses. We saw the flag on trucks. The stars and bars are unmistakable. The sting of the hate that accompanies the flag is too.

“Daddy…Why are they flying the hate flag?” Though we come from Confederate heritage, we’re not interested in continuing or promoting the racism of the past. We teach our kids what the Confederate flag means. How could we not teach them to choose love over hate?

How does a town with so many churches have so many Confederate flags? I couldn’t believe it. Was De Leon growing more racist with every visit? More than that, I suspected the town was becoming more fearful. The same scenario is repeatedly playing throughout our society.

There will be those who claim heritage. I don’t buy it. If your heritage is important to you, you should be able to

find less offensive ways of showing it. We all know that the Confederate flag has been a symbol of hate for a very long time. You don't need much knowledge of history to realize it.

As much as Jesus is talked about in De Leon, I invite you to follow him in loving all of your neighbors and tossing out those flags.

Jeff Hood

September 22, 2016

On Support for the Death Penalty

Have you ever killed somebody? The question in and of itself is haunting. Have you ever killed somebody? Each word rattles my soul. Have you ever killed somebody? The more times I ask the question the more times I'm brought face to face with my own complicity in killing. Most people don't think about it like that. The more times I ask the question to others, the more times I

get adamant denials of ever being involved in killing someone. Yet in the midst of a quickness to absolve ourselves of any evil, there is our death penalty. Each time the State of Texas kills someone, the citizens are responsible. Since 1982, we have killed 538 people. There is no hope to be found in what we are. There is only hope to be found in what we can become.

Just last week, the Pew Research Forum released an article entitled, "Support for the death penalty lowest in four decades." I grabbed my heart and almost fell over. Though I'd known that support for the death penalty has been declining for a number of years nationally, this was the first time that I'd realized that it

was at the lowest point in four decades. Just under half of Americans now support the death penalty (49%), while 42% oppose it. Support is down from a high of 80% in 1994. Support has even dropped 7% since March of last year. The death penalty is dying. How could this be? We've had that killer instinct for so long. People are changing. While I can't say for sure why, three possible reasons are worthy of deep thought.

How do you teach someone not to kill by killing? The death penalty is supposed to be a deterrent to killing. How could it be? The death penalty teaches people that there are ethical ways of killing. We can't teach people how to stop killing by showing them how to do it again and again. To that end, the Death Penalty

Information Center has consistently reported that the murder rates in death penalty states are higher than the rates in states that don't have the death penalty (http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org/deterrence-states-without-death-penalty-have-had-consistently-lower-murder-rates). The death penalty is not a deterrent to murder. If anything, it is an encouragement to murder. People are finally figuring out they are less safe with a death penalty than they are without one.

The death penalty is not a deterrent to crime.

Killing is expensive. Ever since the March 8, 1992 Dallas Morning News article entitled "Death Penalty Costs Millions," the public has known that the death penalty

costs multiple times the amount that it would cost to put someone in a maximum security prison for life. We also know that the cost isn't going down. Just a few years ago, the Dallas Morning News reported in "Execution Drug Cost Quadruples for Texas Prisons" that death penalty costs are skyrocketing. Companies don't want to sell drugs meant to save lives to those who are dedicated to taking lives. The cost to carry out these executions is only going to continue to grow. The bottom line is that we know it is far more expensive to execute someone than to put them in prison for life. The death penalty is starting to earn a reputation for being another expensive failed government program.

The death penalty costs too much.

There is a question that eats at the souls of those with knowledge about the death penalty. What if we execute someone who is innocent? I think we already have. Surely out of the hundreds, there's got to be at least one. Was it Carlos De Luna? Was it Cameron Todd Willingham? Or was it someone else entirely? In 2014, the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (http://www.newsweek.com/one-25-executed-us-innocent-study-claims-248889) released a study concluding, "One in 25 sentenced to death in the US are innocent." With exonerations taken into account, Texas has still probably executed many innocent people. There is no way to stop the execution of the innocent without stopping executions entirely.

The death penalty kills the innocent.

The three reasons to abolish the death penalty meet to form one question.

Is the death penalty worth it?

Jeff Hood

October 18, 2016

On the District Attorney and Civil Liberties

On April 29, Jordan Edwards was murdered by Balch Springs police officer Roy Oliver. While I'm confident that many people have come to the same conclusion, it doesn't matter until our public officials successfully shepherd this case through our legal system. Without them, the case goes nowhere. Trust is often called for but seldom earned, especially in cases of police brutality. Even the most obvious cases are often scuttled. When Edwards was murdered, I found hope in

limited supply. Trusting God, I prayed. Minutes later, I was invited to a meeting with Dallas County District Attorney Faith Johnson. When I repeatedly asked about the scope of the gathering, I was told that an agenda had not been set. Well aware that a lack of a negotiated agenda means that someone else will control the agenda, I still knew I had to go. Considering the many possible outcomes of the meeting, I wondered if it would be an answer to prayer or the beginning of a nightmare.

Before heading in, we gathered to formulate a strategy. The same question was asked over and over, "What's the agenda?" Nobody knew. Trusting God, we walked in. What I thought was going to be a meeting with DA Johnson, turned into a meeting with a large contingent

of her top staff. The room was packed full. There was no question that she wanted to purvey a seriousness about her investigation. From the moment the DA started talking, she sought a connection. Our unrelenting skepticism was more than warranted. Outlining the progress of the investigation, we were assured it was proceeding expeditiously. The DA was desperate for us to trust her. I don't know that I've heard the word trust used in any meeting that many times. Repeatedly, we expressed that trust is earned not assumed. There was no question about what we wanted, a murder charge. If we didn't get it, we would take to the streets. The DA didn't retreat. I admired her struggle to assure us that she would do what's right. Certainly, this is much better than pursuing what's

wrong. After a fairly productive meeting, everyone was exchanging final words when a comment came out of nowhere. The DA reminded us that nobody wanted protests or press conferences. Surely, she knew that there were cameras outside and a protest had already been planned. I wondered if the comments were more about her reelection than anything else. When Roy Oliver was charged with murder a few days later, I was very proud of our efforts. Though I tried to forget the DA's previous comments, I couldn't. Then, it happened again.

Recently, District Attorney Johnson told the media that nobody wanted protests or any other actions. If she hadn't shared these comments just a few hours before a large protest, I might have been a little less suspicious. Instead, I was furious. Had the DA forgotten about our right to freedom of speech and assembly? This had nothing to do with Jordan Edwards. This was about the DA's reelection campaign. If it had been about Edwards, then conversations should have taken place between activists and the Edwards family. It is inappropriate and unethical for the DA to think that it's her role to mediate our responses to injustice. Think about how threatening it sounds for one of the most powerful legal officials in Dallas County to instruct activists on how they should exercise their rights. What are the

consequences of ignoring her requests? Who knows? Instructions paired with undefined consequences are the weapons of totalitarianism. Freedom means freedom for us all. Will the DA be a protector or a suppresser? Only time will tell. If reelection is so important to her, I suggest that she make the rights of all people important too. Jordan Edwards didn't die to birth further oppression. I hope District Attorney Faith Johnson remembers that.

Jeff Hood

May 17, 2017

On the Anniversary of the July 7th Shooting

Life is a peculiar thing. Occasionally, you find yourself in places you never expected. The allure of something more pulls you further. Then, the world explodes.

I watched last year as police put Alton Sterling down like an animal. The video played over and over again. I didn't have a choice. I couldn't walk away. We began to organize a march against police brutality in Dallas. Before our preparations were complete, I saw the video of Philando Castile bleed out after being shot by police.

The video played over and over again. I didn't have a choice. I couldn't walk away.

When the time came for our march on July 7, 2016, I felt God’s presence. People kept coming. Rage was our friend.

The times allowed for no other emotion. Our rhetoric reflected the deep collective desire for swift revolutionary change. We believed then as we do now that gradualism is the greatest threat to justice.

My time was drawing near. Pain grew with every word. God drew closer. The feel of the megaphone signaled it was time for me to speak. Though many words poured

out of my mouth, people remember four: "God damn white America!" Everything stopped.

During the next few days I did countless media interviews. Eventually, reporters stopped asking me to recount the events of the shooting and turned to what I said. I repeatedly heard versions of the same question, "Do you regret using that inflammatory phrase?" Amid the trauma and emotion, I gave a variety of responses. Things grow clearer with time. This column is not an apology. It is an invitation.

In those moments, I said exactly what needed to be said. As a minister, what stronger language could I have used

to condemn the systems that brutalize persons of color in this country?

After I spoke, a black man killed five police officers. Though constant racial oppression contributed to the violent climate, killing is always evil.

In the days that followed the Dallas police shooting, everybody wanted to talk about unity. In some ways, such talk hasn't stopped. The problem is that everyone wants to sacrifice justice to achieve it. I will not.

I used the phrase because I am diametrically opposed to a society dominated by white people. How could anyone who has watched the countless videos of police brutality

not join me? How can you follow the call of God to love your neighbor and be a white supremacist?

We are called to banish that which is evil. Is there anything more evil than protecting and promoting racism? If you want to stop, then stop.

The altar is open. Don't remain in your seat. Step out into the aisle. Run forward. Salvation is here.

Invitations are never without consequences. If you decide to get saved from racism, you will need to change. White supremacy infests every aspect of society. But the exterminator is within you. It's called love.

For those still questioning my use of that phrase, I must simply ask: Are you serious about honoring the fallen officers?

Lorne Ahrens, Michael Krol, Michael Smith, Brent Thompson and Patrick Zamarripa died protecting the rights of all people.

Will you live their legacy?

Jeff Hood

July 6, 2017

On Sheriff Lupe Valdez & her Campaign for Governor

Dead Body Disqualifies Valdez

On drugs and out of his mind, Joseph Hutcheson raced around Dallas. The date was August 1, 2015 and Hutcheson knew he was taking a ride for his life. With every second, he seemed to feel worse and worse. Seeing the Lew Sterrett Justice Center, Hutcheson

swerved to a stop. Seeing the glass doors, Hutcheson raced up the concrete hill. Busting the lobby doors open around 10:24am, Hutcheson started to do whatever he could to get help. As time passed with no response, Hutcheson grew more desperate. When deputies started to approach, he started shouting out, "Don't be scared of me, I just need some help." Their patience having run its' course, the deputies pounced. Other people in the lobby could not believe what they were seeing. As Hutcheson pleaded that he couldn't breathe, witness April Berryhill described one deputy having a "knee to his back" and another having a "knee to his throat." The force being placed on his body was not compatible with the maintenance of life. Eventually, all of the screaming stopped. Hutcheson's face turned from

white to blue. In the midst of his decline, the deputies were still forcefully restraining him. Once they realized that he had lost consciousness, they called for help. A considerable amount of time passed before CPR was started. No matter how many times they pumped, there was nothing they could do. The lobby security cameras recorded it all. Through brutalizing force, the Dallas County Sheriff's department murdered Joseph Hutcheson.

Responsibility for this incident rests squarely on the shoulders of Sheriff Lupe Valdez.

Now, she wants to be governor.

Throughout the duration of the video, it is clear that the deputies did not have any training for dealing with this situation. Many departments around the country have spent considerable amounts of time training for dealing with persons on drugs or the mentally ill. It seems obvious that there are plenty of options besides lethal force. Regardless, these deputies didn't have the training because Sheriff Valdez did not provide such training. Based on her inaction, Joseph Hutcheson is dead.

How many more Texans will die if a Governor Valdez fails to provide proper training?

As the body of Joseph Hutcheson lay on the floor, nobody seems to know how to administer proper medical treatment. CPR isn't started for a considerable amount of time. Sheriff Valdez did not put mechanisms in place to provide medical care for an incredibly vulnerable man.

How can we trust a Governor Valdez to work to make sure that other vulnerable people receive proper medical care?

Immediately after Hutcheson's death, Sheriff Valdez presided over a declaration that they found drugs in Hutcheson's truck. Ultimately, they had to admit that their statement was a lie. The release illustrates that

they were very interested in defaming the victim as a means of absolving the department.

How many more advantageous lies will a Governor Valdez tell?

As the Hutcheson family mourned, they heard nothing from Sheriff Valdez. Even though Hutcheson died in her jail, they heard nothing from Sheriff Valdez. Even though her deputies murdered someone that they loved, they heard nothing from Sheriff Valdez. They heard nothing. After some time, in the midst of rallies and protests, Sheriff Valdez released a statement of condolence to the Hutcheson family. Politics dictated her conscience.

How can we ever believe that a Governor Valdez will be compassionate to all?

We rallied and we rallied and we rallied. For weeks and weeks, we demanded the release of the tape. We knew that that tape showed it all. Sheriff Valdez wouldn't budge. It wasn't until we got more and more media involved and spoke before the Commissioner's Court that she decided to release the tape. Politics won again.

How often will a Governor Valdez refuse to release information or try to obstruct the progress of justice?

After our Commissioner's Court speeches, we confronted Sheriff Valdez in the back of the room. Press surrounded us. Offering nothing in the way of condolences to the Hutcheson family, Valdez kept telling us, "Let's not do this in front of the cameras." I couldn't believe that all she cared about was saving face in front of the cameras.

Could you ever trust a Governor Valdez to not act the same way?

Time continued to pass. Believing people have a right to know who is policing them, we kept demanding that Sheriff Valdez release the names of the deputies involved in the murder of Joseph Hutcheson. She

wouldn't do it. Possibly thinking that it could reignite large protests, Valdez wouldn't budge. Ultimately, a leak provided all of the names. Valdez remained an obstructionist.

How much information would a Governor Valdez keep from Texans?

Though the questions are many, there is only one conclusion.

Sheriff Lupe Valdez is not qualified to be the Governor of Texas.

The dead body of Joseph Hutcheson is all the evidence you need.

Jeff Hood

December 9, 2017

On Donald Trump & the Need for Revolution

I woke up. Fear had nested in my bones. I couldn't see. There was something downstairs. The words penetrated the darkness. "Trump" and "win" repeated incessantly on the forgotten radio. Shock exploded. Audio of the vulgar and profane utterances filled my ears. I was

terrified for the marginalized and oppressed. Their lives were already tough.

Now, things were going to get much worse. In the darkness, my soul cried out for the strength to stand with the forgotten. I stumbled. Immediately, I got back up. There would be no rest. In the light of the election, I knew that I must learn to walk anew.

Even though I didn't believe it possible, I still prayed that he would change. I don't pray like that anymore. I pray for revolution. I pray for the swift and immediate removal of the president of the United States.

I am a Baptist minister. For centuries, my forbearers have carried the torch of religious liberty. We are firm believers in the separation of church and state. Local Baptist minister and religious tyrant Robert Jeffress does

not behave like a Baptist; he's behaves like a joke. He speaks evil to be seen favorably by our president.

Since the election, I've started to realize that the separation of church and state does not mean the separation of conscience and hate. This is not about politics. This is about responding to evil for what it is, evil. These are desperate times. To not revolt against our president now is a sin that futures generations surely will not be forgive. I believe revolution is the only path to God.

Jeff Flake's policies and politics always reminded me of a popular bully in high school. Then, something happened. Frightened by the actions of our president, Flake began to revolt. Most Republicans have sought to

distance themselves from his actions. Flake doesn't seem fazed at all.

With boldness, Flake recently rose on the floor of the Senate to deliver a withering critique of our president's consistent denial of truth. At one point, he even compared Trump to Joseph Stalin. I couldn't believe it. He has joined the revolution. There was one line of the speech that has stuck with me more than all the others:

"Between the mighty and the modest, truth is the great leveler."

Our president might be the greatest liar of our age. Such a title would also make him the greatest oppressor of our age. Truth is the great leveler. It is the only thing that can set the captives free.

The verbalization of words does not create truth. Our president says he loves all people. He is lying.

Our president has mocked the disabled.

Our president has denigrated women.

Our president has shunned black people.

Our president has stolen from the poor.

Our president has bullied Muslims.

Our president has robbed native populations.

Our president has ignored the homeless.

Our president has endangered LGBT folk.

Our president has terrified Latinos.

Our president has tricked the worker.

Our president has cursed the condemned.

Our president has destroyed the environment.

The evil doesn't stop.

Our president's verbalization of words has not created truth. Our president says he loves all people. He is lying.

Revolution is a peculiar word. For many, it's terrifying. For others, it's exciting. For us, it must be our reality.

Evil controls our present. It doesn't have to control our future.

Jeff Hood

January 20, 2018

On Good Friday & the Death Penalty

Good Friday always beckons us to think deeply.

Word spread quickly. The crime was unspeakable. The reward for his capture was great. The government was desperate to get him off the streets. Nobody knew what he was capable of next. Considering him to be exceedingly dangerous, law enforcement planned carefully. For some time, they'd practiced and discussed the take. When the moment arrived, one of the fugitive's confidantes revealed his location. As authorities made the arrest, those closest to him pushed back. It was no use. It was as if he knew his fate. Government officials repeatedly declared that a monster had been taken off the streets. The mob grew larger and larger. Everyone wanted justice right then and

there. Believing some level of due process was necessary to keep from giving their power over to the mob, local officials restrained themselves. That doesn't mean that they restrained themselves completely. Throughout his detainment, he was subject to repeated abuse. Everyone knew that this was a big one. Insult after insult flew. They knew that nobody could stop them now. Then, the time came.

When the doors opened, he immediately became aware of how public his case was. Though he'd seen reports and heard rumblings, he just wasn't aware of the magnitude of the hate. Every whisper was a whisper of death. The weight of it all was almost too much to carry. Weak in the knees, he determined to keep moving. The people kept calling him a monster. The

words were painful. However, it was more painful to realize that they were calling everyone he loved monsters too. When the walk didn't seem like it could get anymore longer, he was there.

There was no question what everyone wanted. Death was in the air. You could see it in their eyes. The authorities gave him a chance to save his life, but he didn't take it. Nobody could believe it. Who wouldn't take the opportunity to save his life? He was subjected to further punishment and then offered the chance at life again. He declined. Death it was.

The path was long between the place of judgment and the place of execution. At every step, the cries of monster overwhelmed his brain. Torture was constant. He was very aware of what the people

wanted. With all that was going on, he couldn't believe that the religious people were the ones shouting the loudest. God and killing just didn't seem to go together. In the midst of it all, he stumbled a few times. I guess that's the nature of all difficult paths.

As the place of execution approached, the Governor had one last chance. Citing his faith, the Governor let the killing continue. Waiting for death, he prayed. Slowly, he was strapped in. His great crime was raised up for all of the world to see. God felt so far away. How could he have been so forsaken? His final words echoed in the beings of all who heard them, "Into your hands I commend my spirit." Death came with a rush. In great agony, he took his last breath. It was finished.

The accounts of Jesus' sacrifice and death always move me deeply. The only problem is, this narrative is not about Jesus. This is a narrative of Rosendo Rodriguez. We executed him last Tuesday. God was there and so was I. Under the rain, I watched. Our souls were stolen by our thirst for vengeance. I could see evil take them one by one. Could the man have possibly been human? Nobody was interested in that question. Could the man have truly been a seeker of God? Nobody was interested in that question. Nobody was interested in anything but killing. More blood was needed. Our thirst was not yet quenched.

The message of God died on that gurney. There are no followers of God here. There are only killers. We love our neighbor by killing them. We forgive our

persecutor by killing them. We pray for our neighbor by killing them. We don't love. We don't forgive. We don't pray. We kill and kill and kill and kill... God hates the death penalty. We are so lost.

Abolition is our only salvation.

Jeff Hood

March 29, 2018

On the Prejudices of the Dallas Morning News

Tears flowed. Multiple employees of the Dallas Morning News sat around me. The task was to discuss our prejudices. Though this was not the first Dallas Festival of Ideas event that I had been to, this was by far the most intimate. In the midst of it all, I was growing more uncomfortable by the second. While I am certainly aware that nobody is perfect, I couldn't stop thinking that many of these people were the same people charged with writing about the same groups of people that they were admitting that they were prejudiced against. My hope that real change might come from these moments was dashed when the next edition of the newspaper came out.

There are newspapers all over the country that have strong records of standing with marginalized and oppressed peoples...the Dallas Morning News is not one of them. Since the inception of the newspaper, words have been constructed and reconstructed intentionally and unintentionally to mask prejudice. While it is important to recognize the Morning News' efforts to grow in recent years to change, time has only solidified my conviction that the newspaper doesn't have the tools it needs to be transformed into a resource for all people. The revolutionary change that I speak of comes from the streets. In order to understand the cries of the masses, one has to understand the language of the masses.

Unfortunately, the Morning News has proven ineffective at interpreting such language.

Throughout its' history, the Dallas Morning News has endorsed candidates for public office. While I am sure that there are many well-intentioned persons participating in the endorsement process, hidden prejudices always seem to remain hidden. For instance, experience seems to be considered a premier consideration for candidates. Unfortunately, such a consideration assumes equality in access. The obvious prejudices of our time should be enough to reveal that experience is difficult to come by for many...if not most. In the streets, experience is code for establishment...or the oppressors.

Police brutality is rooted in prejudice. The streets are beholden to the biases of every officer. For decades, departments have tried to portray their departments as unbiased. These claims of unbias have allowed officers to operate with very little check on their biases. Due to the work of activists throughout the country, law enforcement is being forced to change. In the midst of it all, the streets are beginning to realize that claims of unbais are often code for bias that is free to operate with impunity. The same thing is taking place at the Dallas Morning News. Unbias creates impunity for bias. In the streets, those who claim unbias cannot be trusted.

Exploitation is one of the most disgusting facets of prejudice. Under the guise of engagement, the vulnerable are used for the gain of the powerful. The streets hear engagement and exploitation as synonymous. The Dallas Morning News must stop covering the community and begin to write from within the community. Real relationship/trust comes from within.

Language is rapidly transforming. To not engage such a change is to remain deeply prejudiced against those who have little voice. The aforementioned words, phrases and actions...along with many more...are violent to those of us in the streets. Put down your dangerous words and let's learn to talk.

Jeff Hood

December 20, 2018

On the Execution of Rodney Reed

For the better part of a decade, I've given my life to the abolition of the death penalty. I've marched hundreds of miles. I've ministered to countless condemned souls. I've been arrested. I've served on boards. I've traveled widely. I've written books. I've given interviews. I've held press conferences. I've been on the cover of multiple publications. I've been featured on numerous programs. To be quite frank, you will find very few

people who have done more for abolition in recent years. Yet, there is one piece of the movement that has always disturbed me...the desire to erase evil by ignoring it.

Current popular narratives being used to save the life of Rodney Reed provide a clear example of such phenomenon...the problem is that they ignore the whole story.

According to established court testimony and appellate records...

She was 12. We don't know her name because of the trauma that she went through. In court documents, she

is called AW. Late one night, she was home alone. The television kept her company and had her full attention. Without warning, AW was violently grabbed...bound...and gagged. Blow after blow, crippled her young body. As words of vulgarity reigned, she was brutally raped...orally...vaginally...and anally. The subsequent rape kit pointed to Rodney Reed.

His 2 children were there. LUCY EIPPER tried to make it work...but Rodney Reed wouldn't stop abusing her. While their kids watched, Reed raped Eipper. Despite the fact that she was pregnant, Reed repeatedly raped Eipper. The violence was endless.

She was intellectually disabled. CAROLINE RIVAS' caseworker noticed multiple injuries on her body. When asked where they came from, Rivas replied that Rodney Reed would hurt her when she wouldn't have sex with him. In time, Rivas disclosed that Reed had also raped her anally.

She was abducted. Late one night, VIVIAN HARBOTTLE was abducted and raped underneath a train trestle. As she pled for her life, her attacker laughed. The subsequent rape kit pointed to Rodney Reed.

She was giving him a ride. Leading her to a remote area, Rodney Reed tried to rape LINDA SCHLUETER.

The only thing that caused tragedy to be averted was a passing car.

Despite the current Rodney Reed craze, we have yet to hear the names of these women. Such an omission is disgusting. How can we claim to care about human life and forget these stories so easily? While I doubt that Reed killed Stacy Stites for a variety of evidentiary reasons, I don't doubt the stories recounted above. So, let's make it very clear...Rodney Reed is not innocent. In fact, he is just the opposite...which is where we must meet him.

In the days ahead, we have an execution to stop...not because Rodney Reed hasn't done evil things...but because we are determined not to follow his lead.

Jeff Hood

November 15, 2019

On Civil Disobedience, the Church and COVID-19

His huge fist repeatedly struck her face. This wasn't the first time her boyfriend beat her up...but this was definitely the worst. Hours later, she awoke with blood caked between her face and the floor. Seeing that her boyfriend was asleep, she quietly ran out the door. Due to multiple warrants, she was too scared to call the police. So, she ran to the only place she knew to go.

Seeing the steeple in the distance, she ran harder. For many years, her church was known as a place that would help victims of domestic violence. It was her only hope. Once she got on the lawn, she raced to the side door. There was always someone there. Running up, she missed the sign. Over and over again, she banged on the door. Nobody came. Backing up, she realized that there was a sign, "Churches are not considered essential based on the recent COVID-19 order...so we have been forced to suspend all social services until the order is lifted."

He was sitting at home watching television. The phone rang. On the other end of the line, was a voice he did not know. After identifying himself as a local police

officer, the voice proceeded to tell him that his son was shot and killed earlier that night. Devastated, the man called his pastor. After hearing the anguish in his voice, the pastor raced over to his parishioner's house. Not long after he got off of the exit, he was pulled over. Unable to understand what he had done wrong, he rolled down the window. The officer asked where he was going. After his explanation, the pastor thought he was just going to be able to go. Instead, the officer went back to his car. After a few minutes, the officer came back with a citation. Immediately, the pastor demanded to know the reason for this ticket. The officer didn't hesitate, "Ministers are not considered essential workers under the recent COVID-19 order."

She needed food. The church was closed.

He needed emergency counseling. The church was closed.

He needed help with his bills. The church was closed.

She needed somewhere to sleep. The church was closed.

He needed to take a shower. The church was closed.

She just needed help. The church was closed.

He just needed help. The church was closed.

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.

* Though I am speaking from my context, I want to make it very clear that I am speaking of all communities/persons of faith.

Jeff Hood

March 28, 2020