Jeff Hood

A Life of Writings

2017-2019

2017

"Are our Confederate monuments worth the lives of our neighbors? If not, we all need to get to work to bring them down." -Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood, July 7 Organizer

January 4, 2017

The Suicide of Salvation

The group sat down close to me. I knew one of them was an evangelical. The cheese gave it away. Needing to get work done, I tried to ignore them. I was successful for a while. Then, I heard a question that has always haunted me. "Do you want to get saved?" Wanting to be sure, I bet I have gotten saved tens of thousands of times. I leaned i/n to hear what the evangelical's two pupils were going to say. Both excitedly proclaimed, "Absolutely!" I listened to the prayer. "God, allow your inerrant and infallible words to save us." Leaning further in, I thought, "That's what it's all about?" The evangelical pronounced them saved. Opening their eyes, the two asked in unison, "What do we do next?" The evangelical quickly and enthusiastically responded, "Reading the Bible was what Christianity was all about!" As if there was nothing more to being a Christian than saying a few words and reading a book, the evangelical got up as fast as he came in. I guess he had more souls to save.

As I watched the two young men excitedly get up, I couldn't help but say something. Getting their attention, I passionately declared, "Everything he just said is bullshit. If you want to follow God, follow Love. For God is Love." Both of them looked at me like I was the devil. One of them actually said, "Your salvation is suicide." As they scattered, I could tell that I really unnerved them. I bet they're praying that I will get saved at this very moment.

Amen.

January 5, 2017

The Thrill of Violence and The Absence of Conscience

Just a few days ago, an 18-year-old man with special needs was abducted in Chicago. Two 18-year-old men and two 18-year-old women proceeded to tie him up and

tape his mouth shut. After taking him to a secure location, the four abductors turned on Facebook Live. After they had an online audience, they beat him for over 30-minutes. One even took a knife and scalped part of his head. Throughout the beating, the four black abductors hurled racial epitaphs at the white victim. Investigators have even insinuated that this was a hate crime. A short time after the incident, police found the traumatized man wondering the streets in crises. The four abductors were promptly arrested.

When I thought about the causes of this evil act, I thought about the people who watched such brutality live. How could anyone get any satisfaction from beating someone with special needs? After some consideration, I realized that we watch egregious violence online all the time. The Internet is full of extreme depictions. Every video seems to raise the stakes even higher. How far will we go? What about broadcasting a murder? It has already been done.

What about broadcasting a rape? It has already been done. What about broadcasting a suicide? It has already been done. I could go on and on. The instances of depictions of unbelievable violence online are innumerable. Perhaps, we should stop watching. Perhaps, we can slow down the demand. We have to do something before our conscience disappears.

Amen.

January 5, 2017

The Power of a Fart

I pushed the button to get on. The ding alerted me that my ride was here. As I stepped on, I realized that I was entering a space full of sour looking people. The looks on their faces alone would be enough to darken anyone's day. I always get stuck with people like this on

elevators. After we went up a few floors, a man in the back started to sweat. I could tell he wasn't feeling well. I tried to move away from him. I wasn't quick enough. The sound was deafening. The air coming out of his ass overwhelmed everyone. Slowly, the smell crept into all of our nostrils. I was certain he sharted. Regardless, everyone started laughing uncontrollably. Even the guy who farted couldn't stop laughing. The power of the fart was to turn a bunch of sour people into really silly people. When the door opened on the next floor, we all rushed off and decided to take the stairs.

When I was a kid, I often farted in church. While I don't guess I farted there more than anywhere else, there was something really funny about farting in church. Nevertheless, my farts made me wonder about Jesus farting. Did Jesus ever fart in the temple? Did Jesus ever get a laugh over a fart? Did Jesus ever shart? Did Jesus ever fart in groups? After my transformative experience today, I'm sure Jesus did. Just like the fart

brought us together on the elevator, I bet Jesus' farts will bring the whole world together.

Amen.

January 6, 2017

Drop the Gun!

Earlier today, a lone gunman opened fire in the baggage claim area of Terminal 2 at the airport in Fort Lauderdale. The sounds were deafening. Bullets repeatedly penetrated bodies. Everybody ran. When the smoke cleared, five people were dead and countless others were wounded. The carnage hasn't fazed most citizens. In our country, these types of events happen all the time. Shootings are an integral part of our culture. We don't know how to live unless people are getting shot.

Jesus knows exactly what to say to a society like ours, "Put down the guns dumbasses."

Amen.

January 7, 2017

Esteban Santiago Should Have Been Helped.

Back in November, Esteban Santiago was growing increasingly paranoid and traveled to the Alaska FBI office to share that he thought that the government was controlling his mind. From his car, agents recovered a gun. Not long after, local police transported Santiago to a hospital for mental health treatment. About a month later, Santiago picked up his gun. Soon after, Santiago flew to Ft. Lauderdale, Florida to unleash a massacre

with the same gun. Now, five people are dead and many others are injured.

Why did Santiago get his gun back? Our laws did not give the FBI the ability to keep the gun. Santiago was not accused or convicted of a crime nor had a court declared him mentally deficient. Here in the United States, we care more about loose gun laws than we do about our citizens. It's hard to believe that this young man walked to an FBI office desperately seeking help and they didn't have the authority to keep his gun.

Why didn't Santiago he get the help he needed? Why wasn't he protected? Why was there no follow up? The only thing that could have saved the lives of the folks in Ft. Lauderdale would have been some sort of action that fills the gap between law enforcement and the hospital. The FBI obviously didn't make it happen. A lack of support for those struggling with mental illness has once again taken lives.

It should not be this easy to carry out a massacre.

It should not be this easy to get or keep a gun.

When someone is mentally ill they need help not their weapon back.

There are bodies on the floor of the terminal.

What will we do to stop the bleeding?

Amen.

January 9, 2017

Leaving God for Is

I am.

The God of our names is not God. The God of our constructions is not God. The God of our thoughts is not God. God is. God is beyond our names. God is beyond our constructions. God is beyond our thoughts. God is. We will not find God in our names. We will not find God in our constructions. We will not find God in our thoughts. God is. We must leave our names to find God. We must leave our sight to find God. We must leave our thoughts to find God. God is.

It is the isness of God that makes God God. We are created in the isness of is.

Our names are not us. Our constructions are not us. Our thoughts are not us. We are. We are beyond our names. We are beyond our constructions. We are beyond our thoughts. We are. We will not be found in names. We will not be found in constructions. We will not be found in our thoughts. We are. Our names will

be no more. Our constructions will be no more. Our thoughts will be no more. We are.

God is. We are.

Leave God. Embrace is.

Is.

Amen.

January 10, 2017

The Execution of an Evil Man

A few years ago, I began to write Texas death row inmate Christopher Wilkins. From the beginning, I could tell that Wilkins was very calculated disturbed person. In the midst of such danger, I still made the

decision to serve Wilkins as a spiritual guide. After writing for some time, Wilkins invited me to visit him on death row. I will never forget those first few moments. The metal door swung open. Wilkins had his head down as the guards took off the handcuffs. After Wilkins reached his seat, his head popped up. As I squirmed in my chair, Wilkins looked straight at me without blinking. Time seemed to stop. After Wilkins grabbed the phone, we began to talk. Over the course of the visit, Wilkins described his crimes in an emotionless fashion. With every sentence, it became increasingly clear that Wilkins had committed many more murders than he was convicted of. I had never encountered such evil. Trying to bring some level of some level of spirituality to the conversation, I mentioned that forgiveness was possible. Wilkins declared that he didn't need it. By the time the door swung back open. I was ready to go. When I returned home, my wife showed me a disturbing piece of mail that had arrived in the mail earlier that morning. It was an

inappropriate letter to my wife from Wilkins. I was shocked. Though, I shouldn't have been. Wilkins sought to make sure that the letter arrived while I was visiting him. Needless to say, our relationship soured from there. The more I learned about Wilkins, the more I realized how limitless evil can be. In the coming hours, the State of Texas will try to execute Christopher Wilkins. If we kill him, we will be just like him.

Amen.

January 11, 2017

The Table Revelation

As I sat with my family around our dinner table, I watched the clock. Every second hastened the execution of Christopher Wilkins. Though we interacted multiple times, we weren't friends. Honestly, I really didn't even

like the guy. I found him to be a hardened evil person. That doesn't mean I wanted him to die. As the clock drew closer and closer to 6pm, I began to pray for Wilkins. My wife knew what was going on. I know she was praying to. As the time of execution arrived, my son leaned over and asked, "Does everyone go to heaven?" In that moment, I remembered the last thing Wilkins said to me, "See you on the other side." From a place deep within my soul, I looked at my son and said, "Yes." Christopher Wilkins was declared dead at 6:29pm.

Amen.

January 12, 2017

The Death Penalty in Our Communities

Last night, Christopher Wilkins was executed. An admitted killer of many people, Wilkins was deemed unworthy of life. In the midst of thinking about the killing, I began to think about the many deaths that we cause. Three killings of the vulnerable in my home of Denton, Texas stood out. In each of these homicides, the cause of death was our inaction. I imagine there are many more communities that are responsible for similar inaction. Do we all deserve the death penalty?

Last Friday night, Richard Gaskin was desperate to get warm. As snow blanketed the ground, the temperature dropped quickly. At 36, Gaskin never expected to be homeless. After a few bad breaks, Gaskin found himself living in a tent in a wooded area behind a local business. On this night, Gaskin was desperate to keep from going back there. Gaskin knew the dangers of the cold. After repeatedly finding rejection, Gaskin reluctantly retreated to the tent. As he grew colder and colder, Gaskin's phobia of crowds and the anxiety it brought

kept him from going to the homeless shelter. Eventually, Gaskin went into shock and died.

Last November, Jessica Yankow was desperate to find a place to sleep. When she arrived after the 10pm curfew at the Salvation Army, the door was locked. The more she banged the more she realized that help wasn't coming. Yankow was forced to sleep outside. Around 5am, a mentally ill man named William Stevens found Yankow and started beating her. Stevens stomped on Yankow's head and neck until she was unconscious. Stevens fled the scene. A short time later, Yankow died.

Last May, Manny Abrego was unable to find a place to sleep. Desperate, Abrego went down into a flood canal and went to sleep under a bridge. Later in the night, a flash flood hit and swept Abrego away. The water kept coming. Eventually, Abrego drowned fighting for air.

Jesus talks about logs and specks. In terms of volume, it seems to me that these folks on death row are responsible for a few killings and we are responsible for many more than that. I guess we should stop executing those with specks in their eyes and concentrate on the logs in our own. Let us preserve life and stop promulgating death. Such a trajectory begins with seeing how we are failing to preserve life on all levels of our society. Now, go and sin no more.

Amen.

January 15, 2017

On Sex with Animals

A few years ago, I had one of the most interesting encounters of my life. I was working as chaplain in a downtown hospital. I was called to a room on the 2nd

floor. When I entered the room, the patient was terribly unkempt. The sign on the door said the patient's name was Frank. So, I went in and struck up a conversation. In the moments that followed, I learned to have empathy in a way that I never even imagined I could. I connected with a segment of our society that most don't even know exists. I left changed.

C1: Hi Frank. I am Chaplain…

F1: Does your name matter? I am going home in the morning. We probably won't be interacting again?

C2: I guess not.

F2: Do you do relationships?

C3: Yes. I am married with…

F3: No. Do you do counseling for relationships?

C4: I do. I would be honored to hear a little bit about your life.

F4: I have been with my partner for about four years (He begins to cry…I draw near to him and hold his hand)…and in the last two weeks things have just started breaking down. Things just don't seem to be the same.

C5: Tell me a little bit more about your relationship with your partner.

F5: Her name is Lucy.

C6: I apologize. Could you tell me a little bit more about Lucy?

F6: We met four years ago at a music festival. When I first laid eyes on her, I knew we were made for each other. After spending some time together just hanging out and listening to music, we walked to my car. I didn't know if she wanted to go home with me or not…so I got up the courage to ask her. She said yes and off we went. We were intimate on the first night. It was magical. We rolled around the bed all night. We've pretty much been together ever since. We don't stifle each other…she does her thing and I do mine…but I have never doubted that she loves me…at least until two weeks ago.

C7: Did something happen?

F7: (Frank began to cry uncontrollably…I put a fresh grip on his hand…desperately trying to stay present in the moment) Lucy bit me!

C8: What do you mean she bit you? Are we talking about rough sex?

F8: Yes. When we were intimate the other night, Lucy sank her long teeth into my neck. She had never done that before. Lucy became very vicious very quickly.

C9: (Still holding his hand…) Sir, if you don't mind me asking…what exactly is Lucy?

F9: Lucy is 88 beautiful pounds of Labrador.

C10: (Still holding his hand…) I appreciate the clarification. I'm sorry that things are not proceeding as well as you would prefer in your relationship with Lucy. Do you think the disconnect you're feeling from Lucy could possibly be attributed to the vast differences between your species?

F10: I have thought about that…but things have been going fine for the last four years.

C11: What attracted you to Lucy in the first place?

F11: I have had numerous failed relationships. This relationship with Lucy just seemed to work.

C12: How did those failed relationships make you feel?

F12: Less than human.

C13: Is it possible that your failed relationships turned you toward something that was less than human?

F13: Lucy didn't complain. Lucy didn't fight with me. Lucy didn't abuse me. Lucy just loved me.

C14: Have you considered that what you're doing to Lucy is abuse?

F14: I think I liked her because I could control her and treat her how all of the people in the past treated me.

C15: Does it surprise you that even a dog gets tired of that type of treatment?

F15: No, I guess not.

C16: (I am still holding his hand from earlier…and I draw closer) Frank, God loves you. What you're doing to yourself and Lucy is destructive to you both. You need to let her go and seek therapy to help you find a way forward into healthier relationships.

F16: I know you're right. It is just going to be hard to let her go. I get horny just thinking about her (his gown had noticeably risen at his crotch). I know what I have to do…I just have to find a way.

C17: (I ignore the erection…) You will.

F17: I receive that. I need to leave Lucy behind. I'm ready to be in a relationship with someone who can at least talk to me. I'm going to call my sister and ask her to take Lucy to the humane society. I've got to move past this funk I've been in. Chaplain it means so much to me that you have held on to my hand this whole time. I thought you would reject me…but you held on. Most people don't understand sex with animals. I thought that you would think I was weird, odd, disgusting or strange or something like that.

C18: You're not weird, odd, disgusting, or strange… you're a child of a God…who promises to never leave you nor forsake you. God is also holding your hand.

F18: Will you pray for me?

C19: (Making the sign of the cross on his forehead) God be near. May Frank never know a moment without you.

May Lucy never know a moment without you. In your presence, make them whole...Amen.

F19: (He begins to cry again…) Thank you… You are a true man of God. What is your name?

C20: Jeff

F20: Thank you Jeff. Now get out of here…I've got to do some tough shit.

C21: It was a pleasure to meet you sir.

F21: Likewise. Bye now.

C22: Blessings.

I was very shaken by the encounter with Frank. Not long after I left, I went and talked with a psychologist.

When I told him what happened, he challenged my assumptions. "What makes you think that someone can't be in a consensual sexual relationship with an animal? It doesn't just have to be all about sex either. Real intimate partnered love is a possibility too. Many animals are intellectually and emotionally more capable of healthier relationships than we are." While it has been many years since these events transpired, I think about them often. I still don't have clarity on what I should have said to Frank. I simply did the best I could with the understanding that I had.

The truth is that Frank is not alone. If you survey the online and print data out there, there are at least thousands of people currently carrying on intimate relationships with animals. Regularly, news stories come out after a relationship is revealed. These frequent occurrences bring about an important question. Can an animal consent to such a relationship? Through expanding science, we are gaining knowledge

that animals are as intelligent if not more intelligent than humans. I'm still uncertain if consent is possible. I do know that there are an increasing number of people who claim that it is. The more I think and read about it the blurrier the lines seem to get.

I also think about what Jesus would say. There is nothing in the gospel narrative that speaks to intimate relationships with animals. In the midst of such absence, one is even left to wonder if Jesus might have even had intimate relationships with animals. At the very least, I do know that Jesus was no stranger to all temptations. Such experiences gave Jesus empathy and love for all people. There is no question that God loves those who have sex or partnerships with animals. I think we should too.

Amen.

January 15, 2017

A Prophetic Convergence: The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. & The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

*Originally published on January 18, 2015

On April 19, 1961, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered a stirring sermon in a most unlikely place. Though not his most famous address, Dr. King's words to the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary or simply Southern Seminary pushed the audience to do more to accomplish racial justice. Delivered to the flagship theological institution of the flagship denomination of Southern Culture, Dr. King would never again give another address like this.

The Southern Baptist Convention originated from a desire amongst Southern Baptists to keep their slaves and Jesus too. For many of the early years, Southern

Seminary reflected the staunch racist and segregationist attitudes of Southern Baptists. After many years of secret and segregated courses, Garland Offutt became the first African-American graduate of Southern Seminary in 1943. By 1947, Southern Seminary was fully integrated. To put this in perspective, Duke Divinity School did not integrate until 1961 and Candler School of Theology at Emory University did not integrate until 1965. Who would have thought that the flagship seminary of Southern Baptists led the way amongst major theological institutions in the South on race?

In December of 1960, Dr. Henlee Barnett secured an invitation for Dr. King to deliver the Julian Brown Gay Lecture from the Guest Lectureship Committee. Knowing that the invitation would be controversial, Southern Seminary President Duke McCall told the committee, “Boys, it is your call, but you do realize you are going to cost us hundreds of thousands dollars if you proceed.” Dr. Barnette replied, “If so, it will be money

well spent.” Dr. King accepted the invitation and responded with a title, “The Church on the Frontier of Racial Tensions.” By the time April arrived, there were security concerns and controversy brewing throughout the Southern Baptist Convention.

Arriving with a full police escort, Dr. King was greeted by professors Henlee Barnett, Nolan P. Howington, Willis Bennett, Wayne Ward and James Leo Garrett. Dr. Ward remembered Dr. King being deeply reflective. The group stopped to take a picture that still hangs on the wall of my office. When Dr. King climbed into the pulpit, an overflow crowd of 1500 people greeted him. Former student Rev. Charles Worthy remembered, “The mood was absolutely electrifying.”

The Dr. King that is heard at the beginning of his address to Southern Seminary is not the same Dr. King that was later remembered as one of the greatest orators ever. Stumbling over his words, Dr. King is

clearly nervous. However, once he got in the flow, Dr. King never turned back. Speaking about the role of the church, Dr. King pushed the gathered to "…develop a world perspective." Speaking about race relations, Dr. King declared that racial injustice is "…diametrically opposed to the underlying philosophy of Christianity." Speaking about economic injustice, Dr. King declared that people must, "…learn to live like Jesus." Pushing the congregation out the door, Dr. King declared, the gathered must be "…maladjusted to the evils of this age." The only African-American seminary student in attendance at the time, Dr. Emmanuel McCall remembered, "It was powerful…I felt like the direction of many lives were altered that day." Though controversy did cause Southern Seminary to lose money, I have to agree with Dr. Barnette that it was money well spent.

In 2008, close to fifty years after Dr. King's sermon, I was a student struggling at a radically different Southern

Baptist Theological Seminary. Following denominational conflict, Southern Seminary became one of the most fundamentalist theological institutions in the nation. Due to some radical changes I experienced, I dramatically changed my perspective on a number of issues of social justice. When I was searching for direction and didn't have many places to go, I discovered the story of Dr. King's sermon. Realizing that there was a way to follow Jesus beyond the narrowness and bigotry I had known, I started following the advice contained in Dr. King's sermon and began working to develop a world perspective that equipped me to fight against injustice and be maladjusted to the evils of this age. Presently, I am a radical theologian and activist. Without the courage of the earlier professors from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and the witness of Dr. King, I doubt I would be here. I pray that maladjustment to injustice continues to spread.

Amen.

January 16, 2017

The Other Rev. King: A Word from Mississippi

*Originally Posted January 15, 2015

Make no mistake, there truly are ghosts in Mississippi. Most often, they inhabit long forgotten places and toil with hopes that their mortal lives have not been lived in vain. A few years ago, I first traveled to a forgotten place to meet a forgotten man. “For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them rubbish, in order that I might gain Christ and be found in him...” Though I had heard the words of Philippians 3:8 many times before, I had never heard them like this. We all know that the setting and the speaker often increase the magnitude of words. I knew that the man speaking to me despite a mangled jaw was someone who had

sacrificed his life to be on the side of justice. A veteran of the Civil Rights Movement and many other struggles, Rev. Ed King is a complicated man. Long forgotten by everyone except the most meticulous of historians, Rev. King truly has suffered the loss of all things in order to authentically gain and be found in God. While I went down to Jackson to collect and tell his story, Rev. King ended up changing mine.

We have very little cultural space for alternative heroes of the Civil Rights Movement. In an age of certainty, we have constructed clear lines of what we think an authentic hero is supposed to look like. Rev. King believed that the only line that should have consequence on the way that we engage the world is the one between justice and injustice. Desiring to stand on the side of justice, Rev. King was mentored early on by Medgar Evers. Serving as chaplain of historically black Tougaloo College, Rev. King helped to strategize, organize and lead the Civil Rights Movement in

Mississippi. There are few other figures as close to almost every major event in the Mississippi Movement. From talking to Evers before he was assassinated to being a part of the demonstration at Woolworth's Lunch Counter to being heavily engaged in Freedom Summer to being an early participant in and candidate for the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, Rev. King was consistently there and paid the price. Why do so few people know who he is?

From experiencing numerous acts of violence (including the crash that left his jaw mangled) to constant threats and psychological torment, Rev. King is forever scarred by the Civil Rights Movement. In the 50 years since, Rev. King has divorced, sometimes been broke and struggled to find his place in the emerging historical consciousness of the Movement. There were four people in the service when I met Rev. King. When I left, I felt sad that so many people were missing out on a chance to interact with such a historical figure. Sometimes, I

still feel sad when I talk to him. I guess I shouldn't. Rev. King has chosen to suffer the loss of all things and count them as rubbish so that he might be found in God. Through Rev. King I have learned that true discipleship is costly, especially in a society that has such strict interpretations of what authenticity is supposed to look like. During this time of celebration of the life of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., let us all not forget that there were other Kings and that life is about engaging in our own authentic pursuits of justice no matter what the cost.

Amen.

January 17, 2017

The Transgender Christ: Chelsea Manning

In 2010, US Army soldier Chelsea Manning disseminated over 750,000 documents and videos to WikiLeaks. The troubling material was exceedingly embarrassing for the US government. Diplomatic cables gave the world an inside look at the unseemly sides of US diplomacy. Arguably, the most damning of the materials was a video of a US helicopter attacking and killing Iraqi civilians and journalists. Eventually, Manning was arrested and tried. After being found guilty of multiple counts, a military judge sentenced Manning to 35 years in prison. A day after her sentencing, Manning came out as Transgender. For almost seven years, Manning has been locked up in an all male prison in Kansas. Throughout this time, Manning has had to fight for medical care that she requires for her transition. Earlier today, President Barack Obama commuted Manning's sentence and she will be released in May.

Christ comes to us in surprising ways. The incarnation wasn't a singular event. The incarnation happens

constantly and Jesus tells us where to experience it. In Matthew 25:43, Jesus says, "I was in prison..." This means that the incarnation is in prison. Christ is in prison. In the midst of our searchings, we are told to look to look to the oppressed. I can think of few more oppressed than Chelsea Manning. From being denied proper healthcare to repeatedly being placed in solitary confinement, Manning has persevered as only the incarnation can. For a long time, I've prayed for her. Occasionally, she has come to me. In the midst of my deeply spiritual interactions, I have met the Transgender Christ.

Amen.

January 18, 2017

The Revolting is Christ

Twice today, I've received messages criticizing my writing. The first said that persons who are attracted to or intimate with animals are revolting and that I was revolting for writing about them. The person also said that they should be given an express ticket for hell. The second person was a little subtler. Initially, they told me that my writing was too provocative. Then, they told me that calling Chelsea Manning the Transgender Christ was revolting. Towards the end of the message, they told me how revolting I was. While I get these types of dumbass messages all the time, I was inspired to think deeper about them today.

Not long after the shooting in Dallas, I was approached by the editor of a publication that I'd been writing for for a considerable amount of time. In the phone conversation, I was told that my writing was too revolting for their audience. Most of the time, I just let these encounters roll off and I keep on going. Honestly, I hadn't even thought about that chicken shit

publication again until today. After reading the two comments mentioned earlier, I immediately recalled what the editor of the publication said. Between the comments and the editor's words, I realized that the construction of revolting was the core principle of my theology. Christ is in our ideas of the revolting and we cannot be saved without going there.

Christ speaks to the revolting. In Matthew 25, we are told that the marginalized and oppressed are the only vehicle for an encounter with Christ. The marginalized and oppressed will always be the most revolting amongst us. People talk about praying and reading their Bibles all the time. If you really want to know Christ, you're going to have to get much dirtier than that. The revolting is both our revolution and our salvation.

Amen.

January 20, 2017

America First is Not a Christian Principle

Throughout the day today, I watched the inauguration of Donald Trump as President of the United States. Repeatedly, I heard the same chant, "America First! America First! America First!" While the largely crowd was simply repeating the words that Trump spoke, I was surprised by the large number of government officials who chanted the exact same thing. Everyone seemed to want the day and the future to be about, "America First!" The message was relayed that the salvation of our people and our planet depended on "America First!" While this might be all well and good for some, the problem for those claiming to be Christians is that "America First!" is not a Christian principle. Jesus' words in the Gospel of Matthew chapter 6 verse 33 make

it very plain, "But seek ye first the realm of God and it's righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." Don't allow patriotism to blind you. God is always first.

Amen.

January 22, 2017

The Children in Our Churches

A few months ago, we were sitting in church when one of our babies became upset. Like any parents, we quickly grew uncomfortable and tried to quiet our son down. Not long after the crying started, someone a few rows back loudly declared, "Can't you shut that baby up?" Immediately, the entire church glared at us. We left in the middle of the sermon.

In the midst of widespread decline, I constantly hear people talking about how rapidly young adults are leaving the church. What do we expect? From the earliest of ages, we silence them. Surely, we don't think any young adult who has been silenced for decades is going to want to stay in such oppression. How we treat babies directly correlates to how we have treated young adults. If the church can't give voice to the youngest of its members, it deserves to die.

When I consider our children, I think about the early church. Based in community, children were seen as a valuable resource capable of spreading the message of Jesus and transforming the world. There was much room for all generations of the community to experience life together. Now, we prioritize those who can sit still and be quiet. Such thinking is a lethal mistake. We will either change or this generation will be our last.

Amen.

January 23, 2017

The Explosion of Fear in America

Growing up in Metro Atlanta, I loved reading our hometown newspaper, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution. I still do. Just this morning, I was reading the paper online when I came across an article entitled, "CDC cancels next month's 'climate and health' summit in Atlanta." Reading further, I realized that the Center for Disease Control was planning on holding a gathering to discuss how climate change destroys our health. The only problem is that the event was quietly canceled. When I read even further down, I found out that the gathering was canceled right after Donald Trump was elected president. Research papers had already been gathered and speakers were secured...but the event was

still canceled. The most important department in our nation for disease control and prevention is scared to do its work. This fearful department is not alone.

Throughout the entirety of our nation, people are afraid. Immigrants feel like they could be deported at any minute. Many Muslims believe that a registry is coming at any moment. Women know their rights are up for grabs. Black folk seem destined for even further abuse. I could go on and on. Right now, the fear in America is endless. Bright minds are not producing. Talented people are staying at home. People simply can't be the amazing people that they are. While there is great reason to be afraid, we can't be.

Some people believe the story is bullshit. I don't. There is magic in believing in something greater than our fear. Late one night, there was a bunch of folks in a boat. Until a huge storm blew up, everything was great. The winds and waves raged. Then, the folks saw a man

walking on the water. I don't know whether the storm or the water walker scared them more. In the midst of it all, Jesus spoke up and said, "Do not be afraid." Immediately, the storm stopped. Everyone regained peace of mind. I've always wondered whether the storm actually stopped. When you have peace, it doesn't matter where you are. Maybe the storm still raged and they had so much peace that they didn't even notice. I don't think our time is all that different from theirs. The storms are raging. Even if the voice we hear is our own, we have to learn to hear, "Do not be afraid." No matter how big it gets, let us make enough peace to banish the storm.

Amen.

January 23, 2017

#Blasphemy

Our pastor preached the hardest when election time came around. Though I was only a young man, I knew whose side God was on. In the midst of it all, everyone I knew voted for the candidate the pastor told them to. I was taught that Jesus was intrinsically connected to our political process. We also believed that politicians were the vessels of the will of Jesus. As I grew up, I began to notice how many problematic politicians there were out there. Slowly, I realized what I learned in the church of my youth was total bullshit. I carry all of those memories around with me. So, you can imagine how I felt when I saw this dumbass painting.

When it comes to finding Jesus, Matthew 25 gives us much better directions than that painting. Jesus said, "I will be with the hungry. Jesus said, "I will be with the thirsty." Jesus said, "I will be with the stranger." Jesus said, "I will be with the naked." Jesus said, "I will be with the sick." Jesus said, "I will be in prison." The

painting doesn't depict Jesus in any of these places. The painting illustrates something contrary to the message of Jesus. The painting is blasphemous.

When I think about Jesus' engagement with President Trump, I think about Matthew 19. There was a rich ruler who came to Jesus and wanted what he had. The problem was that he didn't want it as much as he wanted himself. I often wonder if President Trump is not in the same place?

Amen.

January 24, 2017

The Martyr of Climate Change

Last week, I'd never even heard of Mark Baumer. I suspect most people still don't know who he his. Such

ignorance is unfortunate. A few days ago, I learned that Baumer embodied the lived experience of faith in something greater than himself. Back in October, Baumer left Rhode Island to walk barefoot across America. With each step, Baumer sought to raise awareness and money to combat climate change. Most people would dismiss Baumer as crazy. I wanted to know more. In the midst of his story, I found great pain. Last Saturday, Baumer was struck and killed on the side of Highway 90 in Florida. While most were focused on their lives, Baumer gave his life in an attempt to save our planet. I remember someone else who took a walk for our planet and ended up being killed on a cross. Perhaps, extraordinary love is not so crazy after all.

Amen.

January 26, 2017

Love Beyond Love: Immigration and Dementia

Due to President Trump's disturbing pronouncements on immigration, our borders have filled the news recently. Sadly, I think our political situation is only causing our borders to grow faster and faster. Separation seems limitless. In the midst of it all, I traveled to visit my grandmother today. For many years, my grandmother's mind has been failing. Every time I leave, I feel like I am leaving something behind. Relationships are tough when only one party seems present. On some level, I really had to force my person through the door. It's amazing how borders can sneak up on you when you're not careful.

"Who are you?" The question is always piercing. The hollow look in her eyes was deeper than it was the last time I saw her. "Who are you?" The question repeated over and over again. Patience was fleeting. I didn't even know her. How could such a wall divide us? There

had to be a way beyond the border. Though I knew I loved her, I also knew that I loved her from the other side of the wall. I had to find a love that was beyond the border. I had to find a love beyond love.

Time passed slowly. It was hard to break through all of our language differences. I just couldn't understand her. I knew she could understand me. We were just so far apart. I couldn't stop pushing. This was my grandmother.

Eventually, I looked down at my phone. An idea popped into my head. I had to do something to distract me from the constant rambling. I decided to take some pictures. The lens was a window to something beyond. The camera captured our funny faces. We started to laugh. We went deeper. We went wider. We went further. The border started to crumble. Love found us.

In the past few days, President Trump has pledged to build higher and higher walls. Borders make greater love impossible. Everybody says they're trying to be loving by protecting our country. Despite the best of intentions, everyone is wrong. There is no love in building walls. We must find a way to go deeper. We must find a way to go wider. We must find a way to go further. Our borders must crumble. Love is there. There is a love beyond fear. There is a love beyond love.

Amen.

January 29, 2017

Where are the Christians?

Throughout our country, millions of Christians are sitting in church at this very hour. Songs are being sung about loving Jesus. Sermons are being preached about

loving Jesus. Communion is being taken as a physical expression of the love of Jesus. Millions of Christians are at church seeking the love of Jesus. The problem is that Jesus isn't in our churches. Jesus is at the airport. Jesus is being denied entry into the United States. Jesus can't even get to our churches. Jesus is stuck. Where are the Christians? ...rotting in the irrelevance of institutions that killed Jesus a long time ago.

Amen.

January 31, 2017

The Darkness is In Us

"You are the light of the world." -Matt. 5:14

Late last night, we arrived home from a long trip. When we entered the house, everything was dark. With hands

full of luggage, I tried to turn the light on. After a few missed attempts, my son started to get scared. My hands were simply too full to turn it on. After I tried and missed again, my son screamed out, "I need some light." We are in a similar place. We need some light.

Can you follow Jesus while living behind the borders of the richest nation on earth? I wonder. It is a question that should haunt every Christian in this country. How can we live so comfortably when so many live with so little? In recent days, we have closed our borders to some of the most vulnerable people in the world. We are not the light of the world. We are purveyors of darkness. We are responsible for whatever happens next. How? We are guilty by association. We are accomplices to the crimes. We are behind the walls. Most Christians live like everything is ok. Nothing is ok. Our faith is under siege. Our government is prohibiting us from welcoming the stranger. Our government is prohibiting us from being Christians. Jesus is the

stranger. Without the stranger, there is no Christianity. While we go about our lives, the light is gone. We are the darkness. Somebody please get us some light.

Amen.

February 2, 2017

God Hates America

This morning, I had the opportunity to watch the National Prayer Breakfast. Rarely, have I seen such a display of national/civil religion. Every speaker lifted up the United States as the home of God. The flag was waved over and over. There was a shared belief that peace could only come through blunt force. God was invoked repeatedly. As everyone asked God to bless America, I thought about the scene last weekend. I thought about people being denied entry into our country. I thought about families being separated. I

thought about all the lives we have destroyed through marginalization and oppression. I thought about it all. In the midst of the constant flow of nationalistic idolistic prayers, I realized something...there are plenty of times when God hates America. If you don't believe me, ask those whose lives have been destroyed by America. God is not blind. Everything is brought to the light. We can only ask for blessings when we are willing to bless.

Amen.

February 3, 2017

Jesus Died

Yesterday, my son and I were coming home from his preschool. In the midst of our ride, I got a message. Someone I'd known for a long time had passed away. After processing the news, I expressed my sadness. In

the midst of my grief, my son spoke up and said, "Dad, don't you remember that Jesus died." In his mind, the fact that Jesus died makes death ok.

Maybe in death we are simply following Jesus.

My grandmother always feared death. Whenever the subject came up, she would cover her ears and make noises to drown everything out. A few years ago, my grandmother was diagnosed with dementia and has progressively gotten worse. After visiting her last month, I brought up someone who had died and realized that my grandmother didn't fear death anymore. After a second of reasoning, it dawned on me that she had no idea what death was. In the midst of her sickness, she was saved from her fear of death.

Through our sickness, Jesus brings death to our fear.

Heaven always has a way of coming up at funerals. Great hope is placed in the great beyond. The problem is that we are not certain about any of it. We are simply casting up our highest hopes. The only thing we can be sure of is death.

Jesus died.

So will we.

We can be certain of that.

Amen.

February 5, 2017

Jesus and Football / On the Super Bowl

Middle school is a time of dumb decisions and lively discovery. I soaked it all up. Thinking I would be the next Barry Sanders or Emmitt Smith, I tried out for the football team. Taking hit after hit, I proved myself to be pretty tough. I think my coaches were surprised that so much strength could come out of such a little body. I made the team. I was so excited. They told me I was the smallest kid to ever be on the team. About halfway through the season, my career changed. In the midst of practice, I decided to go up against the biggest guy on the team. He came at me as hard as he could. When he hit me, I'm sure I flew backward about 20 yards. Lying on my back, I came in and out. In addition to the stars, I think I saw Jesus too. My coaches were yelling at me to see if I was ok. The stars didn't stop. Everyone seemed really happy that I was alive. That was my last play of organized football. Scared that I would get hit even harder, my coaches benched me for the rest of the season. Bored, I started thinking about the many ethical problems with football. The thoughts lingered.

After decades of watching football, my former thoughts started to reemerge. While studying at the University of Mississippi, I attended a game at the football-crazed school. I will never forget what I saw. Afterword, I wrote the following...

Letter to the Editor of The Daily Mississippian
September 30, 2011

The Editor:

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 niggers." 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 former player Bennie Abram / who incurred deadly injuries while playing football) 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.

Rev. Jeff Hood

People were not happy that I wrote this. I didn't see how I couldn't. I began to realize that all of my experiences helped me to realize how antithetical football is to Jesus.

At every level of the game, players are exploited. They are consistently asked to make astronomical sacrifices

with insufficient rewarded. How much is a brain worth? How much is a life worth? Every play is a risk. Every hit could be the last. Catastrophic injuries and shortened lives are a part of every level of football. I just can't see Jesus promoting something that leads to the destruction of one's neighbor.

Oppression is a part of football. Minorities are asked to make great sacrifices for entertainment of the majority. The only people getting rich off of football are the rich. Poor folk get left out as always. At every stadium in the country, poor folk are made to be slaves to keep the show going. The culture of domestic violence and assault that festers in all levels of the game is intimately connected to the misogynistic violence of football. I could go on and on. I just can't see Jesus promoting all of this mess.

I think Jesus is begging us to stop the brutality.

Don't forget about Jesus as you watch the big game.

Amen.

February 7, 2017

Fake News: Betsy DeVos and Corruption Past/Present

Over the last few months, I have been astounded by the fake news bubbling out of our new government. It seems like there is no lie too big for the Trump Administration. Official after official just claims whatever they want. Twitter is the vessel of choice. The good news is that many people realize that you can't trust everything you read on social media. The goal in all of this is to master the art of manipulation. Perhaps, they've already mastered it. Today, the United States Senate voted to confirm Betsy DeVos to be our Secretary of Education. The vote was close, 51-50. Thankfully,

truth does not depend on DeVos' confirmation. After watching her hearing, I can honestly say that there are millions of people in our country more qualified than she to be the Secretary. DeVos fumbled basic educational question after question. Instead of admitting the truth, the Trump Administration continued to trumpet DeVos as one of the most qualified candidates for Secretary of Education in history. I cannot imagine a bigger piece of Fake News. Aware of the truth, the Trump Administration will do anything to guide the country into deception. It is import to also point out that DeVos' family is one of the largest donors to conservative causes in the country. I imagine they think any deception is going to be well worth the effort. Make no mistake, the Trump Administration is not alone in the construction of Fake News.

In the Gospel of Matthew, an angel scares away the guards placed at the tomb of Jesus. Once they ran into the city, the chief officials paid them a large sum of

money to lie about what they had experienced. The guards took the money and fervently told the people that the disciples of Jesus took the body. Regardless of what Fake News the guards shared, the truth was and is that Jesus rose from the dead. Just like the chief officials of Jesus' day, the Trump Administration is willing to do whatever it takes to contruct and promote Fake News. Despite the lies, it is plain to see that DeVos was and is simply unqualified. Don't worry though, truth is arisen and there is no Fake News that will live forever.

Amen.

February 9, 2017

The Absurdity of Time and The Existence of Jesus Christ

A few years ago, I was studying history at the University of Mississippi. I was in a class on Latin American

history. As we discussed ancient history, I made the observation that we couldn't prove any of this happened. Immediately, I took it a step further and further declared, "I'm not even sure we can prove that we exist. For historians, such observations are a declaration of war. Historians believe that the past can be proven with proper evidence. I believe that the past can be proven with proper belief. Since it is possible that there is no past, we construct our own past. After about ten minutes of arguing the benefits of such deconstruction with the entire room, my professor screamed out, "God damn it! This is not the fucking Matrix Jeff!!!" After that, my professor cleared the room. Immediately, he turned to me and demanded, "What the fuck was that?" "The deconstruction of history." "Well, don't do it again in my classroom." "Time is a relative concept." "Not in my classroom." There is no fundamentalism stronger amongst the human race than the idea of time.

February 10, 2017

Pastors: Your Press Conferences Suck

Early this morning, I was scrolling through my Facebook feed. I couldn't help but notice the numerous press conferences pastors are holding all over the country. In each one, pastors put on their stoles and jump in front of the cameras. The problem is that such performances are unbelievable. Just this morning, I saw pastors loudly about social justice. Most of them are the laziest workers for the marginalized and oppressed that I know. It's all a charade. How many of these churches have opened their doors to give sanctuary to immigrants? The answer is very few. How many of these pastors have been willing to sacrifice their jobs and pensions for the least of these? The answer is very few. How many of these pastors have been willing to give themselves over to jail terms for justice? The

answer is very few. How many of these pastors have held grieving mothers as they mourn the loss of their murdered children in our inner cities? The answer is very few. How many of these pastors are out in the streets protesting police brutality? The answer is very few. I could go on and on. The answer is always very few. Since these pastors love to pose, let's set the cameras up in the areas of greatest need to draw them there. Then, perhaps the cameras will be good for something. Make no mistake my friends, we live in an increasingly scary time. In the coming days, more and more will be demanded of those who seek justice. We don't need any more pastors pontificating at press conferences. We don't need anyone else talking about a justice they're unwilling to sacrifice for. Now is the time for more than just words. Now is the time for pastors to give their lives and livelihoods.

Amen.

February 10, 2017

Immigration Imagination

*Letter written for various newspapers.

Dear Editor,

Imagine a scenario. You're in your apartment. Your favorite show is on the television. The kids are resting in the floor. You give your partner a hug and a kiss. When the show is over, you help your kids to bed. Once they're underneath the covers, you bend over to gently kiss them on their foreheads. As you close the door, you pray for their safety. Giving your partner a kiss, you run to the store to get some food for breakfast. When the children wake up, you're gone. Overnight, Immigration and Customs Enforcement or ICE picked you up. As your children cry, they wonder if they'll ever see you again.

Their remaining parent can't answer the question. You're driven to the border and pushed out of the country. As you look around, you realize that you're alone. Now, I want you to imagine that the family is white and the agents from ICE are all persons of color. Things always begin to look different when white lives are on the line. Jesus commanded that we love our neighbors regardless of their color. How can we love our neighbors and deport them?

Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood
Denton, Texas

February 12, 2017

The Death of a Wizard

The body of the Imperial Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan in St. Louis Frank Ancona was recently found close to a

river in Missouri. This is the same man who threatened lethal force against protestors in Ferguson. I was one of those protestors. In some small way, I guess Ancona threatened to kill me too. When I saw that he was dead, I briefly had a moment of celebration. Then, I remembered Jesus. In the midst of it all, I was pulled back to my faith. I heard, "love your enemies." I heard, "love your neighbors." I heard, "pray for those who persecute you." In the moment, l repented. Something returned. I thought about Ancona's family. I thought about hate. I thought about death. I thought murder. During it all, I prayed for the courage to love no matter the circumstance. In the midst of these dangerous times, I suggest you do the same.

Amen.

February 13, 2017

Pedophiles in Church

For the past few decades, the church has worked hard to keep pedophiles out. Remembering that the love of Jesus extends to all people, I'm wondering how we get them back in?

A few years ago, I sat nervously in my office. Watching the clock tick, I wondered what I was going to say. I didn't have a clue. I'd never met with a pedophile before. When the door chimed, I was slow to answer it. I was getting sick to my stomach. Seeking to hide my anxiety, I reached out my hand. After a brief shake, I showed him the way to my office. Once we sat down, he asked me a simple question, "You know I'm a pedophile right?" I assured him that I did. Before we got much further, he began to tell me his story. Repeatedly, he sought jobs and tasks that put him in contact with boys. Often, he served as a youth minister at churches. In the span of a decade, he had close to 20 victims. On

multiple occasions, he was able to lie his way out of charges. Moving throughout the country, he avoided getting caught. Eventually, federal authorities caught up with him. Charged with multiple accounts of abuse, he took a plea bargain that gave him only 8 years in jail. After he got out, he tried to return to being a minister. Thankfully, churches weren't having it. In time, he made his way to our church. Before he finished his story, I was so sick to my stomach that I thought I was going to puke on my desk. With much concern, he repeatedly asked, "Are you ok?" Finally, I mustered enough strength to say, "Please continue." "Well, I'm here because people aren't treating me right. Sundays are the worst. Folks won't talk to me. Folks won't look at me. Folks won't even sit near me. I feel so shunned." I didn't know what to say. When I am at a loss for words, I invite whomever I'm with to pray. When he reached out his hand, I wasn't sure whether to hold it or not. I did. After we lifted up many words, the meeting ended. As he walked out the door, I assured him that I

would pray about the situation and contact him with suggestions. The problem was that I didn't know if I wanted there to be any solutions.

Over the next few days, Jesus started to work on my heart. Deep in prayer, I finally realized that God commands us to love all people. Though people have always been quick to toss the pedophiles out of the church, I realized that it was time to bring them back in.

Eventually, I called the pedophile back and suggested a few things. First, I suggested that he explain how he has repented and changed to all he meets. Second, I suggested that he try and develop a close circle of friends to help him navigate the church. Third, I suggested that he start a class for those who have struggled with pedophilia and model it after Alcoholics Anonymous (I even suggested that he call it Pedophiles Anonymous). I also told him to call me anytime. Hanging up, I felt like my work was done.

Not long after we talked, I left the church. For a long time, I didn't think much of the pedophile. I just kept going about my ministry. One day, I was talking to a friend who still went to the church and they told me about all of the amazing work the pedophile was doing. To say that I shocked was an understatement. My friend even told me that the pedophile had become a leading advocate and strategist for victims of pedophilia in churches. The Spirit washed over me and I began to weep. I was changed. I was saved. I realized that I didn't have to be the only one.

God is not to be underestimated. The vilest of sinners can be transformed. Pedophiles belong in our churches just as much as anyone else. In fact, I think the church is one of a limited number of places that can actually help keep them from abusing again. It is beyond time that we welcome pedophiles back into our churches.

Amen.

February 14, 2017

A Love Letter to North Korea

Kim Jong-Un.

What the fuck is wrong with you? Earlier today, you assassinated your own brother? You are developing nuclear weapons capable of killing millions? You starve your own people? You continuously execute your opponents? Is this your way of showing love? I don't think so. This is never the way you show love. Such things are always evil. I don't think you have any love in you. I'm told not to think this way. I'm told to think positively. I'm told to see the best in people. You are supposedly made in the image of God. Quite frankly, I don't see how. I think you're a monster. Does that make

God a monster? I guess monsterizing someone is always the first step away from God. If I can't love you, then I can't know God...for you are God's image. To say that I've wrestled with this truth for a long time is an understatement. I've racked my brain to try to find another way. There is no other way. 'I love you' is it. So...I love you.

Jeff Hood

February 15, 2017

Loving Sh*t

Back in the beginning, God created people with breath and bones. Over the last few days, I'm convinced that God also creates people with the divine ass too. God just squats down and takes a big shit that produces some of

our fellow human beings. Though both are made in the image of God, some people are just shittier than others.

Take for instance Leslie Ray Chaping. After he passed away, Chaping's family wrote one of the most stinging obituaries I have ever read. These lines are notable: “he lived...29 years longer than expected and much longer than he deserved.” “he left behind...relieved children...and...countless other victims including an ex-wife, relatives, friends, neighbors, doctors, nurses and random strangers.” “Leslie’s hobbies included being abusive to his family, expediting trips to heaven for the beloved family pets...” “Leslie’s life served no other obvious purpose, he did not contribute to society or serve his community and he possessed no redeeming qualities besides quick [witted] sarcasm which was amusing during his sober days.” "With Leslie's passing he will be missed only for what he never did; being a loving husband, father and good friend." Yeah, it seems like God took a big shit when creating

Leslie. It also seems like he never stopped smelling or acting like shit.

Regardless, whether one is made from the divine ass or the divine breath/bones...they are still made in the image of God. I guess the toughest task is learning to love shit.

Amen.

Obituary Source: ABC13 : http://abc13.com/news/woman-who-wrote-brutal-obit-says-she-meant-every-word/1749259/

February 16, 2017

US Refugees Seek Asylum in Canada

In ancient times, there was a maniacal man ruling the country. Afraid that the people would rise up and challenge his rule, he ordered families to be terrorized. One family fled. After traveling countless miles, the family ended up in a place of safety. The country they left further descended into chaos.

In present times, here was a maniacal man ruling the country. Afraid that the people would rise up and challenge his rule, he ordered families to be terrorized. One family fled. After traveling countless miles, the family ended up in a place of safety. The country they left further descended into chaos.

These two stories are no different. The first is a description of the flight of the family of Jesus to escape the wrath of King Herod. The second is a description of families that are currently fleeing to escape the wrath of the Trump administration. The similarities are stunning.

In recent weeks, Canadians have welcomed US refugees fleeing persecution at their borders. Often traveling through deep snow, refugees are graciously met with coats, warm spaces and food. Under Trump, the asylum seekers feel like their lives are on the line. With the rhetoric and actions consistently coming from the White House, who could blame them?

God is with those who flee.

God damn those who do nothing to help.

Amen.

Photos: http://mobile.reuters.com/news/picture/fleeing-to-canada-from-the-us?articleId=USRTSYU71

February 17, 2017

Hand Washing in the Trump Era

Can you even breath?

The water is so high.

Jesus was slung in the direction of his potential executioners. As the crowd screamed for blood, Pilate could have stopped it. Instead, he washed his hands and absolved himself of any responsibility for what was about to happen. Jesus was given over to death.

Immigrants were slung in the direction of their potential executioners. As the crowd screamed for blood, we could have stopped it. Instead, we washed our hands and absolved ourselves of any responsibility for what was about to happen. Immigrants are given over to death.

Women were slung in the direction of their potential executioners. As the crowd screamed for blood, we could have stopped it. Instead, we washed our hands and absolved ourselves of any responsibility for what was about to happen. Women are given over to death.

People of color were slung in the direction of their potential executioners. As the crowd screamed for blood, we could have stopped it. Instead, we washed our hands and absolved ourselves of any responsibility for what was about to happen. People of color are given over to death.

The disabled were slung in the direction of their potential executioners. As the crowd screamed for blood, we could have stopped it. Instead, we washed our hands and absolved ourselves of any responsibility for what was about to happen. The disabled are given over to death.

Prisoners were slung in the direction of their potential executioners. As the crowd screamed for blood, we could have stopped it. Instead, we washed our hands and absolved ourselves of any responsibility for what was about to happen. Women are given over to death.

LGBTQ people were slung in the direction of their potential executioners. As the crowd screamed for blood, we could have stopped it. Instead, we washed our hands and absolved ourselves of any responsibility for what was about to happen. LGBTQ people are given over to death.

The list could go on and on in the Trump Era.

Cowards continue to run toward the sink.

Will we too wash our hands?

I guess nobody realizes that we're all drowning.

Amen.

February 19, 2017

God Don't Go to Church

Does God go to church? This is the pivotal question for the churchgoer. If God don't go to church, then what are we doing there?

On a particularly powerful day, I was sitting in church... and I started to become deeply troubled in my spirit. I couldn't figure out why. After some moments of prayer, I heard the voice of God, "I am not there...Come outside..." Light from the heavens touched my soul. Slowly, I was pulled outside. The church faded away. The streets came into focus. God was on every corner.

Light exploded from every heart. I knew where salvation was found.

Deeply confused, I asked God "How can this be?" "Remember the time that I went to church?" The Temple came into focus. I saw God filled with rage. Leaders constantly demanded money. Buildings were more important than the people. Infighting led to abuse. Nobody seemed to come out of the space alive. Pain killed all inkling for God. "I couldn't just walk away." God exploded. No table was left unturned. No abuse was left unpunished. No leader was allowed to remain in the room. God cleaned the place clean out. "The people also ran to the light." The pain turned into power. In the streets people danced to celebrate their new found freedom. God let me join them...and then...the light carried me away.

I didn't know what to do from there. "What about my children?" "What is it to you? They are mine. You

follow me." I saw my children learning to love God by being in the streets with the people of God. "To send them anywhere else is to send them astray. Lead them to me." The light engulfed each of them. Trust came back. Light filled me once more. "I will be with them always."

God gave me a tattoo. While experiencing the pain of transformation, God put ink on my heart. I couldn't figure out what it was. "You will like it." Eventually, the process became relaxing. I knew we were getting close. The finished product was sealed for all of eternity. Light glowed from every mark. Looking down, I slowly read the words, "...what you have done to the least of these, you have done to me." "Let each syllable guide your life and never forget that I am with them." The light showed me the ramifications of such words. God is hungry. God is thirsty. God is abandoned. God is naked. God is sick. God is a prisoner. "Have you ever seen any of these people in church?" With tears in my eyes, I declared,

"No, I havent." The sadness was a brief moment of mourning for all those people who are trapped in church...and estranged from God. "Help them!" "I will draw all unto myself...you just draw to me." In the distance, I saw millions of points of light saving people from their churches.

"I have nothing to do with those churches." Never forget that. Before I knew it, I was back on the street that I had left. Light was near. I knew that it would be always. The realm of God is here. Get out of your churches and experience it.

Amen.

February 20, 2017

Jesus Doesn't Read the Bible

We are instructed to follow Jesus. We are instructed to become more and more like Jesus. In the end, we will be made like Jesus. If Jesus is the ultimate aspiration, how much time do you think he spends reading the Bible? Do you think that Jesus has to read his own story? I don't. I think Jesus is so far beyond the Bible that the Bible becomes insignificant and of little consequence. Jesus is God and God don't need no book to tell God how to be God. I would say that Jesus is the Bible incarnate...but that's not even true. Jesus is the sounds way beyond the words. If God could be contained or described by words, then God would not be God. Words are fading as the message of Jesus is heard.

So, what does this mean for us?

You can't follow Jesus with your head stuck in the Bible. Reading an ancient book is not our chief aim...becoming like Jesus is. While a few verses might be a good start, we ultimately must grow beyond the Bible. So, I

encourage you to put down your Bible and be like Jesus. Remember, Jesus doesn't read the Bible.

Amen.

February 21, 2017

Jesus Died in Mexico

There is no doubt about it...15-year-old Sergio Hernandez was slaughtered for no apparent reason. Gunned down in his native Mexico. Sergio and his friends were simply playing a game. They were running back and forth near the US Border. After pulling up on his bike, US Border Patrol Agent Jesus Mesa opened fire. Sergio was not armed. The coward with the badge simply gunned him down. While Jesus has tried to claim that the kids were throwing rocks at him when he fired, cell phone video proves that this was not the case.

Sergio was simply hiding behind a pillar. When he moved, Jesus took him out. I believe there were two Jesuses there that day. The real Jesus died in Mexico.

As the US Supreme Court hears arguments about whether Jesus can be prosecuted for his crimes in 2010, I pray that you will join me in praying that law enforcement will quit killing unarmed children.

Amen.

more info:
http://www.cnn.com/2017/02/21/politics/border-patrol-shooting-supreme-court/

February 22, 2017

I AM: A Primer on Being

What was before the beginning? What was before that? What was before that or that? The answer to the question doesn't change. It is the same now as it was then. All of existence and beyond is encapsulated in one phrase, "I AM." The earliest ideas of God were based on the deconstruction of all that was, is or will ever be. When you search for the core of everything, you arrive at being. Existence names existence. Being is the ground of everything. To be able to name yourself "I AM" is to claim your birthright to God. We are made in God's image. We are made to name the core of our existence through our existence. You cannot deconstruct any further than being. "I AM" is divinity bubbling up within us. Name it and hold it close and you will touch the eternality of the universe. Believe in God. Believe in you. "I AM." "WE ARE."

Amen.

February 23, 2017

The Evil of Communion

Communion is one of the most consistent and sacred practices in the Christian world. Instituted by Jesus, the practice is intended to draw people closer to Jesus and each other. Recently, I've been considering what the fullness or complete embodiment of communion is. We have to assume that since Jesus is both the totality of the body and blood that Jesus is the fullness of communion. With this in mind, we do know that Jesus took communion with his disciples. Does this mean that Jesus is still taking communion? Does Jesus take communion with us? I don't think so. I think that Jesus was simply illustrating the way. Furthermore, when we take communion we are moving closer and closer to oneness with Jesus. Since Jesus doesn't take communion, then we should take communion less and less the more and more we become like Jesus. Perhaps,

communion is a sign of spiritual poverty and not spiritual health. Maybe communion is evil because it pulls us away from experiencing perfection in Christ. Regardless, we should always be striving to become the communion that people need not worrying about gobbling up communion for ourselves. The incarnation of the body and blood is not a singular event. We are the communion that people need most.

Amen.

February 24, 2017

Cursing God

A few days ago, I heard an interesting exchange at the gas station. After a man dropped all of his change at the pump, he loudly exclaimed, "God Dammit!" Immediately, someone at the next pump responded, "My

God's last name is not dammit!" The coin dropper replied, "Are you kidding?" The gas pumper got louder, "God curses those who curse him!" The exchange got me thinking. Does God curse those who curse him? My mind immediately went to the eternal nature of the love of God. Does such a love run out? I don't think so. Furthermore, I can't imagine such love leading God to curse anyone. The love of God is infinite. How could it not be? God is love. Love can't curse. In the midst of such love, I'm also doubtful that God cares very much about what kind of language we use to interact with him. So curse God all you want, God's love never runs out.

Amen.

February 26, 2017

Jesus Doesn't Live In Your Neighborhood

"I ain't racist or nothing, I just had to get away from all the crime." Of course, when anyone says they're not racist...they are. Curious of the man's thinking, I enquired further, "Are you sure that's what it's all about?" "Well, I also felt like I'd be a better witness for Jesus if I lived in a mostly white neighborhood. White folk just connect better with white folk...you know?" "No, I don't know." The conversation was very illustrative of the excuses that people make to mask their racism. The man felt comfortable talking to me. He thought my whiteness made him safe. In the end, he figured out he wasn't, "Honestly my friend, there ain't no sense in doing any witnessing...Jesus don't live in your neighborhood. You left him back in your old neighborhood."

There are grave spiritual consequences connected to our flights from people of oppressed people. Jesus lives with the poor. Jesus lives with the hungry. Jesus lives

with the othered. Jesus lives with the marginalized. Jesus inhabits the neighborhoods infested with crime. Jesus lives in the communties infested with drugs. Jesus is surrounded by prostitution. In the midst of a troubled world, the truth is very simple. If you don't live in these types of places, then Jesus doesn't live in your neighborhood. For those who follow Jesus, let me make something very clear. We will stand before Jesus. I would hate for Jesus to say to you, "How are you going to claim me? I never knew you. You didn't live in my neighborhood."

Amen.

February 27, 2017

God is Fiction

"Do you really believe in God?" She leaned in for my reply. "God just seems like such a silly idea." When I finally answered, she could hardly believe her ears. "This doesn't sound like any God I've ever heard of." As the conversation proceeded, I explained. I believe the fundamentalist God is an angry piece of shit. I believe the progressive God is deconstructed piece of shit. I believe the God of the Bible is a false idol. I believe that any God that is easily explained or ignored is not God. "So, what type of God do you believe in?" I believe in the God that is beyond our conceptions. I believe that God is fiction. "You believe that God is fake?" Fiction is not fake. Fiction reveals more truth than that which we claim to be real. Fiction is beyond complete conception. Fiction is alive. Fiction is changing. Fiction is growing. Fiction is divine. We meet God in places of fiction. God meets us in the stories. "So, what type of God do you believe in?" I believe that God is fiction.

Amen.

February 28, 2017

Jesus Smokes Weed

Walking into the grocery, I was approached by a rough brother. The closer he got, the more concerned I got. When he started to speak, I had no idea what he was going to say. Then he got to the point, "You got any weed?" I replied, "I'm sorry, I don't." Walking away, the brother exclaimed, "Fuck you man!" I guess he just needed some pot. I've never smoked weed before. Though, I know more than a few people who do. As a matter of fact, I know one very well. In the midst of debates over marijuana, It is important to insert an important point...Jesus smokes weed.

There are sick people all over our nation who smoke weed to make it through their day. Study after study

has shown that marijuana has offers significant benefits to people suffering from all sorts of ailments. In Matthew 25, Jesus declares, "I am sick." Through this incarnation, Jesus experiences the pain and the treatments of the sick. Jesus gets high to get well.

Recently, US Attorney General Jeff Sessions forcefully condemned laws legalizing marijuana. Not only is he wrong, he is also a heretic. By turning his back on the sick, he is turning his back on the Jesus that he claims.

Sickness is a broad category. People smoke weed for all sorts of reasons. I would argue that most of these reasons are based in sickness of some kind. It is important to realize that we're all sick and in need of a strong dose of medicine. To treat our ailments, maybe we just need to follow Jesus and smoke some weed.

Amen.

Further info: http://www.politico.com/blogs/under-the-radar/2017/02/jeff-sessions-marijuana-235461

March 1, 2017

Death Cometh: Deconstructing Faith

"Ashes to Ashes, Dust to Dust." Ashe Wednesday is a time for remembering our own mortality. Perhaps, that is all we have to cling to. We know death cometh. Is there anything after? There is no way to know for sure. The only thing we know is death. When you look survey your surroundings, death cometh. When you look into your own person, death cometh. Our planet is dying. There is no salvation. Our families are dying. There is no salvation. Our friends are dying. There is no salvation. Ideas of God are dying. There is no salvation. Instead of talking about belief, maybe we should concentrate on what is certain...death cometh. Instead

of faith in God, maybe we should place our faith in death. There is so much more evidence for the end of mortality than there is for the existence of a benevolent divinity. If God is there, why is he killing us? The only thing I know about God for sure...is that death cometh. In the midst of it all, may we find something that will carry us through.

Amen.

March 2, 2017

There is No Achievement

Early this morning, I got a call from someone I've long loved. While he often says hurtful things, today was particularly biting. In a concerned fashion, he insinuated that he felt like I'd never achieved anything. Because it was coming from him, I was particularly

hurt. Without responding in anger, I assured him that we have different ideas of success. Loudly, he proclaimed, "There is no achievement apart from money!" While I've never earned much money, I am smart enough to know that it doesn't matter. Perhaps, the idea of achievement doesn't matter either. God doesn't measure achievement. God measures being. We are made in the image of God. With every breath, we are to be that image. There is no achievement. There is only God. Fuck anything else.

Amen.

March 3, 2017

God Quit / God Sex

I've always wondered what it would be like for God to quit. Would the universe explode? I don't think so.

Sometimes, I think it would be similar to a romantic spat. We would just stop talking to each for a little while. Have you ever experienced silence from God? It seems to me that it is very immature to ignore someone who is trying to talk to you. Many feel like their words are ignored by God on a regular basis. So, why do we keep trying to talk? I think it's very similar to fights amongst couples. You can ignore each other for a little while...but most of the time you grow up/make up and have a romp/sex. So I guess when we all grow up, we'll just rip off our clothes and have a romp with God. Wouldn't that be divine?

Amen.

March 5, 2017

God Is Always Late...You Should Be Too

Recently, someone asked, "Why are you always late?" After a moment of thought, I replied, "I don't know of any place worth being on time to." Time is such an important part of our existence. It's not for God. In fact, I think there is something heretical about time. As evidenced in the movements of God, being and time cannot coexist. God simply is. The mind focused on being does not have time for time. God is never on time. In fact, God is always off of time. In the beauty of being, time is an illusion that God would never spend time on. One can become the person that God has created you to be. You just can't be on time. You just have to be. God will meet you there. Somewhere beyond the minutes and seconds that control our lives, there is salvation. In the midst of the divine timeless reality, God is always late...you should be too.

Amen.

March 6, 2017

Do Progressive Christians Own Bibles?

Just the other day, I watched a prominent conservative pastor debate a prominent progressive pastor on the issue of human sexuality. For almost thirty minutes, I watched the conservative pastor quote verse after verse to destroy any argument the progressive pastor presented. At one point, the conservative pastor screamed, "Do you even own a Bible?" While I don't believe that the Bible is the center of the Christian faith, I do believe it's an important part. I was absolutely embarrassed for the progressive pastor. He had no arguments (Biblical or otherwise) to counter any of the arguments of the conservative pastor. If someone was completely neutral and had no opinion, they would after watching this debate. I believe the progressive pastor did tremendous violence to LGBT people. How many kids will be further abused because of this

debate? How many more kids will contemplate suicide because of this debate? How many adults will be further ashamed of who they are because of this debate? The consequences of biblical illiteracy are great. I could argue that this was an isolated incident if I didn't know the truth. I have seen it over and over again. Progressive Christians are completely unable to engage fellow Christians and our culture on a wide variety of issues because they do not know the Bible. The consequences are frightening. I pray that the Gideons will hurry up and visit Progressive Churches. Somebody please call them before another Progressive Christian embarrasses the faith and puts others in further danger.

Amen.

March 7, 2017

International Women's Day, Suicide and the Bankruptcy of Christian Theology

On many occasions in a variety of settings, I've often wondered, "What does Christian Theology have to say to women?" Usually, I don't have to think too long. Throughout the development of Christian Theology, women have been denigrated to a subservient role. Every figure of divinity is considered to be a man. Most heroes in our scriptures are men. I don't think this happened by accident. I think there is an undeniable thread of sexism that runs throughout Christian Theology. Women have got to be the most patient Christians to ever exist. Without them, the faith would never have survived. If you go to most churches, women fill the pews. It has been this way for sometime. Without women, there is no Christianity. Despite the denigration, there is very little theology that pushes liberation. In fact, there is more theology intended to keep women in their place than anything else. The evil

trap of sexism continues to hold the entire faith hostage. The bankruptcy of Christian Theology is that it has never spoken to the completeness of human existence. Women have consistently been left out and pushed down. I'm convinced that our faith has very little to say to women at all. Not too long ago, this became even more apparent to me.

As I held the phone, horrible news met my ears. A short time before I got the call, a high school teacher had walked into the bathroom to discover a young woman had just committed suicide. The student struggled with much heartache and decided there was nothing left to live for. It seems that women consistently feel this way in our society. As soon as I grieved the news, I began to wonder what Christian Theology might have been able to do to help the young woman. After a few seconds, I realized that the answer is an unequivocal nothing. Christianity Theology has completely left women out since the beginning. Christianity is a religion that

banishes women to hopeless places...like school bathrooms.

Since the call, I've had time to think about just how urgent it is for Christian Theology to be destroyed. We have to take apart everything. For, only by a more equitable reconstruction can our faith be considered truly Christian. We have to start at the beginning. Eve is not the villain. We have to move through the Old Testament. There should be an equal number of sheroes as there are heroes. In the midst of the Gospels, we should use the multiple accounts that were written by women. The writings of Paul should be supplemented by contradictory writings of female Christian writers. The Trinity should be feminized as much as it is masculinized. Since Jesus represented the entirety of humanity, why can't Jesus have a vagina? With regards to the end, there is no eschatology worth a shit that doesn't provide hope for the young woman in the bathroom. Why can't we open the canon back up?

Though the possibilities of deconstruction and reconstructive liberation are endless, I worry that we won't change. I worry that my daughter will end up hopeless. On this International Women's Day, let us not forget that Christian Theology begins and ends in that bathroom.

Amen.

March 9, 2017

Fear is Our Only God

I've long wondered what happened to our boldness. Our faith was once defined by courage. In their earthly existence, all the early disciples had to look forward to was a gruesome execution. In spite of the consequences, they still followed. If persecution hit our churches, I have no doubt that people would renounce their faith as

quickly as they could. Too often, our churches are built on nothing less than money and false righteousness. We are called to a radical faith that causes us to stand with the least of these. How can we love the least of these when our primary concern is survival? We are so scared of losing our influence. We are so scared of losing our buildings. We are so scared of the collapse of our institutions. We are so scared. Fear is our only God. Our faith feels dead. Is there anyone who will join the revolution? Is there anyone who will live into the resurrection? Jesus is incarnate in the least of these not in our churches. We can only follow Jesus if we go to the least of these not to our churches. Our faith is about giving our lives to the least of these not to our churches. Jesus is calling us to so much more than our current ecclesiastical imprisonments. Get out! There is no progress there. Please follow Jesus. Look throughout the institutions...he is not there. There is nothing progressive about following Jesus. It is so much more than that. Join the real revolution. Give your life to

more than the safety of moderation. Wake up! The least of these are dying. We must leave. Stop being afraid! Go much further than any false notion of progressivism. Save the Jesuses that our inaction are killing. There is no fear in God...there is only revolution. Don't delay. Jesus is waiting.

Amen.

March 10, 2017

Kids, Drag and Jesus

Late afternoon found me quicker than I anticipated. I was tired. I searched the house for strength and came up empty. So, I just had to go with what I had. Jumping in the car, I took off to pick up our 5 children from

preschool. Each child demands more each day in different ways. I guess that's the way it's supposed to be. Nevertheless, I pulled my car up and raced to the door. Before I could get in, another friend yelled at me, "See you after Spring Break!" "We don't have school tomorrow?" I anxiously replied. As she got into her car, she loudly said, "No!" Shocked, I had to stop and collect myself. Knowing that my wife was going to be working, I pondered one question, "What am I going to do with all 5 kids tomorrow?" It didn't take long. Before the day was done, our tomorrow was full.

In the dead of night, popular Transgender drag performer Chyna Doll Dupree was shot and killed in New Orleans just a couple of weeks ago. This is the fifth murder of a Transgender woman this year. Each month, the numbers only seem to grow. Pierced deep in my spirit, I wrote a short piece about the failure of Christians to protect Transgender women. As usual, I didn't hold any punches, "If you're not willing to place

your body between a bullet and a Transgender woman then you don't know a damn thing about Jesus!" I went to sleep with those words running through my mind. As one of the oppressed and persecuted Jesus singled out, I knew that she was Christ amongst us.

Morning comes early at our house. 1 ambitious child usually wakes up the other 5 and then we're off to the races. After breakfast, I asked the kids, "What do you want to wear?" Knowing we had a full day coming, I helped the smallest kids up the stairs. After getting to the bedroom, one of my sons picked up a pair of tight hot pink pants and asked, "Can I wear some of sister's clothes?" Before I had time to answer, Chyna Doll Dupree came to mind. Jesus told us where he would be. I thought about the courage that Dupree had exhibited in life and the sacrifice she offered us in death. Right there, just outside the closet, I knew she was with us. As all of my sons chose their pink or polka-dotted outfits and my daughter grabbed an old flannel shirt, lines

blurred and blurred. May the blurring never stop. With deep emotion, I told everyone to gather close. Looking into each of their eyes, I said, "Let's pray to Chyna Doll Dupree." Before I could start, one of my sons asked, "Who's Chyna Doll Dupree?" Closing my eyes and holding their hands, I responded, "Don't worry...she'll join us as we pray."

Amen.

March 11, 2017

Hell = Our Churches

"Do you believe in a literal hell?" Even though it was more than a decade ago, I'll never forget that first question. In the midst of my Southern Baptist ordination council, the gathered men wanted to make sure that I would carefully toe the line of fundamentalism. At the

time, I was growing more and more conflicted with these beliefs that I'd ultimately come to reject. Back then, I blurred the lines of fundamentalism and answered the question thusly, "I believe that there is separation from God and that any separation from God is hell."

Although I've traveled pretty far from that day and embraced a much more radical faith, there is one belief that still remains. Though I find any idea of an eternal hell to be heretical and believe that God will eventually draw all of us to eternal love, I still firmly hold that we can be separated from God in this life and that such separation is hell. I've realized that our churches often separate us from God.

Whether in our individualized worship or in our growing institutionalism or in our capitalistic finances or in our desperation to keep the doors open or our idolization of religion or in a whole host of other

embraced evils, we our quickly drifting away from God. You see, God told us that the incarnation of God would rest in the least of these. When our churches fail to give their entire ministries to the least of these, they become hell or separated from God. There is no salvation apart from God...there is no salvation apart from the least of these. Ultimately, I believe in a literal hell and I believe it is often our churches.

Amen.

March 14, 2017

Queer God Calling

In many places, I've sought the Queer God. Sometimes I find divinity and sometimes divinity finds me. The nature of seeking is that God always finds us. Every journey is queer, unlike any other journey. The

queerness of our lives is an emulation of the Queer God, in whose image we're made. We are constantly living into God's image...our own queerness. The queerer we become, the closer we draw near to divinity. To engage God in normative ways is to not engage God at all. Queer God is calling. Do we have ears to hear?

I got a phone call this morning. We hadn't talked in many years. In fact, I believe we've only talked once before.

Our first call was contentious. Coming from a fundamentalist background, this person believed that they would go to hell if they lived into their sexuality. As the person quoted verse after verse, I politely listened. Then, I started talking about the love of God and our perfection in our creation. The more I deconstructed, the angrier this person got. When we went our separate ways, I assumed we'd never speak again.

I was wrong.

When the phone rang, I was chasing my kids around the house. Although I didn't recognize the number, I decided to pick up. "Is this the Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood?" "Yes. Who is this?" When the person told me their name, I still had no idea who they were. As the person described who they were in great detail, our first call finally came back. Slowly, the person told me that they'd come to accept their sexuality. I rejoiced in the Queer that they're slowly becoming. Before we hung up, the person offered a few closing thoughts, "I just wanted to tell you something else... When we first talked, I was suicidal. I couldn't accept my queerness. I could only accept condemnation. You saved my life. Thank you." When the call concluded, I was overwhelmed. In those precious seconds, I realized that I'd just experienced the Queer God calling.

Amen.

March 17, 2017

The Ferociousness of God / A Parenting Lesson

Growing up, my mom was beyond loyal to us. My brother and I were wild kids. Consistently, we found trouble and trouble found us. In the midst of our atrocious behavior in public, strangers would sometimes try to discipline us. No matter what we did, a ferociousness arose in my mom. When someone made the mistake of laying a hand on us, my mom laid a hand on them. While public was for fiercely defending her children, private was for disciplining the shit out of us. In the midst of it all, she often repeated, "I'm going to defend you even when you're wrong." Back then, I never fully appreciated these words...I do now.

Last week, my wife left on a trip. While she took our daughter with her, our four boys stayed with me. With ages ranging from two to four, they are a handful to say the least. For seven days, I did my best to fill their days with as much fun as I could. On a few occasions, someone tried to publicly discipline our passionate and free children. Often, what they saw as bad behavior, I saw as ingenuity. Over the last few days, my mom's words returned. When anyone even got close to disciplining my children, a ferociousness rose up inside of me and I made sure that they better not even breathe near my kids again. The one person who tried to physically pick my child up and move them, was the recipient of an out of body experience from me. I promise that they nor anyone in the near vicinity will ever even think about touching my child again. I'm not saying they aren't wild. I'm just saying that the wildness of my children is something for me to engage. No stranger is ever going to discipline my child. As these moments played out, I repeatedly told my children the

same thing my mom told me, "I'm going to defend you even when you're wrong."

Over the years, I've always been taught to see God as a loving parent. My mom taught me what parental love in public looks like. When God's children are disciplined, I have no doubt that God responds with a ferociousness. "God defends us even when we're wrong." Honestly, I don't know that there is a greater love than a ferocious reckless abandonment for the sake of someone else. In word and deed, Jesus agreed. May we go and do likewise.

Amen.

March 19, 2017

The Heresy of Church

We were driving along in our neighborhood, my son observed our local park and blurted out, "Why aren't they going to church?" My other son responded frankly, "Jesus never went to church. They're just doing what Jesus did." I found the interaction of my young twins to be particularly insightful. While one could argue that Jesus went to religious services, such an argument betrays Jesus' command for his followers to individually be the church. Jesus talks about making disciples not creating institutions. Perhaps, those at the park were simply being who God created them to be. There is no other way to follow Jesus. As I sit in an institutional church, I'm affirmed in my suspicion that Jesus resides elsewhere.

Amen.

March 21, 2017

Cowards in Pulpits

*Only cowards have flags in their sanctuaries.

Not too long ago, I attended the wedding of two old men. Before the service started, my friend leaned over asked, "What's that smell?" More interested in the service, I brushed him off and dismissively replied, "I have no idea." As the service started, I smiled when I saw the pastor. Standing between the two grooms was a man of great boldness. In defiance of his denomination's prohibition against clergy performing same-sex ceremonies, the pastor stood boldly. Surveying the room, I saw dozens upon dozens of pastors from the same denomination repeatedly stand and cheer. I couldn't help but be shocked. These folks had the audacity to cheer when they were too much of a coward to do the same thing. They didn't know a damn thing about justice. Leaning over, I told my friend, "I finally know what the smell is...all these pastors around us are full of shit."

Why are pastors often cowards when it comes to justice? I've heard about pensions. I've heard about jobs. I've heard about retirement. I've heard about standing. I've heard about not wanting to upset anyone. I've heard explanation after explanation. What I haven't heard is anything about Jesus. These folks are smart enough to know that Jesus doesn't have anything to do with excuses. Jesus is with justice. There is no other measurement for ministry. Justice is it. Now, just preaching about justice or attending a protest or any other moderate measure is not justice. Justice is about giving your life. God does not look kindly on those who sit on their ass as people crumble. Pastors are the greatest threat to the church today. We need to call them what they are...cowards.

Amen.

March 26, 2017

Talking to Strangers: Theologies of Lying

A few years ago, I succumbed to my elderly grandfather's constant inquiries about my availability to attend his family's annual reunion. I'd only been a couple of times and knew that I wouldn't know anyone. When we arrived, I watched people attack the buffet like they'd never eaten before. I guess this is a characteristic of most family reunions. After dinner, we gathered in a circle to remember all the family who'd died the previous year. When they held a picture up of one of many distant uncles, I knew that I'd never seen him before in my life. The cousin that was leading the reflection called on me to offer a few words about the distant uncle in the picture. For a brief few seconds, I closed by eyes to make it seem that I was really meditating on what I was going to say. Truth be known, I was trying to figure out how to get out of the awkward

situation as painlessly as possible. When I opened my eyes, I started to speak. Although I spoke in generalities, I gave an impassioned eulogy of someone that I had no knowledge of whatsoever. When I looked up, multiple people were crying. Not long after, we started moving towards the exit. As I walked out, people thanked me for my words. When I got in the car, my grandfather told me that he appreciated what I'd said. The more I thought about it the more I realized that though someone one can get really good at talking about people they don't know anything about, it's certainly not the same thing as knowledge and even more problematic...it is a lie.

I've heard many preachers in my life. Some were entertaining. Some were loud. Some were scholarly. Some were mad. Some were rich. Some were sad. Some were women. Some were gay. All were unique. No matter their description, I've found a common characteristic that has struck me about all of them.

They are just like me at the family reunion...they are speaking about someone that they don't know. You can capture people's attention. You can shout. You can share all sorts of truths. You can sing. You can speak in tongues. You can dance. You can act in a variety of ways and be a variety of things. But if you don't know the person that you are talking about...you are lying. It's sad, but most of the preachers I know are liars. I don't think they would know Jesus if Jesus was standing right in front of them. Maybe Jesus is? As we all live your lives...may leave religion behind and venture out into the magic of spaces unknown...and encounter Jesus there.

Amen.

March 30, 2017

Clergy Movement: Do They Know What They're Getting Into?

Over the last few weeks, I've seen a plethora of announcements about the employment of fellow clergy in new positions. Without fail, the photo is always of a smiling minister. Underneath, there is inevitably a list of credentials and an overzealous statement about institutional growth. Earlier this week, two announcements garnered my attention. After reading through the bullshit a few times, I wondered aloud, "Do they know what they're getting into?" Deciding to let the question ruminate, I continued on about my day. In time, I realized I already knew the answer. Of course they know what they're getting into...a nice salary, expense accounts, insurance, retirement plans and on and on. Who wouldn't want to get into that? The call of Jesus is to come and die. The call of modern ministry is to come and live...and live well. God is elsewhere.

Deeply moved by his story, I'll never forget his face. MJ Sharpe was first and foremost a lover of God. Love is what propelled him to give his life to others. Seeking global transformations, Sharp took a job with the United Nations. Educated and trained in nonviolence, Sharp was working to diffuse various conflicts in the Congo. In the midst of his efforts, Sharp was kidnapped. Though many prayed for his safe return, Sharp's body was found a few days ago. I believe that Sharp's influence on our world will never die. In the next life, I hope that Sharp haunts our professionalized ministers. As clergy take their glamour shots and accept their safe positions, I hope they're unable to get the images of Sharp and the many other great martyrs of the church out of their heads. For the survival of the church, I hope they're never comfortable and always remember...you can't follow Jesus and live like the people who killed him.

Amen.

April 9, 2017

Beware of the Palm Wavers

*Originally Posted on Palm Sunday 2015

The people of Jerusalem waved their palms madly to celebrate the entry of Jesus into their town. Less than seven days later, Jesus was tortured and executed in the same place. Though Palm Sunday is a time to celebrate, I can never get past the fact that the same palm wavers either participated in or did nothing to stop the execution of Jesus. The lesson of the juxtaposition should be one of caution.

Emily and I don't have a tremendous amount of close friends. We are too skeptical for that. Truth be known, we have experienced far too many showdowns where no one showed up to help. We have known many palm

wavers who stand on the sidelines waving palms at us in the moments of triumph and who run for the hills when times get difficult. In our ministry, we have learned to love generously and trust cautiously.

How did so many people praise Jesus and either participate or do nothing when he was executed less than a week later? While certainly a complex question, I think one should never underestimate the desire that humans have to praise and be praised by institutions. The people decided that power was more important than love.

We live in a day and age where everyone wants to talk about power. The palm wavers thought that Jesus was about power and they wanted to be on the winning team. When everyone realized that he was about love, the execution went pretty smoothly. Thousands of years later, people largely remain the same.

Love is always going to be far more dangerous than power.

Beware of the palm wavers who might try to convince you otherwise.

Amen.

April 14, 2017

Jesus Didn't Die for Your Sins. Jesus Died to Show You the Way…the Way to the Cross. // Some Words from A Good Friday Walk

*Originally Posted on Good Friday 2014

Lately, I have had a lot of time to think about borders and boundaries. I am a doctoral student at Brite

Divinity School and I was sitting in class last spring…and in this class on immigration we began to talk about the end game. What is the end goal? I raised my hand and said, “Can we imagine a world where there are no nationalities…where there are no borders…where there is simply us?” From their response, you would have thought that I was talking about Mars.

This morning I think it is important that we realize that the borders and boundaries we create in our lives cause violence…they separate…they divide…they keep us from being in relationship with each other. As we stand next to the Federal Building…so often when we think about what it means to be here in the United States…we don’t spend a lot of time thinking about the 70,000 people who have been murdered in the drug war in Northern Mexico. Less than a couple hours drive from where we stand right now. That is because we have erected borders and boundaries in our lives that allow us to other people.

Just this past week, I was in Huntsville, Texas. I told people this week that, 'Here in Texas, the way of the cross ends in Huntsville.' We live in a state that is executing more people than most nations on earth…and somehow we seem to be able to pass concern by saying that those people are monsters. Those people are something less than human. We look outside of our national boundaries and we are often able to not care because somehow those people are different…somehow those people are other.
It is Good Friday and there is Good News.

If we want to talk about gun violence, gun control… ending the need for all of these things….then we need to talk about the borders and boundaries that we put between each other. That lead us to protect things. What would be the big deal if the border between the United States and Mexico was taken down this afternoon? …and people came and got all your stuff…

and we were pushed in a direction where stuff don't matter…a direction of Jesus. Where we share. Where we learn to love each other.

You see I don't believe that Jesus died to save us from our sins. I believe that Jesus died to show us the way. And the question is… 'Are we willing to go the way of the cross?' Are we willing to put down our power…our violence…our hate…and learn to love our neighbors as our selves?

As we were walking over here, this guy said something to me that made me so angry. I wanted to turn around and punch that guy in the face. He said, "I wish I could protest with y'all but I'm working." I wanted to get right up in his face and I told myself, "Jeff you are about to talk to people about loving their neighbor as their self and it might not look nice to get in a tussle with this guy on the sidewalk before you get there." But I think… names like Adam Lanza, Fred Phelps, Corporate

Executives…all of these people that we have othered. Now wait a second…you didn't expect me to say those names. You see in our activism…what will be the measure of whether we follow the way of Jesus will be how much love we show to those that we have othered. It is not just the people on death row. We exist in a time of increasing polarities…increasing division… and I want to know something…do we as Christians have the courage to get up on that cross and say, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do"…? and when we travel to that space…that is the space where we can say that we are following the way of Jesus. When we go to that space that is not just about justice but it is about reconciliation. That is when we can talk about following the way of Jesus.

Will we push toward the cross today? It means loving our neighbors as our self even if they are killing us. Today, whether we are American or Mexican, black or white, gay or straight…whatever dichotomy, boundary,

border or identity that we can come up with…Jesus is calling us to a cross where such things die and we are asked to love our neighbor as our self no matter what.

Will we put down our guns…whether they be our mouths or physical guns…and begin to love our neighbors as our selves?

This is the hour of the crucifixion. This is the time of forgiveness. This is the place where reconciliation happens.

So I invite you all to climb up on that cross and hang there for a little while until love is all that is left.

Amen.

April 16, 2017

The Cold Dead Jesus: A Plea for a Post-Easter Resurrection

*Easter Message Delivered in Denton, Texas

Let's begin with the excluded God. What does it mean for God to be left out? My mind immediately conjures up a situation at the church I attend, the Cathedral of Hope United Church of Christ. Our church was founded to be the ultimate space of inclusion for LGBT people and those that love them. Presently, the church's idea of liberation is based around your ability to fit within certain identities. This is not a phenomenon unique to our church. For the past 40 years, identity-based churches have become the leaders of progressive Christianity. You have the gay church, black church, latino/a church and many others. These spaces exist to liberate the populations they serve. I am beginning to be firmly convicted that our ideas of liberation and

inclusion have created a new exclusion. For illustration purposes, let me return to the Cathedral of Hope United Church of Christ.

We are a congregation that has existed to promote the inclusion of LGBT people. Over the last few weeks, I have noticed that a row of chairs in the back of the sanctuary where homeless LGBT people usually sit has been removed. While I can't speak to the precise reason why this row of chairs has been removed, I can say that a congregation that has consistently been about the inclusion of LGBT people has now marginalized some of the most vulnerable people in their midst. I am beginning to realize that inclusion has now become code for an ability to exclude whoever we want to exclude…or at least to interact with them on our terms.

Inclusion has become the highest priority in our modern culture. The Gospel of Jesus is not about inclusion…it is about exclusion. Following Jesus is about being included

in the excluded. Whenever we institutionalize inclusion, we often find out that the institutionalization of inclusion most often leads to exclusion. When you are included you are excluded in the realm of God. Jesus said, “What you have done to the least of these you have done to me.” I was hungry. I was thirsty. I was sick. I was in prison. Jesus was excluded and continues to be excluded in our exclusions. It is interesting that Jesus doesn’t say, “What you have done to the included you have done to me.”

We are at an interesting time in history. We are months away from marriage equality. We are having more nuanced conversations about race, class, sexuality, gender and a whole host of other things than we have ever had before. As the world shifts and some people gain more rights and access, how will we treat those who are excluded? If what I have seen throughout my life is any example, the suffering will be left to suffer and the excluded will continue to be excluded. Let me

break it down in Easter terms…for most people, Jesus will remain dead.

Friends, a dead Jesus is a safe Jesus. For most churches and the people within them, a dead Jesus is far easier to manage than a Jesus that is alive. With regard to the message of Jesus, safe spaces are always going to be dead spaces. Jesus calls us to interact with the excluded or those who the world would say are not very safe. Dangerous faith is a faith that can declare that Jesus is alive. A safe faith would just leave Jesus in the grave.

When I think about living out a dangerous faith… I think about the courage that it takes for a woman to hold the hand of her girlfriend in homophobic spaces throughout this nation. I think about those who are struggling against police brutality in the midst of overwhelming racism. I think about those Christians in the Middle East who are daring to follow Jesus in the midst of certain death. I think about the Muslims who are pushing back

against Islamaphobia in this nation. I think about the poor, homeless and dispossesed people of this world demanding better. I could go on and on…but there is something divine about having the courage to live dangerously and simply be who you are. Those who live dangerously will always be excluded…but Jesus will always be right there with you.

I think we need to quit talking about inclusion and safe spaces. If you are black and gay, you will not achieve equality based on the constructs of inclusion and safe spaces. If you are poor and transgender, you will not achieve equality based on the constructs of inclusion and safe spaces. If you are disabled and a woman, you will not achieve equality based on the constructs of inclusion and safe spaces. We have to create a movement of love and justice that liberates people based on who they are and not where they can fit. A dead Jesus makes people fit. A resurrected Jesus

liberates people from their individual location…no matter where they are.

We will be able to say that Jesus is truly risen when we begin to work to create a world where people can feel alive in their individuality and find community in their exclusion.

Amen.

April 18, 2017

Testimony on the Abolition of the Death Penalty before the Criminal Jurisprudence Committee of the Texas House of Representatives

*Testimony on the Abolition of the Death Penalty before the Criminal Jurisprudence Committee of the Texas House of Representatives / April 17, 2017

I have been involved in innumerable organizations, actions and efforts to abolish the death penalty here in Texas. I serve as a spiritual advisor for two men on death row. One of which...Paul Storey...was scheduled to be executed a few weeks ago and was saved by a stay of execution. As we sit here the day after Easter...what a time to be having this conversation. I could talk about the cost. I could talk about class. I could talk about the exonerations. I could talk about many things...but what is important to me is Jesus. How in the world can we have a legislature...most of whom profess to be Christians...get to the issue of the death penalty and prove to be so zealous about killing people? Jesus attended one other execution besides his own. There was a woman caught in adultery. At the time, adultery was a capital offense. So, the Pharisees threw the woman at the feet of Jesus. There is no question that the Pharisees were prepared to kill her. Jesus didn't go ahead and put the needle in. Jesus didn't go ahead and

flip the switch. Jesus bent down in the dirt and placed his body between the woman and those who had condemned her. So, I invite you to think about where Jesus would stand on this day. Those who refuse to move forward with the abolition of the death penalty will to have to step over Jesus to continue killing the condemned. Know that the very body of Jesus is lying there. At the end of the day, Jesus tells us to love our neighbors as ourselves. How in the world are we going to love our neighbor and kill them? Refusing to kill your neighbors...that's one of the base lines for following Jesus. I hope that those of you who claim to be Christians will decide this day to turn from the evil of the death penalty and follow Jesus. Amen.

Y'all got any questions? Good. I thought I was pretty clear.

April 19, 2017

When White People Die

Auburn University is the type of place that most people wouldn't believe exists until they experience it. For four years, I was consistently surprised at the backward things I heard over and over again. Though much time has past since graduation, I still think about my alma mater from time to time. When I heard that Richard Spencer was going to speak at Auburn, I wasn't surprised. He seems to always speak at spaces where he thinks he might find a few receptive ears. I was curious how it would all go down. Would the people of Auburn push back against such hate? When I heard the University had canceled the speech, I was appalled. The First Amendment protects hate speech too. After a Federal Judge stepped in, the speech went ahead as planned. After watching large protests of the event outside the venue, I tuned in to the speech. From his first few sentences on, Spencer proved to be completely

illogical. The more he talked, the more I realized that he viewed the world with one color and one color only...white. When white people die, Spencer believes they are to be exalted above all other categories. At first I couldn't put my finger on it, but the talk sounded very familiar. Toward the end of the talk, it dawned on me. The only difference between Spencer and all the other identity peddlers is the category they use. As I prayed about these thoughts, Jesus revealed to me once more that there is really only one category...the least of these.

While many like to restrict this category to certain categories of people, I was reminded tonight why such thinking is so dangerous and contrary to the way of Jesus. Not long after I finished watching the speech, I read about the hate crime in Fresno, California. A Muslim man of color named Kori Ali Muhammad killed three white people today for no other reason but the color of their skin. Muhammad was also wanted in connection with a prior murder as well. Immediately, I

realized that there might be a temptation to discount this tragedy because it is often erroneously believed that white people can't be the victims of hate crimes or considered to be amongst the least of these. Nothing could be further from the truth. When white people die, they die. The pain is the same. The least of these exists irrespective of category. The least of these simply is. When you are murdered for no other reason than the color of your skin...you are unquestionably amongst the least of these.

When white people die...as is the case with any other identity...earthly exaltations or boundarizations are irrelevant...grace is all that matters...and it exists far beyond our categories.

Amen.

April 28, 2017

Alliance of Baptists 30th Anniversary Press Conference / April 28, 2017 / Pullen Memorial Baptist Church Raleigh, North Carolina

Good afternoon, I'm Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood. I serve as a spiritual advisor on Texas' Death Row.

I come here this afternoon with a warning...there are killers in our midst.

Over in Arkansas last night...

Kenneth Williams was murdered.

Part of us died.

Kenneth Williams was murdered.

Part of has died.

Kenneth Williams was murdered.

Part of us is dead.

We can't keep on executing people and expect to be the same.

Part of us always dies.

How can we teach our children not to kill by killing?

Once there was a woman that committed a capital offense. Officials consistently ignored her pleas for mercy. In court after court, the government only knew two words, "Execute Her! Execute Her!" Eventually, the officials arrived at the execution chamber and slung the woman onto the gurney. As the technicians started to carry out the execution, Jesus dove between the needle

and the woman. The entire world stopped. Staring deep into the eyes of officials who thought themselves worthy to murder someone...Jesus said, "Whoever is without evil can start the execution." Slowly, everyone left the chamber.

We are to love our neighbors as ourselves.
We can't love our neighbors and stand by as they are slaughtered in our execution chambers.

Open your eyes...

The death penalty is torture.
The poor are disproportionately executed.
New victims are created.
The innocent are executed.
Pain is compounded.
Persons of color are disproportionately executed.
Trauma fills the lives of everyone who participates.
The disabled are disproportionately executed.

There is simply no end to the lunacy of it all.

At this hour of evil, now is the time to place our bodies between the executioner and the executed. This is the only way. You can't save a life without giving yours. At this very hour, I call on Christians around this nation to come down the aisle of grace...and pray the prayer of mercy...and get saved from all this executing.

I come here this afternoon with a warning...there are killers in our midst.

Over in Arkansas last night...

Kenneth Williams was murdered.

Part of us is dying.

Kenneth Williams was murdered.

Part of has died.

Kenneth Williams was murdered.

Part of us is dead.

We can't keep on executing and expect to be the same.

Part of us always dies.

Jesus is the word of life.

Are you ready to live?

Amen.

May 7, 2017

The Passion: A Ballad for Jordan Edwards

The party was going to by hype. Excitement filled his veins. Everybody was going. Then, the time came. The car rolled out with a shout. Everyone knew what this night was about. Laughs filled the car. The house came into view. In the midst of it all, God arrived too. Before things truly hit, the blue lights lit. Joy turned to horror. White men with guns, now was the time to run. The empire was only doing what it knew to do. Oppress the oppressed until their lives are through. They ran to the car. It seemed so far. Now, wasn't the time to try and be tough. Throughout their lives, they'd seen enough. The backseat was now an altar and such. "Is their any other way?" You could hear someone say. As fear lingered in his eyes, the shot pierced all sound. There wasn't even a second to flee into town. As the bullet hit, it felt like God was gone. When time stopped, he learned that was wrong. "My child, your death will give many sight." Though police brutality continues, let's not forget

salvation arrived that night. The altar is open...the time is right...Jesus is waiting...will we pick up the fight?

Amen.

May 9, 2017

Enough is Enough: Words for Jordan Edwars from a Press Conference

*Based on Words from a Jordan Edwards Press Conference on May 8,2017

Enough is enough!

Enough is enough!

Enough is enough!

We are here today because Roy Oliver murdered Jordan Edwards...there is simply no other way around it. Police brutality is a cancer on our society. Will we ignore it until it kills us all? As rage pours out of communities of color, where have all the white folks been? I imagine they've been hiding in their churches while Jesus is out here with us. Salvation flows through the streets. When will white people get saved?

Enough is enough!

Enough is enough!

Enough is enough!

Today, I am wearing suspenders that were given to me by my late grandfather. Though I loved him dearly, there is no question that he was racist. Our world is complicated like that. Without a doubt, I can tell you

that in his wildest dreams he would have never ever imagined that I would be standing here. Change is possible...but you have to hunger for it. Where is the fire? White communities can get saved...but there has to be a radical turn.

I invite people of all colors to join Jesus tomorrow night...right here in these streets. With God on our side, we will not fail.

In closing, let us never forget that Edwards has joined a heavenly host made up of the many people brutalized by the police. They're all calling us toward justice. Can you hear them?

Amen.

May 14, 2017

*Originally Published July 17, 2015

The Vagina of Jesus

“How dare you insinuate Jesus had a vagina!” The woman was livid. In my talk, I stumbled on the most disturbing idea she’d ever been presented with. With church doctrine and dogma over the centuries in mind, the thought of Jesus having a vagina didn’t seem too out there for me. Since the earliest days of the church, haven’t Christians believed that Jesus was fully human and fully divine in every sense of the words?

“So you believe that Jesus was transgender?” “What would be so bad about that?” I mused aloud. Knowing that I didn’t have time for extended conversation about gender performance, I pressed on with a conversation focused on genitalia. While I can’t know for sure, I feel like some combination between a vagina and penis was probably what the most perfect representative of all

sexes and genders to ever exist was working with. Regardless, the woman continued, “I know for a fact that Jesus was a man with a penis!” In deep anticipation of a strong argument, I waited for her next sentence. “We all know that God has a penis and Jesus is God.” “What happens when God gets an erection?” I asked. I couldn’t help but make an absurd remark. The idea of anyone being certain that God has a penis and a penis alone was too much for me. Feeling the need to wrap up the conversation, I paused and asked her a question, “How did the penis feel when you reached up Jesus’ skirt and grabbed it?” I don’t know anyone who ever saw or touched the sexual organs of Jesus. Flabbergasted, the woman walked out.

“God created humanity in God’s own image, in the divine image God created them, male and female God created them.” With regard to our connection to God, I believe there is no more powerful of a verse of scripture than Genesis 1:27. The scriptures declare that God

created the first persons to be male and female. In Eden, I believe the first persons had both sexual organs and functioned at unique spaces on the gender spectrum. The scriptures declare that the entireties of our beings are created in the very image of God. How could God not have both sexual organs? The first persons were intimately connected to God. Throughout the early church, there was a constant theological desire to connect Jesus with the first persons. If Jesus was like the first persons, then it makes since that Jesus would have a vagina and a penis.

Regardless of whether you believe these theological arguments or not, Jesus declares that the incarnation is not a singular event. In Matthew 25:40, Jesus says, "What you have done to the least of these…you have done to me." In placing Jesus' very being with the least of these, Jesus becomes the least of these. Throughout Matthew 25, Jesus says that the person of Jesus will inhabit the hungry, the thirsty, those who are strangers,

the naked, the sick and those who are in prison. I think we can be certain that persons with vaginas are regularly a part of each of these categories. With that affirmed and sealed for eternity, we can also be sure that Jesus has a vagina.

I believe that the vagina of Jesus is a miraculous occurrence. We should work to smash the patriarchal understandings of Jesus for broader conceptions that create greater access to the person of Jesus. If this essay offends you…I encourage you to get saved from your addiction to erectile theology.

Amen.

May 21, 2017

Progressive Christians & Darth Vader: On Freedom

Earlier today, Texas Governor Greg Abbott signed a bill that prevents religious sermons from being subpoenaed and also prohibits religious leaders from being forced to testify about their religious sermons. The impetus for the law originates from conservative churches that ferociously opposed equality/anti-discrimination ordinances/actions and were pushed to hand over and testify about their religious sermons. While I couldn't disagree more with the hate speech that these pastors were spewing in their pulpits, I believe that such teachings should always be protected by the separation of church and state. I don't see how a follower of Jesus could be a proponent of state control over religious sermons. If you don't think that such procurement amounts to state control, imagine how limited in their teachings most pastors would be if they knew their words were discoverable and they could be subpoenaed for the words they speak at any time. Religious teachers should be able to teach whatever they want. There is no quicker way to silence pastors than to allow our

government to harass/oppress them for what they are teaching. I want to make something very clear, I will go to jail before I surrender my teachings or testify about my teachings. Today, I thank Governor Abbott for protecting me. The government is not my God and I will never allow my teachings to be subject to any law.

Even though I often compare Governor Abbott to Darth Vader, I have to give credit where credit is due. This new law is very protects people of all faiths. Many of my colleagues don't think so. I guess they want the government controlling all of our teachings. Repeatedly on social media, I saw progressive Christians put out post after post bemoaning the new law. I think they're all full of shit. They would oppose anything this Governor did. I don't feel that way. When God works in mysterious ways, I like to sit back and enjoy it. For my colleagues, if you want your teachings oppressed then start asking the government what you should teach about. As for me, I'm thankful that people of every

religious perspective in Texas can now teach whatever they want. I hope that my colleagues will use this expansion of religious freedom for more than bullshit. I hope that we will see more moral courage from our religious teachers to speak out against injustice and oppression. Regardless of what you think about the new law...don't worry...I can assure you that it won't be long before we're all back together to fight Darth Vader again.

Amen.

May 22, 2017

Memories of God: Murder and Something Greater

The images of God were colorful and inviting. The problem was they looked more like a fairy tale than a description of the creator of the universe. I begged God

to give me faith. God didn't. Every night, I prayed for something. I found silence. There was nothing there. Finally, I realized I was praying to a God that I didn't believe in. I walked away. Though everyone talked about getting saved, the only thing I wanted to get saved from was all of the bullshit at church. I was drowning in it. Countless times, I reached God. The silence slapped me back into place. I'd never felt such a sting. The violence continued. There was no God. There was only pain.

Later, I realized why I don't believe in God. Any God that can be explained by theology is not God. Any God that can be manipulated by prayer is not God. Any God that has control over the entire universe is not God. While I could go on forever, I was wooed back to spirituality when I realized that I believed in something far beyond the God that we promote. There is no God. There is only something greater.

Though I have many memories, I'm glad God's dead. Now, I can engage the mystery of the ultimate in spirit and in truth.

Amen.

May 27, 217

The United States Flag at the Front of YOUR Church is Blasphemous

*Originally Published May 2014

A United States soldier processed the flag of the United States of America in to our sanctuary as we stood at attention singing "God Bless America." The veterans in our midst were honored as we sang the "Star Spangled

Banner." The "Battle Hymn of the Republic" proceeded the pastor's fiery sermon on the coming destruction of our beloved nation if we "...did not turn from our wicked ways." Somehow gays, abortion and popular culture always made it into these services...but that is another story. The service concluded with an invitation to salvation as the congregation sang "God of Our Fathers." To say that the services of my Baptist youth were precariously wrapped in nationalism is an understatement...we believed that God's military was the United States military. Despite the fact that we did so much else that was problematic, my mind remains focused on the United States flag on that gold stand up on the altar.

In many Memorial Day services throughout our nation, some of those who have fallen victim to our thirst for violence and power will be honored and celebrated. We will remember the soldiers and attempt to reconcile their sacrifice with our faith. Unfortunately, there will

be little conversation about peace and preventing the deaths of any one else. There will be no conversation of the millions and millions of people who have died as a result of our failed foreign policies and military interventions. The words of Jesus will be forgotten amidst the words of patriotism and nationalism.

No one will recite Jesus' words in Matthew 26:52, "...those who live by the sword will die by the sword." Matthew 5:44 and Jesus' reminder to "love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us" will not make an appearance. Least of all will we remember the millions and millions of people who have died in places with names like Hiroshima, Hanoi, Waziristan, Nagasaki, Kabul and Baghdad in the infernos created by our bombs...those "least of these" dead because we failed to see Jesus in their midst. No these words won't be remembered... and I know most congregations won't be talking beyond the soldiers who have died and will miss

the opportunity to have a conversation about the wider call of Jesus to peace and justice.

My mind wonders back to that flag though. To put the United States flag on the altar of a church is to insinuate that somehow the United States has a claim to the grace of God that other nations and peoples do not. To put the United States flag at the front blurs that glorious declaration "For God so loved the world..." Can you imagine what someone from another country thinks when they see that United States flag up front at our churches? There is no nationality barrier to the altar of God. Jesus does not love the United States more than any other nation...to put a flag at the front and bless the atrocities committed by an incredibly powerful people in the name of Jesus is blasphemous.

A real conversation about the non-violent love of Jesus and our purpose as followers can only happen when we take down the United States flags in our sanctuaries that

stand in the way. If we want to truly honor slain soldiers we will stop perpetuating the nationalism that killed them. So let's toss out all the flags and have a real Memorial Day next year...one that memorializes and celebrates a time when we began to emulate Jesus' love for all people and put to death the nationalism that fooled us into thinking that violence can bring about peace.

Amen.

June 3, 2017

Secularity, Salvation and the Heresy of Religion

Earlier tonight, I was working in the backyard. From the fence, I heard my neighbor calling for me. On the short walk over, I wondered if our kids had done something. With five children, everything is in the

realm of possibility. Before I could get to him, my neighbor declared, "my wife died three days ago." Immediately, I was heartbroken. She was an incredibly loving woman. For multiple years, our family experienced her generosity. I couldn't believe she was gone. When my neighbor asked for my thoughts about death as a minister, I started to answer in the phrases that I'd been taught. "Jesus loves you." "She's in a better place." "She's with God." In the midst of tragedy, these phrases have little meaning. Regardless, the bullshit just keeps oozing out. After a few seconds of heading down that fruitless path, I stopped myself and said, "Forgive me for sharing those canned lines. I don't know why we feel like we have to say those things. Put simply, those words are all bullshit. When it comes to death, the truth is we don't know. We have absolutely no idea. Everyone just wants to believe that there is something more. In the spirit of Einstein, I believe we can. If love/energy is never created nor destroyed, then the love you shared with your wife will never die. Love is

our salvation." After a few tears, my neighbor looked up and said, "Forget all of that religious bullshit. I feel love right now and that's enough. Thank you." Before we departed, I thought about praying with him. Then, I thought, "Love is enough." As we turned to leave, I looked at my neighbor and said, "Love from our family to yours." Without missing a beat, my neighbor replied, "Be careful, that shit lasts forever."

As I pondered the communion, I heard about the terrorist attack in London. Multiple people dead and dozens injured. Religion had done it again. In the name of God, terrorists gave their lives to kill as many people as possible. When I checked out social media, I was sickened. Most people only knew one way to respond. The same religious phrases repeated over and over. How can religion defeat religion? Truth be known, religious language seems so far removed from our current circumstances. We must get closer than such language will allow. Religion must subside. God must

be resurrected in the language of the secular. We can too.

Amen.

June 5, 2017

Thrift Store Theology

In the past couple of years, I've learned just how ferocious I can be. If you get nasty with my children, you can expect to get nasty back. Earlier today we were in a thrift store, when a woman declared, "Your little girl has such pretty hair." Immediately, my child said, "I'm just me." Undeterred, the woman responded, "I know what you are now...Tell your parents to cut your hair so that you'll stop looking like one of these transgendered shemans." Garnering what little restraint I could muster, I raised my voice and said,

"Ma'am, if you say another goddamn word...things are going to get nastier than you could ever imagine. I suggest you quickly leave the store." Though my children couldn't understand everything that had just happened, they knew enough to know that their dad didn't and wasn't going to back down. In the midst of feeling some initial guilt for getting angry, I felt a stirring in my spirit...and realized that God created ferociousness.

Amen.

June 8, 2017

Deadly Bullies: Sparky & the Thompsons

Years ago, I was a youth minister in a small town church. As churches go, people took ownership of certain things. There was the music lady who protected

the hymnals as if her life depended on it. There was the Bible teacher who refused to allow anyone else to teach. There was the usher that refused to let the congregation touch the offering plates. The sound guy was especially horrific. After an older woman touched the sound system, Sparky cussed her out. In the midst of the assault, she screamed, "Please stop!"

As the sun slowly set in the sky, I pumped up the music. The small portable sound system was working great for our youth service. Kids arrived one after another. I was so excited. As the youth danced, I heard tires screech and the door fly open. Before I knew it, Sparky was in my face. After repeatedly telling me he was going to kill me, Sparky pulled back his fist. I screamed, "Please stop!"

Still reeling, I went for a run a few days later. While I was on a small road, I saw a truck coming in the distance. Before I knew it, Sparky was out of his truck

screaming that I was a dead man. As he grew redder and redder, I was prepared to die. After he stumbled a little bit, I started to run. For a second, I thought he might catch me. I screamed, "Please stop!"

Bullies are deadly.

I survived.

John Hernandez didn't.

After a late night in Houston, John Hernandez was stumbling around drunk. Once Hernandez made the decision to go to Denny's, there was no turning him around. Fearful that he might get into trouble, his wife refused to let him go alone. There was no one to watch their daughter. So, she came too. The entire family ate the night away. The meal seemed to hit the spot. After dinner, Hernandez was still drunk. Pushing his way outside. Hernandez decided to take a piss on the side of

the building. A sheriff's deputy named Chauna Thompson and her husband Terry were leaving around the same time. Offended by Hernandez's piss, the Thompsons rushed him. The violent confrontation escalated quickly. Hernandez was pushed around and forced to the ground. Terry Thompson ended up on top of Hernandez and pushed him down with all of his weight. As Hernandez's wife screamed for the couple to stop, their three-year-old watched in horror. Chauna Thompson helped to restrain Hernandez and kept screaming orders at him. Too drunk to fight back, Hernandez struggled to breath. Some of his last words were, "Please stop!"

Eventually, Hernandez lost consciousness. As his body changed colors and life drained out, the couple refused to stop. The Thompsons treated Hernandez as a threat even when he was practically dead. Realizing that an injustice was going on, people tried to record what was going on. Advocates for the Thompsons threatened

anyone with a camera. By the time law enforcement arrived, Hernandez was dying. In the midst of the chaos, Hernandez's wife still begged, "Please stop!"

The little girl stares at her toys. Strangers keep coming through the house. She can't find her daddy. Nightmares fill her head. Understanding as much as she can, the little girl whimpers, "Please stop!"

Bullies are deadly.

Sometimes they're successful.

Sometimes they're not.

John Hernandez is dead.

Terry and Chauna Thompson murdered him.

To anyone who would defend or emulate theses bullies/pieces of shit...

For the love of God...

"Please stop!"

Amen.

June 9, 2017

God: Adventures in Living and Dying

Music boomed. Lights flashed. Hands raised. By the time the minister came on stage, the crowd was ready. "Isn't it wonderful that God died once and for all for all of our sins?" The statement was meant to reassure the assumed safe/saved in the room. Evangelical theology misses the point. The pastor and many others believe

that God only had to die once. They are wrong. The problem is that a God who dies once cannot be incarnated in and with a humanity that never stops dying. If God only dies once, God is dead useless to mortals. If God dies repeatedly, God is alive. The incarnation never stops. Perpetual death is the gateway to perpetual life. We are made in the image of God...living and dying always go together.

Amen.

June 10, 2017

I Don't Believe You: On Following Jesus

Jesus promised loyalty. Jesus promised care. Jesus promised miracles. Jesus promised salvation. What happened? Jesus left. Jesus doesn't care. Jesus is powerless. Jesus has damned us. What in the hell

happened? I believe in you. I don't believe in you. In the chaos of belief, I follow Jesus.

Amen.

June 12, 2017

The Tears of Oppression

One by one, people walked through the door. As the room filled up, I was surprised by the attendance. When we put up the advertisements, we expected only a handful people. Once everyone was in the circle, we began to talk. Emotions ran high. Eventually, three white women were crying loudly. They begged, "Please, forgive us of our racism!" My fellow organizer quickly responded, "Forgiveness is a lived experience not an exchanged commodity." The women begged further, "How can we know how to live unless someone teaches

us? Please, teach us not to be racist." As a quick aside, there is nothing more racist than expecting a person of color to teach you not to be racist. My fellow organizer immediately explained, "I can't teach you not to be racist." The women were incredulous. At the end of the dialogue, the women stormed out of the room. In the hallway, one of them pointed at my fellow organizer and loudly declared, "He's the real racist!" Emboldened, the women stormed out. In those moments, I realized that their tears were nothing more than a further expression of racism.

Just a few days ago, I participated in a similar conversation. The tears flowed freely. Though I was exceedingly skeptical, I tried to be generous. Later in the day, as we discussed oppressions that it would cost money to rectify. The sources of the earlier tears were the first persons to declare that it was too expensive to rectify these oppressions. The tears were meaningless.

The emotional bullshit is all played out. If tears are all you have to contribute to the struggle...then go cry somewhere else.

Amen.

June 12, 2017

Politicians Poison Prophesy: Damnable Awards

Pandemonium filled the church. The television cameras rolled. I beamed as one of the top elected officials in our county walked up to receive an award. Everyone listened intently as I described the official's accomplishments. Then, the moment we'd all been waiting for arrived. I extended the award and gave the official a hug. Pandemonium broke out again. In the midst of the joy, I saw the cross out of the corner of my eye. Slowly, sickness came upon me. This wasn't a

physical sickness as much as it was a spiritual sickness. I knew that I'd committed an offense against God. We had no business championing any politician and I was one of the main participants. I hadn't given the official what was the official's. I'd given the official what was God's. While there are certainly worse politicians we could have given an award to, it doesn't matter. The church cannot exercise prophetic authority over the state when it is throwing around awards. If I had it to do all over again, I'd have never done it. From what I've seen on social media, there are multiple churches planning to give out awards to politicians this summer. Some of whom are blatant enemies of God. Be careful my friends, you will reap what you sow. Jesus is not found in political influence. Jesus is not found in public attention. Jesus is found on the streets. Our awards should be given to the least of these not the most of these. Repent. Turn around. Let your awards reflect the claims you have made about your hearts. +Can you imagine Jesus giving Pilate/Cesar an award?

Amen.

June 14, 2017

God is Afraid

Humanity mixed with divinity is a lethal combination. Explanations are fleeting. Jesus is the full incarnation of God. Jesus is God. On the way to the cross, there is no doubt that Jesus is terrified of what's next. From the anxious blood to the pleas for help to the shouts of abandonment, God was afraid. In the midst of pain and death, God wanted out. Moments like this are not foreign to humanity...nor are they foreign to divinity. If we are afraid, God is afraid. Ours is the God who is with us. What is God afraid of? Who knows? Fear is human. Fear is divine.

Amen.

June 17, 2017

Disruption: The Language of God

Today is the first Sunday after the acquittal of Officer Jeronimo Yanez. Nearing a year ago, Yanez murdered Philando Castile during a traffic stop. The entire incident was streamed live. The video seems clear. When police officers are involved, nothing is ever clear. How many pastors have mentioned anything about police brutality? How many have they spoken their names? I suspect very few. Chicken shit pastors rule the roost. Thankfully, we don't have to wait on pastors to do something. Jesus showed us how to be disruptive. In the midst of injustice, God is found in shutting it down. We are responsible for making sure that not another service goes by without the names of those we

are slaughtering in the streets being loudly proclaimed. Interruption in the midst of accommodation is a holy act. For those who would criticize such tactics, let us remind them that there can be no worship without justice. In this hour of deep hate, nothing should be normal. We are sinking into a moral abyss. If we are to be saved, disruption is our only hope. So...until churches begin to act like churches...don't let them worship in peace.

Amen.

June 23, 2017

The Murder of a Mom: Justice for Genevive Dawes!

On January 18, 2017, two Dallas police officers trapped a stolen car in the back of a parking lot. When the car started to move, the officers discharged their weapons

into the car. Genevive Dawes was mortally wounded and bled out a short time later. The 21-year-old unarmed mother of two was murdered.

In the police account of the events, they said that Dawes hit their patrol car and they had to discharge their weapons. The tape doesn't lie. In various scenes, it is very clear that Dawes was driving too slow for any reasonable person to think that they were in danger. It is also apparent that the officer actually positioned the patrol car to hit Dawes' vehicle and not the other way around. Initially, the Dallas Police Department lied about what happened. Once the tape was unveiled, lies died. Was anyone held accountable?

Yesterday, the grand jury released an indictment against Officer Christopher Hess for his actions that led to the murder of Genevive Dawes. He was the officer closest to Dawes. While the first indictment of a Dallas police officer for killing a citizen in over 40 years is reason to

celebrate, we must not stop until the entire Dallas Police Department faces indictment for it's consistent crimes against the citizens of Dallas. How many more unarmed citizens are going to have to be brutalized and killed before there is a drastic overhaul of the Department?

On this day, Genevive Dawes is still dead. Her two children will still grow up without a mother. Why? Because Officer Hess mistook Dawes for a piece of shit that he could pump bullets into. When the shots rang out, God was there. In those moments, there was only one piece of shit present and he was the one holding the murder weapon.

Amen.

June 23, 2017

3 Years Later: Don't You Dare Turn Your Head: The Self-Immolation of The Rev. Charles Moore

As the lightening crashes on this night, the passion of Rev. Charles Moore visits me again...

Originally written on July 3, 2014

The fiery passion of 79-year-old retired United Methodist pastor The Rev. Charles Moore is raging in my soul right now. On June 23 around 5:30pm, Moore exited his vehicle in Grand Saline, Texas, doused his body with gasoline and set himself on fire. After rescue efforts by bystanders, Moore was taken by helicopter to Parkland Hospital in Dallas and eventually died late last night. Based on notes left behind, Moore chose to self-immolate based on his frustration with the United Methodist Church's position on human sexuality,

opposition to the death penalty, disdain for racism (especially in his hometown of Grand Saline) and his deep anger at Southern Methodist University's decision to house the George W. Bush Presidential Center.

Rev. Moore knew how we would react. On June 22, the day before he self-immolated, Moore wrote, "I know that some will judge me insane." When I first shared Moore's story with a table full of people at a Dallas restaurant, everyone immediately declared him insane. I know different.

While a graduate student in history at the University of Alabama, I spent six months studying self-immolations that took place in both the United States and in Vietnam during the Vietnam War. With stark consistency, the persons who self-immolated that I studied were remarkably sane and unquestionably persons of deep conviction. The temptation of the hour will be to turn our heads and call The Rev. Charles Moore insane. If we

do…we should also turn our heads from Jesus and call him insane too. For we must not forget, Jesus sat in the Garden of Gethsemane and made a conscious clear decision to step out into death…just like Moore.

Instead of judging Rev. Moore, maybe we should try to ignite the passion for justice that burned so brightly in his life in ours. When Texas tries to execute Manuel Vasquez on August 6, maybe we should do something more than simply turn our heads and protect our dignity. When our churches and societies ignore racial segregation and discrimination, maybe we should do something more than simply turn our heads and protect our pride. When we are asked to perform a same-sex wedding ceremony or ordain a same-gender loving person, maybe we should do something more than turn our heads and protect our salaries/pensions. When institutional injustices occur all around us, maybe we should do something more that turn our heads and bless them with our silence. I will go to bed this evening

thankful for the public witness of The Rev. Charles Moore and pray that the church would garner even an ounce of his passion and courage.

On a personal note, I serve on the Board of Directors of the Texas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty. Rev. Moore helped found the organization. Because Moore lived, I am able to do the work that I do. My respect for Moore is unwavering and I am proud to follow in his footsteps. Jesus asks us to give our lives and Moore did.

Tonight my passion for Jesus burns as intensely as ever. When I look straight ahead into the dark, I see Moore's bespectacled image burning. I see Moore giving his life so that others might live. I refuse to turn my head. I know that Jesus is speaking to me from there. The courage of a passionate follower of Jesus can set the world afire with love. May the great martyrdom of The Rev. Charles Moore make it so.

Amen.

June 24, 2017

Heresy is Participation: A Plea to My Colleagues

Just a few years ago, I traveled to stand in solidarity with a brutalized community. When I arrived, I followed the lead of local activists. They were ready to go. When we arrived at the authorities' designated protest site, we started to march. For days, we marched along the same path. I even heard someone say, "If we march how we're told, we'll get what we want." Ultimately, I realized that the designated spot was more about control than change. If we stayed in the spot, there would be no problems...and there would be no change. The designated spot was a prison. To follow the designations of public officials was to die.

This morning, young passionate clergy will arrive at their designated spots. They will go through the motions. During the sermon, they might even drop a line about justice. The only problem is that they're not free...and without freedom there can be no change. "Do you want to move to a bigger church?" "What about your salary?" "Do you need health insurance?" The incentives for minding the designations are great, but the cost is greater...justice. Designated systems kill prophetic voices. Jesus collapses and dies in these spaces.

Friends, we were made for so much more.

Heresy is participation.

God is not a designated space.

Amen.

June 26, 2017

Theology of Abuse in The Park

Earlier today, I took my kids to the park. While they were playing, I noticed a mom disciplining her child. When the child refused to do what she asked, the mom slapped the child across the face. Immediately, my son Jeff screamed, "You shouldn't treat someone you love like that!" My heart was filled with pride. He'd listened to our teachings about speaking up for the abused. Though the woman acted like she was ignoring Jeff, she heard him.

God came to mind on the bike home. As the wheels turned, I thought about how twisted it that people believe God is the divine punisher. People who believe such bullshit are ignorant of the love of God and capable

of much abuse. We share the love of God to save lives...both literally and figuratively.

Amen.

June 28, 2017

*Dallas Morning News Piece

GOD DAMN WHITE AMERICA

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

I watched the 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. Before our rally planning was complete, Philando Castile was shot by a police officer who stood there and watched him die. The video played over and over again. I didn't have a choice. I couldn't walk away.

I know that God was there. Even though the rally was about to start, people didn't stop coming. In those moments, rage was our friend. The times allowed for no other emotion. The rhetoric reflected the deep desire for swift revolutionary change. We knew then as we know now, gradualism is the greatest enemy of justice. Time was drawing near. Pain grew with every word. God drew near. The feel of the megaphone signaled that it was time to deliver. Though I spoke a variety of words, I felt God most vividly when I shouted four words, "God Damn White America!"

When the shots rang out, I was close. Over the next few days, I did countless interviews. Eventually, reporters

stopped asking me to recount the events and turned to what I said at the rally. Repeatedly, I was asked the same question, "Do you regret saying, 'God Damn White America'"? Though I gave a variety of responses then, I've now had a year to think about it and we all know that things grow clearer with time.

In those moments, I said exactly what needed to be said. Though we yearn for unity, we are too often willing to sacrifice justice to achieve it. I am not. I declared, "God Damn White America" because I am diametrically opposed to a society dominated by white people. I don't see how anyone could be a lover of God and not also rise up with me to declare, "God Damn White America." How can anyone love their neighbor as they love themselves and be a white supremacist? We damn that which is evil. There is nothing more evil in our society than the racism that pervades everything we do. So over the last year, I have learned to turn a deaf ear to anyone who would criticize such language. With God

on my side, I can't stop. I can only keep marching for justice. I can only keep on offering people that holy invitation to repent of racism and join me in declaring at the tops of our lungs, "God Damn White America!"

For those who would continue to quibble, I must ask, "Are you serious about honoring the five officers who were murdered?" Lorne Ahrens, Michael Krol, Michael Smith, Brent Thompson and Patrick Zamarripa died protecting the beautiful diversity of people gathered that night...not White America. I too am interested in protecting beautiful diversity. Which is why, I have not doubt that I honor them every time I say, "God Damn White America!"

Amen.

July 1, 2017

Truth: False

God is truth. We are not. The mortal search for truth is continuous. The fullness of truth is never found in this life. Those who believe otherwise are perpetuators of that which is false. Often, I meet these assumed keepers of truth.

I was exchanging small talk to a police officer. Then, he realized who I was. For a moment or two, we talked about what that night in Dallas was like. Before we left, he said, "If y'all want police brutality to end...you have to recognize that law enforcement are the keepers of the truth."

Requests for interviews are cranking up as the anniversary nears. When I sat down with a prominent journalist, her first words were, "Journalists are the keepers of the truth in our society. I just want to share your truth."

I encountered a big supporter of a local city councilman. When he asked me what I thought about the councilman, I said, "I just don't trust him." Immediately, the supporter responded, "The councilman always tells the truth."

Finally, I heard a preacher talking about, "the truth." His truth turned out to be the most dismal truth I could have ever imagined.

Claims of truth are false. Truth cannot be possessed. Truth cannot be kept. Truth is always beyond us. Our job is to chase it with all that we are. To do anything else is false.

Amen.

July 7, 2017

The Phrase

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 your 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?

July 9, 2017

The Sermon After the Shooting

*Delivered at Trinity Presbyterian Church in Denton, Texas on July 10, 2016

It's been a very busy time. Just a few days ago, I organized the rally and march that preceded the deaths of five police officers in Dallas. This morning I want to journey through the story of Dallas and end with in the familiar story of the Good Samaritan.

On Wednesday, I partnered with others to organize the protest. We were all disgusted at the video of Alton Sterling's death at the hands of the police in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. The next day another video showing the death of Philando Castile at the hands of police in Falcon Heights, Minnesota became widely available. Seeing those men bleed out...watching black Americans regularly bleed out in our streets...remembering Ferguson...remembering Baltimore...remembering city after city where black lives do not matter...including our own...Denton, Texas...is overwhelming. We see it over and over again. We see black communities overpoliced.

When communities are overpoliced, there is no doubt that tragedies happen in greater frequency.

Someone asked me the other day to prove that there is police brutality in Dallas. I simply responded, "Why would a thousand people show up to protest police brutality rally if there wasn't brutality?" We never expected so many people. We thought there was going to be a hundred or so. When the video of Philando Castile bleeding out went viral, the numbers increased exponentially. We gathered at the rally. When I looked out into the sea of people, I wondered, "What does Jesus have to say in a time like this?" By traditional interpretations, the answer is absolutely nothing. We keep on offering salvation to people who are dying in the streets. We keep on talking about Jesus loving the world and we can't even take the time to love our neighbors.

We say that we are a people who believe that God loves the world...but look around. We don't do shit. People are being gunned down in our streets and we don't do shit. Look around! We keep on hearing people demand that the church do more. The church doesn't have anything to give. The church has no voice. The church has no witness. The church has no purpose.

We traded our voice for influence. We traded our witness for political power. We were most concerned about protecting churches. We wanted to make sure we maintained our denominations. In the mean time, we gave everything away. Do you care more about your church or denomination than you do these black bodies that are lying in our streets? If you do, you are not following Jesus...you are following evil. We have to wrestle with difficult questions in these difficult hours. What is salvation? What is love? What is truth? Where do we go from here? We gathered last Thursday night to wrestle with these questions and many others.

Anyone who declares that Thursday's protest should have been less angry...doesn't understand the daily violence facing black people in this country. People were mad as hell and they had every right to be. Many have criticized the language that I used at the rally. I declared, "God Damn White America!" I'm tired of hearing about White America. There is no White America. There is only America. I'm also tired of hearing about White Christianity. There is no White Christianity. There is only Christianity. A Christianity that is white is not Christianity. I wish a few more people would start damning everything that is contrary to love and justice.

Throughout our nation, you have heard the phrase, "Fuck the Police!" Why would people say such a thing? Have we considered that the situation has become so dire that people don't feel like they have any other language to use? Those who criticize the language of

those who are being beaten and killed and don't stop to help are the enemies of Christ. People are being slaughtered in our streets. Why can't we love our neighbors as ourselves? We must get saved. We must stop police brutality. We must rip the racism from our hearts. We have to change.

As we began the march, we followed the directions of the police. At every turn and with every step, the protest was nonviolent. I remember the officers repeatedly commending the peaceful nature of the protest. I was thankful that the protest remained nonviolent. Why do you think protestors keep calling for nonviolence in this country? I think it's the same reason that I keep on calling for nonviolence...it's the only logical choice. Violence never achieves love or justice.

Towards the end of the march, we gathered at the Old Courthouse. After hearing about the horrific 1910

lynching of Allen Brooks from multiple speakers, we made our way back toward our starting point...Belo Gardens Park. As I led our march to it's finish, I talked with a Sergeant from the police department. We talked about how successful the protest had been. I'd just passed Austin Street. I had on my white robe. I was carrying my black cross. I had on one of my favorite stoles. All of a sudden I looked up and heard...pop-pop-pop-pop-pop. I was close enough that I thought I might be shot. My first reaction was to grab my stomach. The Sergeant ran toward the shooting. The eight hundred people behind me were walking directly into the line of fire. I ran to get as many people out as I could. I repeatedly screamed, "Active Shooter! Active Shooter! Run! Run! Run!" My cross very quickly became a staff to push people out of the way. It was total chaos.

We didn't know who was shooting. We just knew that there were many shots. I remember the question that came after: "Why?" I repeatedly heard that one word

question. When people asked Jesus questions of meaning, he consistently responded with answers of being. I did too. I kept telling people that we have to learn to be love and justice. We can't talk about justice without love and we can't talk about love without justice. When you start talking about peace and nonviolence you better make sure that you are talking about love and justice too. There is no peace or nonviolence without love and justice.

The 5 officers who lost their lives during the shooting remain heavy on my heart. It is difficult to experience something like this and not feel like you have some level of responsibility. There might be a million pieces of evidence to prove the contrary...but still you wonder what you could have done to prevent the tragedy. For 24 hours straight, I was on television. I didn't have time to mourn. I just had to spread the message of love and justice. I did television, newspaper and radio interviews all day long. It went on and on and on. I knew that if I

didn't get the message of love and justice out...somebody else would be ready with a more sinister message. When we are silent, other messages fill the void. As followers of Jesus we are responsible for getting our message out...we are responsible for sharing the good news. If we don't, there will be other messages.

Last Friday night, I arrived home to hundreds of threats. People were looking for someone to blame. When you become a public figure in a time like this, you become a target for hate. People have said all sorts of shit. I even had someone tell me that the reason I act this way is because I'm a vegan. People can make some pretty wild connections. That's why we have to help them make the right connections.

Devastation doesn't come close to describing the totality of what I feel. I couldn't believe what happened. Noises scare me. Movement scares me. Crowds scare me. This morning I thought the car might blow up when I turned

the ignition. We live in a crazy time...a dangerous time...a dark time. Jesus still has a word for such a time as this.

There were two people who saw suffering and walked on by. There were two people who saw great difficulties and walked on by. But in the midst of it all, there was the Samaritan. There was the person who stopped. There was the person who bandaged up the wounds. There was the person who held the hurting. There was the person who refused to walk by.

In the midst of great conflict, we keep on walking by. We say that we can't stop. We say that we can't talk. We say we don't have time. Where are the Samaritans amongst us? We need you now more than ever.

Amen.

July 9, 2017

The Ethics of Murder

*The previous iteration of this post was unintentionally hurtful. In the rush of writing, I assumed things that were not true. For these errors/sins, I am truly sorry. In the future, I dedicate myself to navigating/mediating my thoughts more carefully.

The last week of my life has been filled with murder.

I started the week thinking about the murder of young Shavon Randle. That a child would be murdered over drugs is beyond disgusting. Can you imagine what type of people could participate in the murder a child? I can. Warped children of God...but children of God nonetheless. Not long after the tragic news was revealed, I heard a friend of mine demand that the

perpetrators be beaten and drug through the streets. What good would that do? It would only make us murderers like them. Murder is murder.

Over the last few days, the first anniversary of the July 7 murder of five police officers consumed my life. As I thought about the pursuit of justice in the midst of tragedy, I also remembered the shooter Micah Johnson. Though he perpetuated mayhem, surely he too must be a child of God. When the decision was made to blow him up, something very evil happened...murder. How could his murder be any different from the murders he committed? It's not...murder is murder.

Just yesterday, I found out that my friend Lee Covington was murdered. The accused party is named Yevin Rushing. Violence seems like a proper response. However, there is no future in vengeance. Without love, we will turn into what we hate. Murder is murder.

The ethics of murder are clear...and murder is always evil.

Amen.

July 18, 2017

When a White Woman Dies: On Blue Supremacy

Repeatedly, I've stood in front of cameras and audiences to loudly declare to white people, "If you don't engage in the struggle against police brutality, the next tragedy will be yours." Yesterday, it was. Not long after calling 911 to report a possible sexual assault, Justine Ruszczyk-Damond was gunned down by one of the responding Minneapolis police officers, a Somali Muslim immigrant named Mohamed Noor. By all accounts, Justine was a beautiful person...loved by everyone who knew her. There is no indication that she did anything to warrant

the shots. Regardless, there was no reason to immediately resort to deadly force. People often wonder why I teach my kids not to call the police...this situation and countless others like it is why. While there is no question that communities of color are under invasion by law enforcement, we would be remiss to not acknowledge that this is a phenomenon that impacts us all. So where is everyone?

Growing up, I was always taught that men are supposed to protect women. Even though I gave up on such a misogynistic idea long ago, I know that there are countless men and women who still believe in such a misguided principles. One has to wonder where all these folks have been when the police have slaughtered countless women? Where are they today? I would imagine they are driving around with their blue lives matter stickers all over their cars. I would imagine that they are in their homes as the blue lives matter flags and signs adorn their homes. One doesn't have to

imagine long, before they realize that these folks and many others who cling to tyrannical manifestations of ignorance are perpetuating crimes against humanity.

Blue supremacy is a pandemic. No one is immune. To those who just can't seem to kick their blue addiction, I offer you the warning of Jesus...those who live by the blue will die by the blue.

Amen.

source:
http://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/australian-woman-shot-dead-minneapolis-police-officers-after-calling-911-n783581

July 18, 2017

The Nature of Blue Supremacy

While I don't use the above image lightly, I do use it intentionally. For the past year, everywhere I've gone I've seen this symbol. Repeatedly, I was reminded that it is the blue lives that actually matter. In these countless encounters, the message was loud and clear...blue is supreme.

I was there when five police officers died. I still grieve for their families. With such affirmed, I am disgusted by how law enforcement has used and abused the memory of their fellow officers to ravenously seek more power. Did the lives of these five officers truly matter? It seems their lives have been most useful to strengthen the power of the blue. The aggressive marketing after their deaths was about one thing and one thing only...blue supremacy.

Why don't governments honor the victims of the blue in the way that they honor the blue? One doesn't have to wonder long...the answer is clear. Only blue is supreme. They can do whatever they want. In egregious case after egregious case, we've seen the blue brutalize citizens and never be held accountable. When you come in contact with the blue, you are right to be scared...any interaction could be your last. Throughout history, oppressors rise up and reign over societies. Many offer contemporary warnings against such a phenomenon. Make no mistake...we're already there.

Not too long ago, we met with multiple officers to try to plan some level of security for a rally. After some conversation, it was clear that the officers didn't like our plans. Forcefully, we were told that we'd have no security if we went through with it. "We ain't going to put our officers out there to protect this." When I found myself incredulous that they would use their position as a means of suppressing free assembly/speech, I let my

eyes wonder to right above their shoulders. Stuck to the wall was a message...blue lives matter.

In the midst of our blue nightmare, a wild diversity of officers are abusing us everyday. While other descriptions of police brutality are also of primary importance, I think it is important to make sure that we have a descriptor that speaks to the ingrained and institutionalized desire to uplift the blue...even when it is of fatal consequence. Blue supremacy is a both a sickness and a mindset that has to be cleansed from our society. As long as the blue keep creating more blue supremacists, we will continue to see the blood of innocent people flow down our streets. The time to resist was yesterday. The blue is on the march and we're next.

Amen.

July 19, 2018

Hood & Alexander's Statement on Dallas' New Police Chief

"We have dedicated our lives to ending police brutality, we our hopeful that Dallas' new police chief U. Renee Hall will join us."

Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood
Minister Dominique Alexander

July 19, 2017

God is Not Blue: On the Churches of Blue Supremacy

Since last year, I've repeatedly seen churches hold praise/gratitude services for local law enforcement. Like most churches, worship is at the center of the

experience. The only difference is that these churches are worshiping the blue. In the space, God is dead in yet another instance of police brutality. One cannot serve two masters. Will it be the blue or will it be God? Blue supremacy is idolatry at its' deadliest. Churches have become a bastion of violence. God is not mocked. We reap what we sow. God is not blue and those who perpetuate the lie that God is...will soon enough meet the blue devil in the streets.

Amen.

July 20, 2017

The Roman Road: Salvation from Blue Supremacy

There is salvation from Blue Supremacy.

Follow the Roman Road.

Romans 3:23

"...all of the Blue have fallen short of their duties."

Romans 3:10

"The Blue cannot fix the Blue..."

Romans 5:12

"Brutality entered the Blue through one officer...brutality continues through all officers...because all have pledged allegiance to the Blue..."

Romans 6:23

"The brutality of the Blue leads to death...but the gift of God is life..."

Romans 5:8

"God demonstrates love for us...by joining us in our struggle against the Blue."

Romans 10:9-10

"...if you confess that God hates the brutality of the Blue...you will be saved...for it is through confession that brutality can be erased."

Romans 10:13

"Whoever calls on the name of God to save them from the Blue...will be saved."

Romans 10:17

"Faith comes by seeing...the day of salvation from the Blue is here..."

There is salvation from Blue Supremacy.

Follow the Roman Road.

Amen.

July 21, 2017

The Cure for Blue Supremacy

"Love your enemies & pray for those who terrorize you."
-Matthew 5:44

There is only one way to cure Blue Supremacy. Weapons will not work. No one is going to outgun them. Politics will not work. Politicians will always support them. Protests will not work. Shutting such actions down are easy for them. None of the classic responses work. We have seen it over and over again. There is only one way. We have to meet violence with violence. There is only one phenomenon that is stronger than physical violence...the violence of love. We love our enemies to make them submit to love. This is the only way. The Blue have to be repeatedly pummeled with love...until they stop the oppression. The Blue must be shamed out of their terrorizing ways. Love is the only

force that can achieve that. The Blue can be beaten...we just have to play a different game. Love is the most violent force ever known. Let's get violent. Let's take the fight to them. Let's destroy the brutality of the Blue. Their physical violence is no match for the violence of love. Let's go. We pray for the terrorists in Blue because we know what love can do.

Amen.

July 27, 2017

Blue Salvation: Redemption from Blue Supremacy

I was just a child. When people started to celebrate my Dad, it took me a second to figure out what for. In time, I realized that Dad was a hero. You see, my Dad ran into a hostage situation involving heavy gunfire and saved the life of a police officer. The officer was shot so many

times, that Dad had to stuff towels into his guts to keep him from bleeding out. In addition to the psychological scars that he contracted, numerous projectiles hit Dad. One of my most vivid memories of the time is of my Mom tending to Dad's wounds in the bathroom of our home. In those moments, I realized that Dad was mortal. I'd never believed it before. I'd also held similar thoughts about police officers. When this incident happened, I realized that officers were just as fragile as anybody else. All it takes is one shot. On that day, Dad helped the officer find physical salvation in a moment of death. If only for a second, the world was made right. Death didn't win.

While I'm pretty sure that Dad didn't know the officer all that well, he still risked his life to save another.

In the midst of our fight to save lives, perhaps the life we save will be our own.

One of the most devastating consequences of Blue Supremacy is that we're indoctrinated to believe that police officers are morally superior to us. They are not. Assumptions of righteousness put all of us in very vulnerable positions. If we get pulled over, we often carry an expectation that the officer will not seek to escalate the situation. Such thinking leaves us unprepared for when an escalation occurs. We expect wrongly. When we call the police, we assume that a professional will show up. Such thinking leaves us unprepared for a maniacal asshole to show up. We assume wrongly. When we see the gun on the officer's hip, we don't think they will shoot us. We are left completely helpless when the gun comes out. We think wrongly. Over and over, we have watched videos of people being slaughtered in our streets. We believe that such violence will never touch us. We believe wrongly. Blue Supremacy is everywhere.

It's getting closer.

After the resurrection, Thomas refused to believe that Jesus had risen from the dead until he touched the wounds. Ultimately, he touched and believed. How many times will we have to touch the wounds before we believe? They're everywhere. People gunned down. People beaten. People brutalized. People treated like shit. Police brutality is no respecter of persons. Either we will save/reform these officers from their ideas of Blue Supremacy or we will continue to be their prey.

Perhaps it hasn't gotten close enough to you yet?

It will.

Amen.

July 27, 2017

Blood on the Pavement: The Crash of Blood and Grace

God is with us.

I was sitting at the light. I saw the bike first. I wasn't prepared. The bottle was next. Everything crashed. I couldn't figure out what was going on. Then, I saw a leg. Instantly, I hit my flashers and ran. I dove to her side. Holding her body as still as I could, I tried to figure out how bad she was hurt. When Sheriff's Deputies pulled up, I thought help had arrived. As a man screamed that the young woman needed CPR, the Deputies just leaned on their cruisers. Honestly, I have never seen two bigger worthless pieces of shit in my life. As the poor woman moaned for help, the Deputies did nothing but perfect their fucking leans. Regardless of my anger, I refused to lose my focus. Eventually, the woman woke up and told me her name. I made the sign of the cross.

Then, I looked at her attire and realized that she was a nun. When the paramedics arrived, I stayed with her. It wasn't until the doors of the ambulance closed that I allowed myself to breath.

When the police arrived, I listened to witness after witness tell their story. In the midst of all the words, the stories often contradicted. However, there seemed to be a growing conclusion that the woman driving the car was at fault. The mob quickly formed and seemed ready to enact vengeance right then and there. As the woman stood by weeping and terrified, I went over and assured her that God was with her. In the presence of such hate, I'm not sure she believed me.

In the midst of it all, a member of the mob started to talk to me. After he shared what he saw, I looked at him and said, "If it was your daughter, would you want people to rush to condemnation like you're doing?" The man looked stunned and defensively replied, "What did you

see?" Without hesitation, I replied, "I saw two children of God in desperate need of love and prayer." In that moment, an officer shouted out, "Don't be talking to him." With that, another officer told me that I could go.

As I walked away, I thought about the bleeding nun's graceful disposition. I knew that she was simply living out her vows. In those moments of contemplation, I realized that she was the embodiment of grace. She was so much more human than all of those who vengefully claimed to be championing her humanity. She shed blood and shared grace. May we go and do likewise.

Amen.

August 10, 2017

God Loves A Killer

Cold. The visiting room is always cold. Death lingers. I didn't wear a coat. There is nothing to do but wait. Well, I guess there are a couple of Bibles available...but it's hard to read it when God seems so absent. The doors rattled. I watched as inmates went to their booths for visitation. Some looked pleased. Some looked bothered. Some just looked. I put my head back down. Cold. I fell asleep. I don't know how long I was there. I just know I was woken up by a question. "Who are you here to see?" After I answered the question, the woman told me that she was waiting on her brother. I could tell that she was apprehensive. "I come up here week after week and sometimes he sees me and sometimes he doesn't. He gets worse each time." One cannot travel to death row without encountering mental illness. The two phrases are practically synonymous. When the door rattled, I heard a commotion. I don't know how. I just knew. The noises grew closer. The woman looked at me. "I just thank God that he came out today." When he passed by my booth, I saw a bewildered older man. The

door slammed. Their conversation began. I laid my head down. The noises of sadness woke me up. He couldn't handle anything more than a few minutes. She couldn't handle him leaving so quickly. I didn't know if I could handle anymore. The woman left upset. I wish I could've followed her. I couldn't. My visit hadn't even started yet.

Raymond Martinez just died.

Most would never associate love with such an occurrence. A killer multiple times over. A man suffering from severe mental illness. An inmate of no particular significance. What's love got to do with it?

Despite the evil, I promise you that his sister will never stop loving him

God won't either.

Amen.

In fact... When Raymond Martinez met God, I believe that it was her love that saw him through.

Amen.

August 12, 2017

The Heresy of Salvation: A Parable from Charlottesville

Lightening crashes. The day is heavy. I remember the past. I don't know about the future. I just write.

The answers have died. The questions are all that is left.

Violence exploded. They just wanted to find a safe place. Running from block to block, they were desperate for something open. After they'd all but given up hope of finding such a place, they saw a church. Running across the street, they banged on the door...a woman welcomed them in. They were finally safe. Cookies and punch filled the room. They got lost in the safety of it all. Finally, they were invited into a worship service. Needing a word of hope, they made their way down front. As the preacher mad his way to the pulpit, he smiled at them and said that he was especially glad they were there. It wasn't long before they knew why he singled them out. "The rioting taking place in our streets is tragic. Racism and violence have no place in a civil society. We could stay in the darkness of it all...but I don't want to...and I bet you don't either. There is hope. There is an answer to all that ails us...and his name is Jesus. If we could just get everyone saved...there would be no more racism...there would be no violence." They knew they were no longer safe.

They got up to leave. Just as they were about to open the door, the preacher pressed, "Where are y'all going?" They turned around and declared, "To get saved." With that, they left the heresies behind. The streets of Charlottesville were their only salvation.

The answers have died. The questions are all that is left.

Lightening crashes. The day is heavy. I remember the past. I don't know about the future. I just write.

Amen.

August 13, 2017

Martyr. #HeatherHeyer

I never knew her. Then again, maybe I did. I have seen her in the streets of Dallas. I saw her in Ferguson. She was in Baltimore. Heather Heyer has been in the millions and millions of people who have dared to fight against injustice. She has been with us all along. I never knew her. Actually, I guess I did.

What was she thinking in the moments before that car smashed her body? Who was she standing with? Who got the call that she had perished? Did she see the face of the murderer? When did she actually die? We don't know the answers to these questions yet. We only know that she was a freedom fighter. We only know that she had the faith. We only know that she was martyred in the midst of the struggle.

Heather will be with us from this day forth. Heather has joined the great cloud of witnesses struck down in the struggle for justice. Guiding. Teaching. Loving. Fighting. Their presence is divine.

How far are you willing to go?

I suggest you follow Heather Heyer.

God will meet you there.

There will be those who question my designation of Heather as a martyr...

In the name of Jesus...eat shit.

Don't rest Heather Heyer...we need you with us.

Amen.

August 22, 2017

Clergy and the Violence of Peace

It's a long way from Dallas to Ferguson...but I had to go. I knew you couldn't follow God and sit on your ass.

The air went out. Fire was all I knew. Sweat poured down my face. God met me there.

When I arrived, I was introduced to the clergy group. One of the other clergy leaned over and said, "Our job is to keep the peace." I was terribly uncomfortable with such words.

Clergy walked together. The diverse clerical attire made us look like a walking rainbow. The authorities kept expressing gratitude that we were there. I was terribly uncomfortable with such expressions.

In time, I realized that clergy wasn't there to keep the peace...clergy was there to stifle protest...the very voice of God. After that first night, I promised myself I would

never participate in such foolishness again...my job was to stoke the rage of God in the people of God. Justice is always ushered in by rage.

Recently, the sins of Ferguson found me in Dallas.

Just the other night, I attended a large protest against confederate symbolism. Toward the end of the gathering, I saw a group of largely white clergy walking swiftly. They were racing toward a rumored site of violence. I imagine that someone in local government asked them to go. I'm not all that interested in responding so swiftly to government. Regardless, this group of clergy believed that it was their duty to keep the peace. They were wrong.

Looking around, I noticed that very few black ministers were going. One of my buddies standing next to me put it simply, "it is not my job to keep the peace...it is my job to keep the justice and then we can talk about peace." In

response, another friend declared, "I can't turn my back when oppressed people need me. If they didn't have me...then where would they be?" The patriarchy within his statement was beyond clear. Unable to see the error of his ways, the brother ran off to join the foolishness. After he left, I looked to my friend and said, "Our job is not to facilitate peace...our job is to facilitate rage."

You shout peace...peace...and there is no peace.

Amen.

August 30, 2017

God is Underwater

I remember it all very clearly. I was very conservative. Sitting in my girlfriend's dorm room, we watched the horrific images of people begging for help from their

roofs. We'd all just witnessed one of the worst natural disasters ever. In the midst of it all, we were glued to the television. Eventually, we struck up a conversation about the theological ramifications of it all. She offered a quick observation, "Despite their sin, God is in New Orleans." I didn't buy it and forcefully replied, "God left a long time ago. That's why they're underwater."

There is nothing more human than to ask, "Why?" Desperate for comfort, people rush to an answer. The problem is that such answers aren't real. The question is the only thing concrete.

The tornado was devastating. Dozens and dozens of people died. Places that I'd sat many times were destroyed. People roamed the destruction. Bodies were still being pulled from the rubble. It seemed that all of the answers had blown away. In the distance, I saw people gathered around a cross. Wondering what was going on, I walked toward it all. The preacher kept

shouting, "God loves us all." I knew differently. God was dead. Love was gone. The wind had taken it all.

Disbelief is belief. Pain is real. God is not. There is reality in denial. There is no belief. Maybe God is not God. Maybe God is a myth. Maybe God is a dream. Maybe not. Maybe.

The water overwhelmed the van. They were just trying to evacuate. Within seconds, they were completely submerged. Yanking at door handles. Kicking windows. Screaming louder and louder. Doors leaking. Windows failing. Tears falling. Prayers lifting. Water filled their lungs. Eyes began to close. The end came quickly. God drowned.

God is in the question.

God is underwater.

Amen.

September 3, 2017

Nashville and Harvey...and The End: Tales of Ignorant Responses

The Nashville Statement and the Irrelevance of Progressive Christianity

"Progressives only know how to do one thing...respond." I was sitting in a classroom at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary when I uttered those words. The topic was, "The Changing Landscape of Religion in the United States." There are few truths that have remained with me from my journey through fundamentalism and

liberalism and progressivism to something far more progressive. This is one.

"They will never define me." The young woman was proud of her progressive identity. At Emory University, there were many just like her. Repeatedly, I heard people talk about progressivism as if it existed in a vacuum. The same woman who said she would never be defined turned into someone who was always being defined. In one of my classes, she brought up the conservative position on everything. Her assertions forced everyone in the classroom to funnel their thoughts through what conservatives thought. Slowly, I watched people's progressivism become imprisoned by their desire to respond to conservatism.

"Their hate won't define us!" Repeatedly, I read post after post that used different language to purvey the same message...we categorically reject and abhor the Nashville Statement. Interestingly enough, I had

absolutely no idea what the Nashville Statement was until I read the posts of disgust that filled social media. Interestingly enough, I doubt I would have ever heard about the statement if it weren't for the response of progressives. The signers of the Nashville Statement are becoming increasingly inconsequential. I mourn that the responses of progressives have made their voice more consequential. Even I felt the need to sign one of the response statements. I wanted all of my friends to know that I stand with them. After signing, I realized that the construction and signing of such statements was a tactical error. In the midst of it all, a truth was revealed. Progressivism is still defined by conservatism.

Relevance is derived from constructing your own future...not allowing those who are irrelevant to construct your future for you.

Amen.

The Fucked Up Nature of Singular Responses

Everybody saw the devastation. Everybody rushed to help. Did nobody see the devastation before? People getting shot. People too poor to eat. People without jobs. People without hope. People in deep desperation. Where was the shelter before? In such communities...devastation isn't a singular event. Natural disasters do one thing well...they illustrate the fucked up nature of singular responses.

Amen.

The End

People spend their entire lives responding just to get by. Remember, the goal is to respond so strongly that you never have to respond again.

Amen.

September 4, 2017

A Recent Email to Our Children's Teachers

Teachers.

I wanted to make sure that I sent this message to both of you.

As a matter of conscience, I am writing to request that our children stand outside the classroom and not participate in the pledge of allegiance/national anthem to the US (or Texas/not sure if y'all do that or not). As followers of Jesus and social activists, we are deeply convicted that we live in a nation that constantly perpetuates a variety of injustices and we work hard to teach our children to resist such evil. We thank you in advance for your cooperation in protecting/upholding the civil liberties of our children/family.

Jeff

Since I didn't get to watch television at home as a young child, I was mesmerized by the television in my classroom. In fact, I was so mesmerized by the television that I never noticed some of my classmates stepping out of the room before the daily red, white and blue explosion. I just faced the front and watched the

cheesy patriotic video that illustrated every sentence of the national anthem. One day, I wasn't feeling so good. Turning green, I laid my head down and looked toward the door. Right before the anthem played, I saw a few of my classmates walk out the door. I was so curious about my classmates that I forgot about the nausea. When I garnered up the courage to ask my substitute teacher about my classmates, she replied, "Their religion teaches them to rebel against patriotism."

I've thought about her words for many years. Shouldn't anyone who follows Jesus rebel against patriotism? How could a follower of Jesus ever pledge allegiance to a nation as corrupted as ours? How could a follower of Jesus ever pledge allegiance to a nation at all? Make no mistake: God is not a patriot. God doesn't pledge allegiance. God would step out of the classroom.

I was a little hesitant to send the email. I knew nothing about our kid's teachers. I didn't want them to be

marked so early into their first year. Then I remembered, there is no fear in love (1 John 4:18). Immediately, love pushed send.

When I arose from my chair, I remembered the words of my substitute teacher, "Their religion teaches them to rebel against patriotism." May it always be said of us.

Amen.

September 5, 2017

From Beyond to Within: The Fall of Queerness

*Excerpt from my essay "Queering the Fall" in Ellin Jimmerson's new book Rainbow in the Word

In the midst of normativity, temptation unleashes the queer. Queerness is what makes us divine. We all have our own unique responses to temptation. If not for temptation we would be just like everybody else. If not for God's responses to temptation, God would not be God. God knew that we needed that fruit tree. The Fall is what makes us like God.

Do you ever think about aliens? Can you imagine what it would be like to find another world? What if we figured out that it was inhabited by intelligent life? What if we were able to go there? Once we made contact, we would lower the spaceship. When we were able to assure the inhabitants that we meant no harm, we would open the door. Slowly descending the stairs, we would look around.

What if we found a pre-fallen world? Temptation never hit the inhabitants. Maybe they were able to resist. Maybe God forgot the tree. Whatever the reason, we

cannot believe our eyes. Looking around, it is impossible for us not to see that everyone is exactly the same. There is nothing unique about anyone. We quickly realize that temptation is what makes us queer. The normative beings that inhabit the planet find us to be sinful. The normative always dismisses the queer.

Figuring that they have nothing to learn from us, the normative aliens just go back to their normative ways. We thought we found new life and quickly realized that all we had found was death.

I have often found myself back in Eden. Temptation has followed me throughout my life. For better or worse, how I've responded to temptation has made me who I am. I guess this is true of all of us. Divinity is found in the choosing.

Salvation is an interesting concept. We yearn to be saved and assume that we know the way to get there. The first humans were convinced that salvation was

based on staying away from the fruit of a tree. It's interesting that sometimes what we assume to be salvation is actually death. The totality of God was found in temptation. God was found in rejecting concepts of normativity and embracing queerness. God is found in pushing back against concepts of salvation and embracing the queer.

Like many Christians, I grew up in a world full of the temptation of salvation. Every time we gathered, we were asked to come down the aisle. Every time we gathered, we were asked to pray a prayer. Every time we gathered, the temptation of salvation stalked us. We were told that we had to, "Know that we know that we know that we know . . . that we were truly born again." The problem is that no one realized that salvation was not about knowing. Salvation is about being who God created us to be in the first place. Humanity discovered salvation when they overcame the temptation of salvation. Salvation is about being the queer.

God has never been about certainty. The temptation of certainty diminishes our lives. God created life to be about seeking. God is found in our seeking. How can we blame the humans in the Garden for seeking greater knowledge of God? Our certainties about the Fall are incredibly harmful. Humanity was trying to seek God. What could be more queer or divine than that?

Throughout my life, the temptation of certainty seems to always be close by. There was the time that I read the entire Bible to make sure I believed it all. When I made it through, I was no closer to certainty than I was when I started. There is something queer about reading the Bible as a mystery. I repeated prayers to be certain of my right standing with God. The prayers never helped. There is something queer about learning to pray with our being. Certainty isn't real . . . God is.

*Read the rest of this essay and a variety of other essays from LGBTQ voices by acquiring Rainbow in the Word.

September 5, 2017

Speech before the Dallas City Council on the Removal of the Robert E. Lee Statue

"Racism isn't right. Because God isn't white. I won't all of you to not be cowards and let's take these damn things down tonight."

-Short Fiery Speech before the Dallas City Council on the Removal of the Robert E. Lee Statue (the motion to remove passed 13-1)

September 10, 2017

Stormy Theology

Throughout existence, humans have leaned into storms to hear a word from beyond. It doesn't matter where that beyond is. Beyond is beyond. Though the conclusions are varied, they all come from a lived reality. Theology is found in such realities. Theology is found in the storm.

"God was with us." "God saved us." "God sent the angels to surround us." "Without God, we would be dead." Immediately after the storm, you are bound to hear comments like these over and over again. The more you hear, the curiouser the comments get. One begins to wonder if thought has entered the displayed brains at all. Of course, the reciprocal conclusion of such comments is that God forgot all about or ignored the

folks who weren't spared. Think about what the reciprocal conclusions might sound like. "God wasn't with us." "God didn't save us." "God's angels lost." "With God, we died." These types of statements would certainly better reflect the existential reality of those journeying through the storm. Maybe we should go even further and declare. "We are with God." "We saved God." "We are the angels that have surrounded God." "Without us, God would be dead." Such statements might best describe the symbiotic relationship between God and us. In the storm, there is truth. Without us, God doesn't exist. Without God, we don't exist. God is with us and we are with God. The storm begins to dishevel theologies. We become disheveled. God becomes closer than we could ever imagine. "God and I." "Salvation is in us." "We are the angels." "We are never dead." May our theology never clear. The storm is the realist theological principal of them all. The cries of our heart echo in the chaos. God meets us in such cries and cries out too. The cry

becomes salvation. There are no words. There are only the shrill cries of the storm. God has never been found in words. God is found in the terrors and longings of the heart. God is. We are. The storm is our home. The storm is our theology. The storm is. The storm. I am.

Amen.

September 17, 2017

Would Jesus March at Dallas Pride? : 2014/2017

*Originally posted September 20, 2014. Throughout the morning, I've pondered the meaning of these old words. God has met me here once again.

The many closet doors will be closed tightly at Dallas Pride. Behind the smiles and drunken debauchery, there will be terror about what it would mean to leave the new normal that many have developed. Most of the participants will have told their parents and friends about their sexuality or gender, but few will have come out of the closet of normativity that has developed in a race for a false equality. We live in a world that bestows privileges on those who fit and shuns those who don't. If your skin is not the right color, your bank account lacks the right amount of funds, your performance is considered to be too much or you have shifted from what is considered normal in any number of other variables you will not be welcome. There on the margins will be the true queers amongst us. Those who have had the courage to come out of the closet and be exactly the person that God created them to be.

For those who seek to follow the way of Jesus, we must ask particular questions about Dallas Pride: What

benefit will it be to the hungry? Will the truly thirsty be given living water? Will queer strangers be shunned? Will the naked be welcomed? How will we invite the sick to participate? Will those in prison benefit? Jesus stands with the truly queer amongst us and questions the normative on their behalf: Will you welcome me?

There will be many who think that the questions of Matthew 25 are too much to ask of Dallas Pride. I don't think so. From the beginning, the wider queer movement has championed the uplift and inclusion of all people. Queers stood with those on the margins and not against them. Because of the beautiful history of the queer movement, my family and I went to Dallas Pride when we first moved to the Metroplex a few years ago. We just knew that it would be inspiring for all of us. It wasn't. From the credit card vendors signing drunk people up for cards with exorbitant interest rates to the blatant celebration of companies that oppress people all over the world to the utter disregard for diversity, I

realized that this was a place for those who could fit into a new normativity and not for those who desired to stand with Jesus on the margins.

On behalf of our social justice ministry Hope for Peace & Justice, I presently work as a Minister of Social Justice partnering with the Cathedral of Hope United Church of Christ. For a long time, our church existed on the margins of society. Now, we find our space inhabiting a new normativity of influence. We have to ask our self in this moment if we will choose to be queer or not? I think the question for the Cathedral of Hope is not all that different from the question for Dallas Pride: Will we have the courage to leave the closet and be queer? After a long discussion, our family has decided to march in Dallas Pride tomorrow with our church. We will be marching to break down all the closet doors that will be so tightly closed all around us and for the inclusion of all

those who continue to be left out. I think Jesus will be too.

Amen.

*Though some has changed...much remains the same.

September 18, 2017

Scout Schultz: Dying to Live

I can remember that night. I wanted to take all of the pills. I was done. Repeatedly, I'd looked for help. Repeatedly, I'd come up empty. The room grew smaller and smaller. I had nowhere to go. Sweat poured everywhere. I prayed. That shit didn't help. God seemed so far away. God was fake. I didn't care. I

needed someone to grasp at. Drifting in and out, I started to lose touch with reality. I never thought about calling the police. The night grew longer and longer. Somehow, I opened my eyes. Looking around, I realized that I'd made it through the night. The war in my mind started all over. I just wanted it to end. They did too.

Scout Schultz was queer. With a ferocious spirit, Scout damned the binaries of our society. Many tried to convince they of the fruitless nature of their protests, but they were not deterred. In one of the toughest parts of the country, Scout pushed on. There is no doubt that the mental strain they endured was exhausting, but they didn't quit. They fought on in the struggle for equality. While a campus leader for LGBTQ causes at Georgia Tech, Scout experienced the fullness of the struggle. A few nights ago, the toll of it all climaxed. Scout wrote three final notes. In the moments before the tragedy, Scout said goodbye and called 911. Instructing the operator that there was someone on campus with a

knife and a gun, Scout went outside and prepared to commit suicide by cop. When the officers arrived, they flashed a knife (actually it was a utility tool). In the heat of the moment, cops did what cops always do...shoot first and ask questions later. After being shot straight through the heart, Scout collapsed and died shortly there after. When they could have shot they anywhere to demobilize they, the cops couldn't help themselves. This thirst for blood is not all that unusual in our society. Scout just happened to get the bullet this time. Who will be next?

Last night, there was rioting at Georgia Tech. After a peaceful vigil, a group began to express their rage. Every news outlet I've read, called the actions "violent." Isn't a riot the language of the oppressed? When I saw the police car on fire, I saw a desperate cry for justice. Let's not forget that Jesus turned the tables over in the temple in a similar fashion. You can't label these riots violent without naming that riot violent. Would Jesus

burn a police car? It seems to me like it's possible. In the midst of such injustice, I know that Jesus' level of rage is the same as what we saw last night. There is no doubt that the rioting will continue until police brutality stops. Moses heard the voice of God from the burning bush. I hope we hear the voice of God from the flames of that burning police car, shouting, "Repent!"

Amen.

*Details from https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/grade-point/wp/2017/09/17/knife-wielding-campus-pride-leader-killed-by-police-at-georgia-tech/?utm_term=.04076025c7a8

September 19, 2017

The Execution of God: Excerpts: Condemnation and Hell

11/12

“There will be silence!” “Sit down! Sit down!” “The charge is murder!” Death is natural. Murder is not. Do you recall the execution of God? You were there. So was I. We witnessed it all.

We watched God being led into court. We heard the incriminating testimony. We listened to the damning details about God’s past.

We cringed at the description of the crime. We wanted the demise quicker than the law would allow. The guilty verdict moved us.

The sentence sent us into a pandemonium of elation. “Death!”

In time, we forgot about it. Later, we rediscovered the joy of murder in the days leading up to the execution. We told everyone that death was too lenient. We watched as God was led into the chamber and strapped

down. We saw the needle draw blood. We were thirsty for more. We listened to God's surprising words of forgiveness. We watched the poison flow. We waited to feel better.
We didn't. We felt empty. The execution of God only made us worse. God was dead. Who would save us now?

God died
It wasn't no suicide
Look, isn't it plain to see
It could've been you or me

.....

58/59

"Do you actually believe that God commands us to kill people?" I asked.
"Not only do I believe it, I want our nation to practice it," he responded.

I continued: “So, you’re saying that you believe that the death penalty is a tool of God? What does that have to do with a God of love?”

“Love sometimes means that you have to kill.”

I tried again. “Does God have to kill?”

“God is punishing our sin. In many ways, God is just following our lead on killing.”

“I don’t buy it. None of it makes sense to me. God is love. That’s what I believe in.”

“You are going to end up loving you some hell.”

I’ve had this conversation a million times. People defend the death penalty by using stories of genocide and other atrocities to turn God into a monster. Let’s turn our eyes to God.

Let the heads roll
Wipe them off the scrolls
God won’t stop
Until the bodies drop
Don’t stand in God’s way

Today is murder day

September 21, 2017

Excerpt from Interview with Morgan Guyton

MG: Hey Jeff, thanks for being willing to talk with me about your new book The Execution of God. It's a very fascinating theological account of the death penalty. I wanted to start off by asking: how did you get started in your advocacy work against the death penalty?
JH: There in the bondage of killing, I got struck down by a miraculous light. "Jeff! Jeff! Why are you executing me?" The world has never been the same. Quite frankly Brother Morgan, I got saved.
MG: Do you have a particular date for your Damascus road encounter? What were you doing when the blinding light struck you?

JH: The further we travel into the mystery of God the more dates disappear. I remember it was sometime between killing and loving. Light hits seekers of the mystery. While it's tough to remember where or how or even when, one knows when they've been changed. The light never stops.

MG: All right let's try it this way. When was the first time you went to a death penalty protest?

JH: The devil was down in Georgia. Night grew darker and darker by the minute. Hundreds of police blocked the gates of the prison. I wore a shirt that declared, "I am Troy Davis." In those moments before his legal murder, I knew I would never be the same. I've dedicated my life to abolishing the death penalty ever since.

MG: Walk me through what happens liturgically at a death penalty protest vigil.

JH: One arrives. One prays. One sees the worship of death. One seeks the sacrament of life. One hears the

worst. One knows murder. One leaves searching for a resurrection.

MG: Have you seen any progress in the years that you've been doing this?

JH: Execution is execution. What's the difference between one execution and another? One execution is always too many. One execution is always going to teach our kids that executions are right. As long as executions continue, I can't speak of progress. Execution is execution.

Read more at Patheos.da

September 23, 2017

The Color of Brutality: Theology From Huntington Beach

"Get down!" Those were the last words that a transient man heard outside of a 7-Eleven in Huntington Beach,

California. Shot after shot had riddled his body. Standing over him, stood a police officer that had just taken a life when he didn't have to. If he didn't have a badge on, he would be charged with murder. In incident after incident, police officers are resorting to lethal force in order to enforce their will. Police are looking at all of us and screaming, "Get down!"

"Get down!" Those were the last words God hear outside of a 7-Eleven in Huntington Beach, California. Shot after shot riddled the body of God. Standing over God, stood an officer that had just taken a life when he didn't have to. If he didn't have a badge on, he would be charged with murder. In incident after incident, police officers are using lethal violence to enforce their will. Police are looking at God and screaming, "Get down!"

The color of brutality is blue. Submission is the name of the game. We are told to get down so that we can't get up. In our fear, we have empowered our police so much

that they feel like they are Gods that can impose their will on all of us. They are not God. There is only one God. That God is dying in the streets.

Every shot is anathema. No one deserves to die. There are countless de-escalation techniques. There are countless officers who don't give a shit. This is why we have countless people being slaughtered in our streets. I don't trust the police. I trust God.

and...

God is not blue.

God is with us.

God is brutalized.

God just bled out in front of 7-Eleven.

Amen.

September 30, 2017

Southern Baptist Pastor Affirms Polyamory!

*Interview I did with Chuck McKnight/Hippie Heretic...which originally appeared at http://www.patheos.com/blogs/hippieheretic/2017/09/southern-baptist-preacher-affirms-polyamory-interview-with-rev-dr-jeff-hood.html#W1julgJPAAysRidU.99

Chuck McKnight: Today, I'm interviewing Baptist pastor Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood.

CM: From your Southern Baptist background, I'm sure you haven't always affirmed polyamory. Could you share how your views have shifted on this matter? What led to your change of mind?

Jeff Hood: The old wooden doors were intimidating. Pushing hard, I got one of them open. Since everything had already started, I sat on the back pew. I heard a message of love that pulled at me stronger than anything I'd ever felt. Before I knew it, I was out in the aisle. Along the way, I heard the voices of the polyamorous repeatedly whispering, "Why are you persecuting us?" Unable to contain myself, I shouted out, "Forgive me!" At that moment, I collapsed. Before I perished, I felt the pull. Divine polyamory found me a sinner and lifted me up by grace. The Holy Trinity ushered me to love. Looking around, I saw a great cloud of polyamorous witnesses shouting, "Holy! Holy! Holy, is the polyamorous love of God!" The waters of a wild grace washed away all my sin; I was forever changed. In

the midst of a great resistance, polyamory saved my soul.

CM: That's a very poetic way of putting it. Let me see if I'm understanding you in plainer language. Would you say that your intellectual objections were overcome by actually getting to know polyamorous individuals?

JH: I'm saying that the polyamorous God saved my soul. I once was blind…but now I see.

CM: Could you elaborate on how you understand God as polyamorous?

JH: There is no more intimate love than the love we share with God. In the beginning, God created us in God's image…we exist to share intimacy with God. The relationship encompasses all types of intimacy. The fact that God seeks such passionate intimacy with all of us… certainly makes God a lover of more than one person at

the same time. I have often pondered that polyamorous individuals might be more like God than all the rest us… because they are living out the wildly multidirectional intimacy of God.

The Holy Trinity is a polyamorous relationship. You can't talk about the level of intimacy and ecstacy that these three beings are constantly experiencing without defining their relationship in such a way. Their love has always been and will always be a shared phenomenon. In the Holy Trinity, love is never denied. We should spend our lives making sure that the love of polyamorous individuals is never denied and always protected. The Holy Trinity demands it.

God is with us. The more we love…the more God loves. We are called to follow God. We are called to keep making love. Polyamorous folks are doing it. How can we deny such holiness?

While there could be many explanations of the polyamorous God, the one that matters the most is this… God dwells within the oppressed and marginalized

(Matthew 25)…polyamorous folks are constantly oppressed and marginalized…God is polyamorous…and if we want to get saved than we have to figure out a way to become connected to polyamory.

Behold, I saw God…on one side of the divine, stood the polyamorous and their allies…and on the other side, stood the oppressors of the polyamorous. I heard a voice loudly declare, “They will go first!” The oppressors began to shout, “Why?” God quickly snapped back and said, “When I tried to love my family…you got in the way. When I tried to get married…you forbid it. When I just wanted to be a part of the community…you shunned me.” Then, God said, “What you have done to the polyamorous amongst you…you have done to me.” Without the polyamorous, we cannot know God.

Love is always Bigger.
Love is Wider.
Salvation is Love.

Polyamory is Love.

Love is Salvation.

Polyamory is Salvation.

How have you Loved the Oppressed?

Hod have you Loved the Polyamorous?

How have you Loved?

How have you?

God.

Love.

CM: As a pastor, what kind of responses have you received for your affirmation of polyamory?

JH: The only people who have responded negatively are church assholes that have no knowledge of God. Let me tell you though…there have been some nasty ones. People have stalked me. People have called me a heretic. People have called me disgusting. People have

threatened my life. I could go on and on. Do these people sound like they know anything about love? Hell no. I ain't listening to a damn word they say. I know who I'm listening to. I hear the voice of God, "I am the way, the truth and the life…no one can can love me and condemn polyamory…for I am polyamorous."

CM: Any more-positive responses from the church world?

JH: No.

CM: What do you think it will take to see polyamory more accepted in the church?

JH: Sacrificing everything. We are called to give our lives to the marginalized. We are called to give our lives to the oppressed. We are called to give our lives to our neighbors. We are called to give our lives. How could I follow God and sacrifice anything less? If it is my fate to

be crucified with the polyamorous, then so be it. There is no worthier aim than to give one's life for love.

Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood is a Baptist pastor, theologian, and activist living and working in Texas. In addition to two bachelor and four graduate degrees, Dr. Hood holds a doctorate with a focus in Queer Theology from Brite Divinity School at Texas Christian University. In addition to his studies, Dr. Hood was ordained to the ministry in 2006, at a church within the Southern Baptist Convention. In 2009, Dr. Hood graduated with an MDiv from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in 2009. The author of 19 books, Dr. Hood is particularly proud of his recent book The Execution of God from Chalice Press. In 2016, Dr. Hood's book The Courage to Be Queer was named the third best religion book of the year at the Independent Publishers Book Awards. In addition to writing books, Dr. Hood's work has appeared

extensively in the media, including in the Dallas Morning News, Huffington Post, Fort Worth Star Telegram, Atlanta Journal Constitution, Los Angeles Times, WIRED magazine and on ABC, NBC, CBS, CNN, MSNBC, Fox News, NPR amongst a whole host of other outlets. Dr. Hood is a husband to Emily and the father of five young children. With deep soul and a belief that God is “calling us to something queerer,” Dr. Hood is a radical mystic and prophetic voice to a closed society.

September 30, 2017

The Rhetoric of Robert Jeffress: An Ontology of Evil

*A Conversation on Robert Jeffress, infamous Pastor of the First Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas

James Sanchez: Here's a quote that sticks out from Robert Jeffress recent interview on Fox and Friends: "These players ought to be thanking God that they live in a country where they're not only free to earn millions of dollars every year, but they're also free from the worry of being shot in the head for taking a knee like they would be if they were in North Korea."

As a theologian, what do you make of Jeffress' implied connection between God and nationalism, that people should thank God for their freedoms and not dissent?

Jeff Hood: Robert Jeffress is full of shit.

This is the most theologically sound statement I will make in our entire interaction. With such affirmed, God hates nationalism. How could any follower of God be comfortable with living behind the borders of the richest nation on our planet? God calls us to more. God knows that here is absolutely no way to fully love your

neighbor and champion the borders of nationalism. Tear them down! God commands us to go unto all the world and spread the message of love...borders should never hold us back. Robert Jeffress' god might be a god of borders...but the living God is not. The teachings of Robert Jeffress are taking people to the border of knowing God...but unfortunately he doesn't know how to lead them through the wall of nationalism. We must pray that Jeffress and his followers get saved.

Dissent is divine.

God made us in God's image. Dissent is what is most divine in us. When we push back, we are emulating the God who is always pushing back. On this day, God is right there with all who love justice...dissenting to the bullshit that Jeffress is teaching. Even at this very hour, my eyes are closed in dissent...praying for the day when I will be able to thank God that Jeffress has actually gotten saved from hate.

Amen.

How does Fox News play into all of this? It seems like Jeffress always says the craziest shit on their programs. Does the forum create the rhetoric or the rhetoric the forum?

JS: Important question. I would argue it was both. On one hand, Fox News and Fox and Friends have become a caricature of their own conservative viewpoints. They often double down on their talking points, expressing radical perspectives that most reasonable people would resist, yet they do so because this is what their audience expects--not a truth per se, but a completely conservative perspective on “truth.” In this case, the forum itself has created a monster where trite positions entirely fit the mold of neo-conservatism, and to maintain that specific niche, they must have guests who

espouse positions that garner headlines, which is exactly what Jeffress accomplished.

On the other hand, any controversial, neo-conservative viewpoint that raises eyebrows would also attract Fox and Friends. A conservative talking head who maintains complexity on issues, who might argue that any problem contains multiple positions, would not be a person that Fox and Friends seeks as a guest. Their platform thrives off of simplicity to the maximum, and anyone who can fit that framework would fill their bill. Thus, this question is sort of a “what came first the chicken or the egg?” type of issue because both the individual’s rhetorical position and the rhetorical platform of the tv show co-create one another.

If Jeffress were to believe that people should stand for the national anthem, but our Christian nation values dissent (thus acknowledging complexity), he would not be asked onto the show

So one might even take this a step further and ask: does Jeffress take a hardline stance on this issue solely to receive publicity, and what does that say about his Christian ethos?

JH: Honestly, I don't think it's about publicity. Jeffress actually believes this shit. His God is just as much of a bombastic asshole as he is.

Do you think that Jeffress' listeners see themselves in his rhetoric? Is this what makes it so effective?

JS: I am fascinated by that because from everything I have read in the Bible and in attending a Baptist church most of my life, the message Jeffress delivers sounds so much different than the one I often heard behind a pulpit. So it makes me question if his Christian listeners truly see themselves in his language, attitude, and

obvious politics. If so, are they hiding or masking their own religious beliefs for political ones?

One way to answer that question is to say that it seems the conservative movement has hijacked Christianity overall and has created a false equivalency between Christian values and conservatism. Though Jeffress words are vile and hateful to me, when I truly think about my upbring in deep East Texas, I see how many of my Christian peers might view his rhetoric differently than. They might see his vileness as moral superiority; his patriotism as righteousness. So I think the way the conservative movement seized control over Christian public discourse suggests than many of Jeffress listeners would see themselves in his rhetoric because they would believe in his very conservative agenda.

Do you see a shift in how Christian leaders have interjected into politics over the past few years or decades?

JH: These folks/Christian leaders are not merely interjecting...they are owned. Over the past few years or decades, the price has fallen dramatically. Used to, it was expensive to buy a preacher. In our context, it don't cost much at all. Robert Jeffress was bought with a few television appearances. Jeffress has made a deal with the devil. Jeffress has crucified his soul on a cross of political influence. He's addicted and he can't stop. While I hope he can get saved, I'm fairly convinced that Fox News doesn't televise resurrections.

Do you see any positive examples of religious rhetoric in politics?

JS: I had never thought about it like that. It's hard for me to imagine interjecting religion into a political space and me thinking of it in a positive light because I see contemporary politics as antithetical to religious beliefs. Most of the time when someone tries to evoke religion

in a political debate I view it as some distorted moral argument that makes me feel very uncomfortable simply because I couldn't see God caring about our political beliefs in the slightest. So in that sense, yeah, I can't think of any positive examples. The only ones that might work for me are when everyday people use religious memes to push against contemporary views of Christianity. So, for instance, one I like is a picture of Jesus feeding homeless people that says something to the effect of "I will feed the homeless after they pass their drug tests."

Of course, this isn't discourse being utilized by politicians but would still be political rhetoric in that it's using a religious perspective to critique politics. I do find value in these sorts of memes that try and recapture a more Biblical understanding of Christianity, rather than relying upon how these issues are being defined in the limelight today.

As someone who has a more liberal understanding of Christianity, do you see Jeffress' conservative, Christian rhetoric as indicative of where America is heading? Do you see it being hard to deliver your message in a climate where Jeffress' rhetoric is not only acceptable but also applauded?

JH: Quite frankly, I don't care one way or another. The follower of Jesus does not work for the salvation of America. Those who do...are not followers of Jesus. You see, governments don't need saving...people do.

Evil will always be applauded. Love will not. In a climate such as ours, we must pursue love as violently as possible. Therein lies our salvation.

JS: Amen.

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Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood is a Baptist pastor, theologian and activist living and working in Texas. In addition to two bachelor and four graduate degrees, Dr. Hood holds a doctorate with a focus in Queer Theology from Brite Divinity School at Texas Christian University. In addition to his studies, Dr. Hood was ordained to the ministry in 2006, at a church within the Southern Baptist Convention. In 2009, Dr. Hood graduated with an MDiv from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in 2009. The author of 19 books, Dr. Hood is particularly proud of his recent book The Execution of God from Chalice Press. In 2016, Dr. Hood's book The Courage to Be Queer was named the third best religion book of the year at the Independent Publishers Book Awards. In addition to writing books, Dr. Hood's work has appeared extensively in the media, including in the Dallas Morning News, Huffington Post, Fort Worth Star

Telegram, Atlanta Journal Constitution, Los Angeles Times, WIRED magazine and on ABC, NBC, CBS, CNN, MSNBC, Fox News, NPR amongst a whole host of other outlets. Dr. Hood is a husband to Emily and the father of five young children. With deep soul and a belief that God is “calling us to something queerer,” Dr. Hood is a radical mystic and prophetic voice to a closed society.

You can keep up with Dr. Hood at revjeffhood.com or message him through his public Facebook page @ https://www.facebook.com/revjeffhood/

Dr. James Chase Sanchez is an Assistant Professor of Writing at Middlebury College. He received his doctorate in Rhetoric and Composition at Texas Christian University in 2017. Dr. Sanchez’s scholarly work focuses on cultural and racial rhetorics, public memory, and writing assessment and appears or is forthcoming in College Composition and Communication, Present Tense, and Writing Program

Administration. He recently produced a film titled Man on Fire with director Joel Fendleman. The film examines why a white, retired minister, Charles Moore, decided to self-immolate in Grand Saline, TX in 2014 to protest racism and investigates the racial history of the town.

You can find out more about Dr. Sanchez at jameschasesanchez.com or email him at jcsanchez@middlebury.edu

October 12, 2017

Robert Pruett & Bullshit Figures

Justice is bullshit. There is no such thing. There is only power.

Those of us who want to stop all of this bullshit just don't have enough of it yet. Tonight, the State of Texas

executed Robert Pruett. It's pretty tough to go up against the State. I've tried and lost. That doesn't mean I'm going to stop. After all the life had left Pruett's body, various figures expressed glee about what happened, "Justice is finally served!" Power/opportunity is to be able to cheer the death of some without any fear of God our humanity.

Bodies are funny looking things...especially after they've been dead for some time. I opened the doors and quickly walked to the front of the church. I wanted to see my grandmother one last time. Crying, I sat down and waited for the service to start. The music started and people spoke a few words. My entire family was grieving. We loved her so much. The service was about over when someone stood up and shouted out, "Justice is served." That's exactly what these figures did tonight. Power/opportunity often turns people into dispassionate assholes.

Robert Pruett was no saint...but one shouldn't have to be a saint to get justice in this country. Regardless of what you think of him, imagine what it would've been like to be his family tonight. You experience your child/brother/uncle/loved one being murdered by the State and then you have to listen to this bullshit? They say they're Christians...but they are full of shit. Jesus would've turned over their tables faster than they could say, "Howdy" and called them assholes in the process. Maybe he still will? Maybe?

I know Jesus still has the power.

I know Jesus has the love.

I know...

"SO!!! Hurry up!"

Amen.

+Nobody screamed out at my grandmother's funeral.

October 16, 2017

Jerry Jones is a Racist!: Words from A Press Conference

*Delivered October 16, 2017 in front of Dallas Police Department Headquarters

I just want to say one more thing. Where are all the white folks at? Specifically, all my progressive white preachers in town who talk about "Black Lives Matter" from the pulpit...and are done with it as soon as they hit the door...I guess it must be about the paycheck. While I don't know about Jerry Jones' faith, I do know that Jerry Jones is a racist and I can also tell you that a racist shouldn't feel comfortable in any church in this

community. So...for all the church folk...who try to get out of church early to get to the Cowboys game...I just want you to know that Jesus ain't joining you.

Amen.

October 16, 2017

The Eternality of Souls

There is a church a few blocks from our house. I run by it everyday. Though I've known about their theology for some time, I've always wanted to hear more. I'm not interested in joining...I know enough to have firmly made that decision...but Their are parts I've wanted to know more about. In the fall, Saturdays are always yard sale days. Every stop sign seems to have a handmade sign pointing you in the right direction. Unaware of much else...besides my feet hitting the pavement...I just

ran by them all. Towards the end of my run, I saw a yard full of interesting stuff. As I was looking around, the owner of the home came up to me and shook my hand. We exchanged small talk for a minute...then, the conversation took a more serious direction. He started giving me the Mormon pitch. There was no doubt that this man was a scholar. I was amazed at his ability to string together facts. I got his hardest presentation of his faith. Though I was polite, I rejected his presentation at every turn. I just wasn't interested in joining his church and he grew more and more frustrated. Eventually, he inquired, "Do we have anything to discuss?" This was the opening I was looking for, "What do you know about the eternality of the soul?"

It has never made sense to me that God is an eternal being...we are made in the image of God...and yet...we are not eternal. Creation seems to be about the creation of the vessel...the contents are already there. From the Law of the Conservation of Mass, we know that matter

is never created or destroyed. From Einstein, we know that energy is neither created nor destroyed. Haven't we always been matter or energy or thought in the mind of God? If so, we have always existed...our soul has always existed. In our life on earth, I believe that we come from God and we return to God. In the middle, there is God. There is nowhere that we can go that God is not. God is in us and we are in God. What can separate us from the love of God? What can separate our souls from God? Nothing...and this is precisely the reason why I believe that our souls have always existed...whether in the mind of God or in some other form...I believe our souls are eternal.

As we finished up our conversation, he was amazed that I clung to a piece of Mormon theology so tightly. I responded, "I guess God truly does work in mysterious ways." When we left the conversation, it was apparent that there was a deep connection between us. Our souls must have known each other in another place.

Amen.

October 17, 2017

Thoughts on Ben Rigg's Finding God in the Body: A Review

Our church was crazy as shit. Everybody was constantly telling everybody that they needed to get saved and everybody was always trying to get saved. To say that it was a confusing environment was an understatement. Like most similar environments, we were taught that our bodies were bad. I can promise you that our youth group talked much more often about saving yourself until marriage than it did Jesus. Regardless, one night was particularly crazy.

Everybody had already gotten jazzed up on contemporary Christian music. Honestly, I think the repeating words and chords actually put me and everyone else in a trance. With a loud run and thunderous voice, our teacher welcomed us. He was the type of guy that you didn't know whether he was going to talk to you about Jesus or kick your ass. Quickly, he dismissed the girls into another room. We all knew that a sex talk was coming up. In fact, some of the other guys were downright giddy...as they didn't get a chance to talk about sex except when we did these little talks. At length, our teacher repeatedly railed against the body. Eventually, he made it to masturbation. After a few words about the dangers of lust, he looked into our eyes and said, "If you masturbate...your penis will fall off." A friend next to me leaned over and proudly said, "That's not true...I know."

As I grew, I chose to believe that my body was not something I had to reject in order to know God...in fact, I

began to believe that I could somehow find God in my body.

While Ben Riggs doesn't spend an extended amount of time on masturbation in his book Finding God in the Body, he does teach us about finding God in all other sorts of ways. Spirituality becomes a dance between God and the being. Prayer becomes an embodied practice. Eternity is found within. Dreams are whispers from the God deep inside. Nightmares are rejecting the self. Sin is pushing God out of the body. I loved how Riggs transformed all of these terms. Actually, I could feel my body tingling all over.

Honestly, I find most books on spirituality to be dreadfully boring. I'm just not interested in a path to this and a path to that. I'm more interested in a path to another book. As an activistic theologian, I'm not interested in cross-legged kumbayas when the shots start firing. With that said, Riggs does something very

different. Riggs speaks to the God who is with us...the God that inhabits the body and is willing to take the shots with us. There is something about Eden. I think about that place all the time...I dream of getting back there. Beautifully, Riggs describes the unity of God and humanity in that place. Through a wild variety of quotes, stories and theologies, Ben is helping us get back to that place. Though I might disagree with the occasional theological/doctrinal point, I stand with Riggs and shout with all that I am...

Come Queen Jesus!

Amen.

Finding God in the Body is available for purchase.

October 23, 2017

The Holy Fingers of Jesus: On the Execution of Torrey McNabb

The diagnosis is terminal. Truth be known, you probably only have a week or two left. Fear inhabits every orifice of your body. There is nowhere to go. There is no one to turn to. There is only one thing to do...die. Then, the phone rings. On the other end of the line, a stranger offers help. For your last few days, the stranger provides you with shelter and care. The beauty of their sacrifice is amazing. Love is everywhere. When the time comes and your words begin to slow, you bring the stranger close and shout, "Thank You!" Then, you die.

The sentence is death. Day after day, you are tortured. Anger inhabits every orfice of your body. There is nowhere to go. There is no one to turn to. There is only one thing left to do...die. No one calls. No one writes. The torture only gets worse. Hunger. Hallucinations.

Pain. Hurt. They're all there. No one cares. Love is nowhere. When the time comes, you are taken to the chamber. You have been encouraged to go respectfully. The needle is inserted. Before the poison flows through your veins, you are asked if you have any final words, you scream, "I hate you!" With your middle fingers extended, you die.

In 1997, Torrey McNabb killed Montgomery, Alabama police officer Anderson Gordon. For his actions, McNabb was sentenced to death. For the past twenty years, the people of Alabama have tortured him. For the past twenty years, the people of Alabama have sought to kill him. This has not been a situation where McNabb has been loved and taken care off. This situation has been about vengeance. When McNabb raised both of his middle fingers, he was giving the people of Alabama what they deserved. I don't understand what all of the shock is about. You can't expect someone to give you a "Thank You!" after you torture and kill. This isn't

sacrificial love. I'm glad that Torrey McNabb resisted until the very end. I wish we would too. The death penalty deserves all of our middle fingers. Let's raise them high until all of this bullshit is over.

The holy fingers of Jesus are with us.

Fuck the Death Penalty!

Amen.

details at:

https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2017/10/20/i-hate-you-a-convicted-cop-killer-said-before-raising-his-middle-fingers-during-his-execution/?utm_term=.1b34f3d20361

October 25, 2017

The Rapture of Fear: Ramblings on Halloweens Past

I heard the word rapture far more than I heard the name Jesus. That's just how we were. We were terrified. We though it was our job to scare the hell out of everyone. Somewhere in there, love got left behind. We said we were following Jesus. Somehow, I think we knew that wasn't true. We were about control. We knew that fear was an incredibly effective method to control others. The fearful won't leave the church. The fearful will keep giving money to the church. The fearful will do whatever it takes to keep them from being afraid. The only problem is that fear grows fear. In a context like this, Halloween is everywhere.

I left in the midst of prayer. I had to go to basketball practice. There were multiple people who looked at me harshly for leaving. When I got in the car, I leaned against the door. I wondered if I was going to get left

behind for leaving. Those stares were piercing my soul. As we rode, I looked up to see demons in the trees. I'm not sure if they were real or not. I'm just sure that they were real to me. I am convinced that much of the mental illness that I deal originated from that time. The demons were following me. I wondered if they had been in church. When my coach asked why I wasn't much into basketball at practice, I just said, "I'm just worried about Halloween."

Our festival was about getting people into the church. All of the talk about community was talk about our community. Every piece of candy directed people to our church. Even at an event like this, our ministers couldn't resist using the rapture as a means of scaring people into a salvation decision. One was a good enough storyteller that he had people coming in waves. It was all bullshit. Everything was fake...everything was real...I guess it was both...just like Halloween.

The future is simple...the rapture of fear.

Happy Halloween.

Amen.

October 26, 2017

The Bricks: A Traumatic Parable

Sweat poured down my face. Gravity was merciless. Tightness visited every joint. Every brick brought me closer. My hands throbbed. I was so close. Dirt covered everything. This was much more than I'd bargained for. Finally, I tossed the last brick in. Everything was so heavy. I thought I could handle it. I thought wrong. I reached up to tilt the bricks. When the bricks gave, I knew that I was in trouble. Turning around, I tried to get out from under the falling bricks. I didn't. I

slammed to the ground. Pain shot through my nervous system. I knew my ankle and my knee were hurt bad. I worried that I'd broken my leg. However, I didn't have much time to think too much about all of that...I had to get out. Though collected, I was scared. Two of my young sons saw it all. One of them went to work lifting bricks off of me and the other ran to get my wife. Brick by brick, I tried to get out from under the mound. No matter how many bricks I moved, I couldn't seem to move enough fast enough. Everybody joined in. It seemed to be of little use. I was stuck for a long time. Eventually, I was freed. I could barely walk. I hobbled into the kitchen and collapsed. I didn't walk for multiple days. Even though much time has past, I still have trouble bending my knees. What would've happened if I'd got out sooner? I can't spend too much time there.

I was stuck.

I was really stuck.

I'm stuck.

Trauma holds us down. We can't leave that space. Even though I got out, those bricks have been on top of me ever since they hit. While irrational, I'm convinced that it's going to happen again. The bricks haunt me.

I was stuck.

I'm stuck.

This won't be the last time.

I'm alive.

I'm stuck.

I'm alive.

Amen.

October 30, 2017

The Color of 34.

Today. I am.

May the grace of God and the comfort of God's brilliance...guide your heart, mind, body and soul...now and forevermore...world without end.

Amen.

The room was devoid of all color. I was exhausted. I had no defenses. Fear crawled up my spine. Deep anxiety trickled back down. Hell! Hell! Hell! I could feel the fire. Sweat poured out of my soul. I was lower

than whale shit. In fact, I was ushered into hell. At the end of the lesson, Jesus finally came up. I'd almost forgot who Jesus was. This lesson was about hell not Jesus. When the invitation came, I accepted Jesus for the millionth time. It was an every head bowed and every eye closed kind of moment. As I was walking out of the door and my teacher winked at me. I assumed it was about me raising my hand to accept Jesus...but I've long wondered. Walking across the parking lot, I saw the beautifully bright sun. I didn't know if it was heaven or hell...I just knew that it was something. The fire followed me. Church was full. God was absent. God was in every song. God was in every prayer. God was all over the sermon. God was so absent. The fire was out. Then, I looked to the windows. Colors invaded hell. God did too. The colors can save us.

People are colors and colors are people. Descending from God, they meet us in holy spaces. I remember the colors that talked to me when nobody else would. I

remember the brilliant explosion of colors that accompanied my friends coming out to me. I remember the colors of courage that taught me how to fight. I remember the lunchroom. I remember the desk. I remember the party. I remember the office. I remember the walks. I remember the trip. I remember the book. I remember you. I remember the march. I remember the speech. I remember the cry. I remember the fight. I remember the rage. I remember. I remember. Oh God, I remember. I was baptized in the colors. I am baptized in the colors. I am the colors and the colors are me.

I run faster. I run faster and faster. I run faster and faster and faster. I run. Meeting all of the colors that are here. I press on toward the colors that are ahead. The colors. I feel them. I know them. They speak to me from the past. They accompany me now. They call to me from the future. The colors are salvation. Every head bowed and every eye closed. Do you believe that

the colors love you? Do you believe that the colors died for your sins? Do you believe that the colors rose again so that you might have colors eternal? With every head bowed and every eye closed...if you want to accept those colors, please raise your hand. I did and my life has never been the same. The colors walk with me and talk with me...and tell me that I am their own. The colors. The colors saved me. The colors will be.

The bridge was long. Though I'd crossed over it many times, I had never seen the sun drop like this. My feet were tired. I had my doubts. I had miles and miles to go. Still in that moment, I was there...I was whole. Everything was there. Everything was ahead. As the inched further into the water, I heard a still small voice whisper, "The colors will lead you home."

May the grace of the colors and the comfort of their brilliance...guide your heart, mind, body and soul...now and forevermore...world without end.

Amen.

Today. I am 34.

Amen.

November 2, 2017
Lunchtime Terrorism

Getting out of the car is not easy. Our youngest children like to sprint across the parking lot. They have no idea of the danger they are in. They are just ready to eat. When we get inside, the kids run around until I get them seated. I turn on a show. They are distracted for the moment. Before they get undistracted, I run to order our food. Keeping a close watch on the kids, I pick everything up and fill up all of our drinks. Stumbling

around with the trey, I push toward the table. The kids get so excited when the food comes. There is little talking as they suck every single morsel of food down their throats. I was afraid that one of our babies might be the next thing that gets sucked down. Regardless, I let myself feel the joy of the moment. We were there. We were eating together. We were there. Until, we weren't.

Looking up, I realized that the guy at the table next to us was filming us. When I realized what was going on, I quickly pulled the kids out of their seats and pushed them to the door. The kids couldn't understand what the rush was. How do you quickly explain to young children? I couldn't think of anything but getting my kids out of there. When I felt like the kids were safer, I looked back. The asshole was still filming. Before I hurried the kids out, I interacted with the filmmaker. There was enough communication exchanged for me to know that this guy knew who I was and had nefarious

reasons for filming my kids and I. We went to the yogurt shop next...but my mind was still on that camera. While this certainly wasn't the first time something like this has happened to me...and I'm sure it won't be the last...the kids made this one different. It wasn't just an attack on me. It was an attack on all of us. The kids just kept eating their yogurt. In their minds, nothing had happened. I haven't been able to think that way.

Amen.

November 5, 2017

Apostasy: God, Guns and Sutherland

In the beginning, God created guns.

God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule with guns."

So God created humanity with guns in their hands.

It was not long before humans started killing each other.

In their depravity, humans roamed the earth prepared to shoot.

Protection and murder became synonymous.

In the day of Abraham, he took a gun and dealt with his domestic violence issues.

In the day of Joseph, he took a gun and slaughtered his brothers for their betrayal.

In the day of Moses, he took a gun and killed everyone who questioned him.

In the day of Samson, he took a gun and massacred hundreds in a church.

In the day of Solomon, he took a gun and kept all of his women in line.

In the day of Ruth, she took a gun and killed Naomi, when she tried to leave her.

In the day of Esther, she took a gun and murdered her way to the top.

In the day of Job, he took a gun and killed himself.

In the day of Jonah, he took a gun and killed everything in Ninevah.

The gun is my shepherd.

I shall not want.
The gun makes me feel safe.
I walk with a gun on my hip.
Guns restore my soul.
I walk in the path of guns.
When I am afraid, I kill people.
My gun is everything to me.
I am prepared to shoot my enemies.
I keep buying guns.
My gun case fills up.
When I have a gun, I am perfect.
I will dwell with my gun forever.

In the beginning was the gun, the gun was with God and the gun was God.

Jesus never let go of his gun.

Surely, one must love their gun as much as they love themselves.

Once Jesus realized that anybody would convert at the end of a gun, he started to win a great many converts.

Jesus controlled the disciples with his gun.

Everyone was scared of Jesus and his gun.

For God so loved us...that he gave us guns...that whosoever believes in guns shall not perish but have everlasting life.

Surely, you will know the gun and the gun will set you free.

Take, shoot, this is my gun given for you.

Jesus washed the disciple's guns.

When the authorities finally came after him, Jesus had killed hundreds and injured hundreds more.

The gun was his God.

Those who live by the gun will die by the gun.

Go unto all the word and convert people with a gun on your hip.

When the Ethiopian eunuch saw the gun on Phillip's hip, he quickly asked where he could be baptized.

Paul was imprisoned for threatening people with his gun.

Guns speak every language.
Without one, you are a noisy gong or a clanging symbol.

If you have everything and do not have a gun, you are nothing.
Guns take care of everything.
Guns never fail.
Guns are perfect.
Everything else is not.
Everyone should carry a gun.
We have been given the revelation.
There is nothing greater than guns.

More guns are coming quickly.

Come, more guns.

The grace of the gun be with you all.

Amen.

Does this interaction with scripture sound fucked up to you?

It is.

But...this is how we live in our country.

Our worship of guns is why 26 people were killed this morning at the First Baptist Church of Sutherland, Texas.

If we don't want this to happen again, we need to realign our worship.

Amen.

November 7, 2017

Cowards.

Dozens and dozens of people were dead. The images were horrific. Yet again, someone opened fire on a church. With images of blood fresh on my mind, I went to the leadership of our church. Out of fear, I suggested that we hire armed security for the church. Everyone agreed. Even though I felt like I'd done something really good for the church, there was a part of me that wondered.

The service was about to start. I noticed one of the armed security officers in front of me. Not too far into the service, a deranged man slammed open the door. Incessantly, the man screamed threats and obscenities. When he moved his hand strangely, the security officer fired two shots. The first hit ceiling. The second hit my throat. As I started to lose consciousness, I heard familiar words, "Those who live by the gun will die by the gun."

I survived. After extensive rehabilitation, I was able to return to a normal life. Well, somewhat normal. Now, I'm an advocate for the elimination of guns in churches. Whenever someone questions whether Jesus is with me, I point them to the message of Jesus. How can you love you neighbor and shoot them? There is no fear in love. How can you cling to your life and give it to Jesus? There is no greater love than to give your life. Stop clinging to it. Throughout my experiences, I've become certain of one thing...God hates guns...and so should we.

This story is an amalgamation of many stories. I was moved to construct it based on the messages and calls I've received all week. People are terrified after the recent shooting in Sutherland Springs. Churches all over are adding armed security. Fear is driving so many away from Jesus.

Questions should haunt us at this hour...

Who will be our God? Will it be love or fear? Love or fear? Love or fear? Will it be God or guns? God or guns? God or guns? There is no fear in love. There is no God in guns.

Churches that have armed security are not churches...they are enemies of love...they are enemies of God...or...simply put...they are...

Cowards.

Amen.

November 10, 2017

Bedtime Prayer

Throughout my childhood, I often spent the night at my grandparent's house. I loved them very much. I didn't

love the way they put us to bed. After we were tucked into our beds, my grandmother would close her eyes and say,

"Now I lay me down to sleep.
I pray the Lord my soul to keep.
If I should die before I wake,
I pray to God my soul to take."

For whatever reason, she didn't recite the rest of the prayer. Regardless, what she said was enough for me. I would be terrified. For hours, I would sit there with my eyes open. I just knew I would die if I fell asleep. Of course, I fell asleep. Night has a way of taking us whether we want it to or not. I always wondered if there was something more than those four lines. There is.

In time, I've constructed a different bedtime prayer. These outward words of justice and hope help guide me

in my wanderings. Often, I repeat them until I fall asleep. I invite you to join me.

"Now I lay me down to rest.
I have tried to do my best.
Don't let them die before I wake.
Justice needs more time to make."

"Now I lay me down to rest.
I have tried to do my best.
Don't let them die before I wake.
Justice needs more time to make."

"Now I lay me down to rest.
I have tried to do my best.
Don't let them die before I wake.
Justice needs more time to make."

"Now I lay me down to rest.
I have tried to do my best.

Don't let them die before I wake.
Justice needs more time to make."

"Now I lay me down to rest.
I have tried to do my best.
Don't let them die before I wake.
Justice needs more time to make."

Darkness cometh to bring forth the light.

Goodnight.

Amen.

November 12, 2017

The Breach: Bullshit

If it weren’t for my children, I wouldn't go to church. I think I'd probably be in a better place spiritually if I didn't.

One does not have to go to a place to meet God. No matter where we go, God is there.

The idea that there is a breach between God and humanity is contrary to the gospel. Jesus fixed the breach. There is no need for further fixing. There is a need for us to be what God has created us to be. There is nothing that can separate us from the love of God. To believe anything else is heresy. There is no breach. There is only God. This idea that we must fix a breach is bullshit.

This morning. I opened the doors of the church and a woman greeted me with, "How can you encounter the presence of God when you're late?" Of course, there was an assumption on her part that one encounters God by

being on time to church. To which I replied with a question, "What can separate us from the love of God?" My kids were smart enough to shout out, "Nothing!"

Nearing a decade ago, I got a phone call while I was having lunch. With pained labored emotion, my dad told me that my uncle had just committed suicide and that he needed me to go tell my grandparents quickly...before they found out from someone else. The shock of the news and the immensity of the task was overwhelming. Regardless, I raced home and quickly entered their house. My grandmother knew that something was very wrong. I pushed her to her chair and grabbed her hand. Holding tight, I said, "He shot himself." Immediately, eternal questions entered raced through her mind. Finally, she cried out, "Does this mean he is separated from God forever?" I didn't hesitate..."Nothing can separate us from the love of God..."

There is no breach.

There is only God.

There is only us.

The breach is bullshit.

Amen.

November 13, 2017

Lay Down Your Body

How far would I go?

How far would you go?

The halls were dark. Time was drawing to a close. Every step was accompanied by the same words, "Dead body walking." There was also a whisper, "I was in prison..." Something seemed to be close. The roomed seemed so far away. Fear ravaged the mind. Memories of love crept in. Heavy. Tears refused to come. The door was loud. Everything was white. This was no heaven. This was hell. Persons devoid of souls gathered to watch the spectacle of it all. They lined up. Stones filled their hands. She was placed before them. "May God have mercy on your soul." Fire! The stones flew. She closed her eyes. The next scream was not her own. On the ground bruised and bloodied was the lifeless incarnation of God. "There is no greater love."

Would I have the courage?

Would you have the courage?

I walk the long hallways. It is cold. God seems to have left. Death is always close. I drag my soul. No matter how many times I come here...I think the same thing. Would I give my life to stop it? Would I give my life to save one life? Many of the people here are evil in a vast variety of ways. Would I give my life to stop it? Would I give my life to save one? Death row is an interesting place to ask questions of sacrifice. "I was in prison."

Will I stand in the gap?

Will you stand in the gap?

Our times have grown increasingly evil. Injustice is everywhere. Death is a constant reminder. Have we forgotten? Are we afraid to look at the bodies? Our body is the only body that can stop such carnage. Our body can save the body.

Where shall I die?

Where shall you die?

There are plenty of locations to choose from. The body of God rests with those whose bodies have been abused. Our body can save their body.

The hour is upon us.

What say you?

Choose this day whom you will serve.

Amen.

November 14, 2017

The Impromptu Sermon: Thoughts on Christian Defiance in Zimbabwe

*Originally posted while I was in Zimbabwe on February 6, 2016

Reposted in response to the current coup unfolding in Zimbabwe.

Earlier this afternoon, a group of Zimbabwean government officials asked me to discuss politics with them. This is an authoritarian society where such an invitation can be dangerous. Nevertheless, I engaged. When I told them that I was primarily a theologian, they told me that here in Zimbabwe politics and spirituality don't mix. While I didn't know if such a comment was intended to be a warning or not, I questioned them as to

whether Christianity could even exist in such a space. When they inquired what I meant, I started to preach.

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus commits acts of political revolution. Repeatedly, Jesus refused to be bound by laws that sought to segregate and divide the population. In direct defiance of the government, Jesus kept breaking the law to be with the people. The lines that the government of Zimbabwe has drawn would not be able to hold Jesus back. When a woman that was caught in adultery was about to be executed, Jesus placed his body between the executioners and the woman. Can you imagine if Christians in Zimbabwe started to place their bodies between all of the people who are disappeared and killed? Jesus was a revolutionary. When Jesus saw the government cheating people out of their money like the police bribe people in this country, Jesus overturned their tables and tossed them out. Jesus was so much more than just a spiritual leader. In Matthew 25, Jesus declared that he would place his very person with the

marginalized and oppressed. In Zimbabwe, this means that Jesus would stand with the political revolutionaries seeking a better world, the hungry, those who are not being paid by the government, the mentally ill and a whole host of others who are mistreated and sometimes killed by the actions of this government. Make no mistake, Jesus was a political revolutionary and paid the price for it. Ultimately, political forces executed Jesus. Make no mistake, Robert Mugabe would kill Jesus and intends to kill anyone who follows his way of revolution. With Jesus, there was and is no separating politics and spirituality.

When I finished talking, no one spoke. I don't think they'd heard the Gospel presented like this before. Before hundreds of thousands more people die due to the tanking economy and the approaching famine, I pray that God will remove Robert Mugabe from his luxurious accommodations and his position as

President. I hope that Christians will follow Jesus and be helpful in this process.

Amen.

November 18, 2018

A Short Theology of Sleep

"What's taking so long?" The restaurant seemed to attract assholes. It seemed like rudeness grew by the hour. When she got in her car, she let out a sigh of relief. She began to drive home. After kissing her kids, she arrived at the place she had longed for all day. Laying down and covering up, she quickly found sleep. It was there that she felt most alive.

What do the backs of eyelids look like?

"What a great ride?" The open road had been good to him. From town to town, he experienced new thoughts and ways of being. The bike was starting to feel heavy. Exhaustion was close. Every turn of the wheel felt like torture now. In his mind, he thought, "I just want to sleep." In time, he did. He felt so at piece. Sleep had finally found him. He felt fully alive. Within minutes, he crashed his motorcycle into a guardrail and died on the spot.

What does sleep pain feel like?

"She just won't go to sleep!" They were at the end of their ropes. Their daughter just wouldn't go to sleep. They tried driving her around. They tried singing. They tried a hot bath. She just would not go to sleep. After a few hours, she finally laid down in her crib and went to sleep. She wore a slight smile on her face. It was almost

as if she knew that she'd gotten her parents good this time.

Does sleep contain memories?

"It's so cold." He'd been living outside for so long that he didn't remember much else. Tonight, he was just trying to stay alive. Though the dangers were great, he curled up in his blankets as close as he could to the fire he made. As the night progressed, the blankets got hotter. When he opened his eyes, the fire was out. He was so glad he made it through the night.

Is waking up the goal?

We've been made in the image of God. Sleep is not a product of our deficiencies. It is a product of our making. We sleep because God sleeps. Sleep is the great equalizer. All sleep. There is only sleep.

Relief.

Death.

Life.

Survival.

We are sleep.

God is sleep.

Amen.

November 19, 2017

Resisting Mugabe in Zimbabwe

*It brings me great joy to have been blessed with the privilege of playing an infinitesimal part of the downfall of Zimbabwean Dictator Robert Mugabe. I wrote this from Zimbabwe on February 8, 2016.

Dirt has been a constant companion. Like air, you're constantly breathing it in and exhaling it out. When the bus arrived, I passed through the red fog to the climb up into my seat. Before I could even think, the driver looked at me and said, "Why do you remain silent about what's going on here in Zimbabwe? We're living in hell. How many more people will have to disappear or starve to death before your people will care? Talking to you could get me killed." My stomach turned. There is no way to explain the silence of the world when it comes to Zimbabwe. When I mentioned that I was trying to write as much as I could, the driver shot back, "You must try harder. You are the only chance we have. Everyone here is terrified." I didn't ask many questions. Why should you when you already know the answers? After much

listening, I managed one before I got out, “What does resistance look like here?” The driver didn’t hesitate, “Prayer is my resistance. Every night when I go to sleep, I pray that I will wake up and Robert Mugabe will be dead.”

While I was looking at newspapers on the street, the vendor looked up and inquired, “When are you going to help us with Mugabe?” Before I could respond, she slipped me an opposition paper and said, “This should help.”

Later in the day, a local businessman approached me on the street. Unsure of what he was going to say, I let him do the talking. “When I first learned about Hitler, I always wondered how people ever allowed a maniac to kill so many people. I don’t wonder about that anymore. Now, I know. Here in Zimbabwe we are living it.” After some further conversation, he looked me in the eye and

said, “Please tell as many people as you can about our terror.”

As I walked down the street, the Mercedes screeched to a stop. I wasn’t far from the local offices of the intelligence service. “Are you that guy writing the articles and posting them on Facebook about the President?” The question hit me in the gut. After responding that I was, I answered his probing questions very carefully. At the first pause in the interaction, I began to walk away and heard, “Be careful during your time in Zimbabwe.”

Many Zimbabweans have been fervent in their resistance for decades. The best that some can do are comments like the ones made to me throughout the day. After only a short period of time here, I’ve gotten a small taste of what happens to those who resist in this country. The difference is that I get to leave. When I do, I’ll do all that I can to make the rest of the world aware

of the evil of Mugabe and his followers in Zimbabwe. I pray you'll join me.

Amen.

November 20, 2017

The Gurney Destroyed: A Lesson in Defiance

*These are the final paragraphs from one of my latests...The Execution of God, published by Chalice Press.

Throughout the day, I will travel to the execution chamber in Huntsville. Instead of commemorating Holy Week in a place of worship, I've chosen to experience

the passion of Jesus in Adam Ward. When the State of Texas places the lethal needle into Ward's arm, I will be standing outside in defiance. We all know that Ward's actions aren't any crazier than the execution we are planning tonight. We think we can teach people not to kill by killing. Who's more delusional: Ward or us?

Finger after finger shook. I'd never seen fingers move like that. I tried to grab them. The shakes hit my hands. I clenched my fists. Then, the shakes traveled up my arms. I wondered what was going on. Before long, my entire body was shaking. I didn't know what to do. I needed strength. I didn't think I had it. Though the robe and stole concealed everything that was going on, I knew I wasn't well. "God, how am I going to do this?" Though people kept coming up to me to talk, I wasn't listening much. I couldn't. I just kept thinking. Adam Ward visited me in those moments. I was overwhelmed. I thought I was going to collapse. Everything was too much. I was coming apart. Then, something pulled me

back together. Sacramental ideas started flowing through my mind. I could see the cup poured out. I could see the bread broken. Drawing me nearer, I could feel the presence of God. “I’m ready.” The weather seemed to get slightly clearer. Everything seemed to move out of the way. My brain focused. I thought about all of the people who had been executed in that space. I could see so many faces. I could hear so many voices. I could feel their presence. I prayed. In those moments, I was with God. Looking down at the prison, I knew what I had to do.

Despite my fear
Jesus be near
Oh, despite my fear
Jesus be near

Every step felt like an eternity. Life was happening in slow motion. I didn't know if I'd ever get there. I never prepared for the struggle of it all. I thought I'd just be able to march down there and do it. It wasn't that simple. There was so much more to think about than just the placement of my feet. There were so many people who wanted to talk. Though I wasn't quite sure of what I was saying, I kept talking. I figured it was better to keep talking than actually to deal with my anxiety. The shakes were back. After the clock struck 6, I saw Ward again. God was there too. I lowered my head and started walking. Step by step, I moved toward the line. Though I'd seen that police line at every execution, I knew that it wouldn't hold me back this time. After I committed that final time, there was never a thought of turning back. This was Holy Week. This was a sacrament. This was the path of Jesus. "I will not turn back." The executed joined me for those final steps. Even though I walked alone, I could hear their footsteps. I think I even heard one of them say, "I am with you

always, even to the end of the age." The officers seemed to have no idea what was going on. As I approached the police line, I said, "I'm coming across." Thoughts of Ward being executed rushed back into my brain. The nearest officer shouted, "No you're not!" I could've turned around during those seconds. I could've just decided that I'd done enough. I didn't.

It wasn't long before two officers were directly in front of me. Immediately, the officers tried to convince me to turn back. I didn't. I just kept praying. I hadn't made it this far to turn around. I knew God was with me. I pressed on. Both of the officers tried to convince me to turn back. I looked up and replied, "I can't do that." By this point, I could feel the presence of the executed standing around me. I knew they'd never left. We were all standing there together demanding an end to executions. God was with us. When the officer said that he was going to take me to jail, I knew I wasn't going alone. As I was placed under arrest and walked to the car, I looked up. The sun gleamed off the cross atop the

prison. “That shit is fake.” I knew that the real cross was out here with us. As we drove off into the sunset, I felt God whisper, “Well done.”

As soon as I got to the jail, I was processed like any other criminal. There were few people there that night. Before I knew it, I was alone. There behind the bars, I started to pray. Once again, Adam Ward visited me. I prayed for those who killed him. I knew that I was one of them. The prayers started to propel my feet around the cell. God gave me visions of all that had transpired. The passion continued. The steps. Pilgrimage propelled me to that line. The encounters. Relationships with the condemned pushed me over that line. The anger. Defiance granted me the courage to refuse to move back over that line. Everything I’d known in my work for abolition culminated in my sacramental act of civil disobedience in front of the prison that night. The cell felt like a place of completion. I was able to rest with God and the executed. I saw their faces. The darkness wouldn’t last much longer. Late that night, I made bail. I hurried to

the car and left. When the rising rays of sun met the clouds, I was on the road thinking about the killing of the condemned. Though the night had been long, I knew that that all of the bullshit would soon be over. Executions can't live forever.

Time was no more.

Behold, I saw God die. I wept. I didn't know what to do. After they placed the sheet over the body, I turned away. I just wanted to get out of there. Not long after I turned back, I saw the sheet start to rise. God was alive! Death was no more. In a fit of rage, God destroyed the gurney. The damn thing exploded into a million pieces. I heard God say loudly, "It is finished."

November 20, 2017

Charles Manson: Son of God

Unaware of what I was getting myself into, I jumped in one of those motorcycle taxi things. I had no idea that such a contraption could travel so fast. Honestly, it felt like the damn thing was going to fall to pieces at any moment. When we finally arrived at the center of the city, my stomach was destroyed. Once we stopped, I went behind a small building and threw up. Everyone was worried about me. I was worried about myself. Then it happened, I realized that there were millions of people swarming around me. I forgot about my stomach. As we walked further, I turned to a friend and said, "Isn't this beautiful?" With a depressed look in his eyes, he turned to me and said, "Isn't it depressing that most of these people are going to hell?"

"I don't believe in hell?" I wish I could have said it. Unfortunately, I was too afraid. In time, my beliefs evolved. Eventually, I came to see God as the creator and lover of all. God's love is never extinguished. There

is no separation from God. To be absent from the body is to be immersed in the love of God. Love is ours for all of eternity.

God is a Universalist.

Such beliefs are always tested.

We are so terrified of believing.

Late one night, I watched an interview with Charles Manson. From the moment the show started, I was terrified of him. Manson is/was evil incarnate. If there was a hell, he would be at the front of the line.

God stands in the way.

Earlier today, I was notified that Manson had died. My first thought was, "I'm glad that piece of shit is gone."

Before I drowned in such misguided thoughts, I ran back to God. My heart changed.

Theologies of love found me.

Love called Manson home.

Love will sustain Manson.

Love will be all that Manson will ever need.

There is no hell.

There is only Love.

He is a beloved child of God.

Charles Manson: Son of God.

Amen.

November 23, 2017

The Baptism of a Dog: Ponderings from The God of the Future

Throughout The God of the Future, I struggled. Many of the questions I met were more than I was prepared to deal with. Regardless, I did. The following words, sentences and paragraphs are a witness to my struggle. God was there the entire time and God will be there for all time. Now, about that dog...

[a] Can alien creatures know us?

Doesn't everybody hate getting dumped? Before I met the love of my life/my wife, I'd fallen in partial love

many times before. I can remember a particular heartbreak that came at a difficult hour. Things were just not going well. Then, I got blindsided by a phone call that terminated our relationship. After completing everything for the day, I struggled to get home. Once I did, I went across my living room and dropped down on the couch with a thud. Glad that no one could see me, I started to cry. Within a few seconds, my dog raced over to comfort me. I could tell from the look in her eyes that she knew what was going on. My dog's presence in those hours brought tremendous comfort. As I talked to her about everything that

happened, I knew she could understand me. I wish that she could have spoken to me. Maybe one day she will. In the last couple of decades, scientists have worked hard to help animals develop communication skills. From teaching sign language to exploring other forms of interactions, scientists are learning more and more. What happens when we arrive at the day when scientists help animals talk and express themselves? It's not as far off as it seems.

[a] Do animals talk dirty?

Not long after the invitation was given, she started coming down the aisle. Everyone was surprised. 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." As they walked down into the water, fur floated everywhere. After a profession of faith, the pastor baptized the dog. Our ability to communicate with animals is rapidly expanding. With increased ability to engage in communication, we will be faced with a number of difficult questions. Should animals be baptized? Do animals have souls? Can animals pastor churches? Can animals recognize their own sin? The questions are endless...and we are not prepared for the answers.

Amen.

November 25, 2017

We Killed Damon Allen.

2 Men in Uniform.

We told him that he could serve his country. We told him that we would be proud. We told him that he would be taken care of. We told him...

The station looked like most others. The recruiters were used car salesmen...only they specialized in warm bodies. The promises kept on coming. They didn't have to tell him twice. He signed the papers and prepared for basic training. He was so young.

We don't care how old they are...as long as they're in front of us. We specialize in warm bodies too. It was time to ship out. His place to stand was over there. Despite the violence, he came back ok...but more was required of him. We just kept making promises.

There were hesitancies when it was time to go again.

Something was different this time. The world felt darker. Home felt more distant.

We weren't there when it happened. We didn't care when it happened. We didn't...

Everything seemed fine. It wasn't. The blast ripped his buddy's leg off. He lost consciousness. For three days, he laid unconscious in the hospital. Quickly, it became clear that he had a traumatic brain injury. We didn't help.

Everyone saw his rapid decline. His brain just wasn't right. He said strange things. Slept with guns. Paranoia took over. The military just wanted to be done with him. Eventually, he was kicked out and given no access to the VA healthcare system. Nobody helped. Nobody. We had gotten all that we needed from him.

Once he was out, he became more and more aggressive. The police were always the enemy. The paranoia took over. Then, it happened.

Texas State Trooper Damon Allen pulled over Dabrett Black near Fairfield. Just like we trained him to do, Black pulled out a rifle and skillfully executed Allen.

We promised him.

We trained him.

We sent him.

We ignored him.

We discarded him.

We forgot him.

We...

Damon Allen is dead because we failed Dabrett Black.

If we can't realize our complicity in Allen's death...then we are dead too.

Amen.

source/for more info:
http://www.khou.com/news/crime/ptsd-friends-family-of-accused-gunman-say-he-showed-signs/494617827

November 26, 2017

I Miss My Grandmother

(italics are words I've used in previous posts)

It was three years ago.

I remember.

She never understood my activism and progressive ministry. While I was at home for Thanksgiving, my grandmother brought up “the gays” (in her words). I asked her, “Have you ever been attracted to a woman before?” My question was simply too much for her.

I remember.

It was Thanksgiving. We were leaving my childhood home. Leaving was never easy with the kids. Collecting all of the bottles. Finding excess clothes. Changing diapers. Packing food. After we got everything packed up, we jumped in the car. I was ready to go. Then, the

thought crossed my mind that I had to quickly stop and see my grandmother. We enjoyed a special bond. When I was away from her, I always missed her. The glass doors were huge. I slid them open. There she was.

I remember.

“I was hoping you would stop and see me one last time before you left.” I told her just how much I loved her. I prodded her to let me take a picture before I left. Leaning in, I gave her a soft kiss on the forehead and snapped a selfie. Though the picture was special, the interaction grew divine based on the last words she ever spoke to me, “I thought about our conversation, I want you to know that I am very proud of you and love is going to be what sees us all through.” Though I will miss her with all my heart, I believe her last words to me.

I remember.

A week or so later, I was sitting at Sunday dinner with my family. I got the call. My dad told me that my aunt had found my grandmother dead in her favorite chair. I did something that I never do. I cried. Once I stopped, I cried again. Having stepped out of dinner, I was alone in the back of our car.

It was three years ago.

Just last night, I was sitting in my office thinking about my grandmother.

Love remains.

Amen.

November 29, 2017

Donald Trump is Not the Problem / We Are

Donald Trump is not the problem.

Jesus heard the reports. Jesus heard the rumblings. Jesus felt the oppression.

Jesus didn't send out messages. Jesus didn't make phone calls. Jesus didn't sign petitions. Jesus didn't organize at all.

Jesus believed in the power of one. Jesus believed in the fury of a prophet. Jesus went alone.

Jesus approached the center of power. Jesus pushed into the Temple. Jesus saw the corruption. Jesus did not hesitate. Jesus went to work.

Jesus tossed out Donald Trump. Jesus tossed out Jeff Sessions. Jesus tossed out Betsy Devos. Jesus forced them all out.

Jesus overturned their tables. Jesus scattered their money. Jesus drove them out of power.

Jesus had courage. Jesus had determination. Jesus gave his body. Jesus won.

Jesus destroyed power. Jesus birthed liberation. Jesus changed the world.

We.

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Jesus overturned their tables. Jesus scattered their money. Jesus drove them out of power.

Jesus had courage. Jesus had determination. Jesus gave his body. Jesus won.

Jesus destroyed power. Jesus birthed liberation. Jesus changed the world.

Problem.

How will we follow Jesus?

Amen.

December 3, 2017

"Dallas Activist's Grandson Murdered" and The Cost of Discipleship

It depends on the hour. Sometimes we get along. Sometimes we don't. Regardless, we all know each other.

When I saw "Dallas Activist's Grandson Murdered," I knew it was somebody I knew.

I was hesitant to even open the link.

Click.

Rev. Ronald Wright's grandson...

Tyrek Jenkins started walking to the store. What was he thinking about? The pledge he made to God? His determination to provide for his family? Step. Step. Step. The doors opened. He knew exactly what he wanted. Pleasantries were exchanged at the register. Tyrek picked up his snacks. Bags crunched in his arms. Step. Step. Step. What was he thinking about? Love? Life? Step. Step. Something didn't seem right. Step. The blast of a gun pierced the air. Steps stopped. Tyrek went down. What was the last thing he said? What was the last thing he thought? What? "This is my blood..."

First responders battled to save something. Tyrek was not responding. "This is my body..." The room was filled with doctors and nurses. Shouts and screams only birthed silence. "It is finished." The soul of Tyrek Jenkins was now one with God. He's safe now.

Don't worry about Tyrek. Worry about us.

I've seen him do it over and over again. Rev. Ronald Wright is not afraid to jump up on a stump or a stage or a truck or whatever he need to stands on to demand justice. His words are piercing. Sometimes he's right and sometimes he's wrong...but at least he is something. No one can accuse Wright of not giving everything he has. No one. A prophet of nonviolence, Wright is now the victim of violence. However, Wright will not stop. In these moments he is garnering new strength. There is power in blood.

When I heard about the tragedy, I wanted to let fellow activists know what was going on. At the very least, Wright deserved our thoughts and prayers. Nobody answered. Then I remembered, there were multiple awards dinners/events going on. Online, I saw people smiling as they received their recognitions. I knew Rev. Wright there. He's a follower of Jesus. People are never quick to recognize him.

As everyone else basked in recognition, Rev. Wright was experiencing the cost of discipleship.

The cross.

May the sacrifice of body and blood be the only recognition we seek/need.

"Let anyone who has ears/the fortitude to hear..."

Amen.

December 4, 2017

School Names Shouldn't Be Racist

"The white men were roused by a mere instinct of self-preservation...until at last there had sprung into existence a great Ku Klux Klan, a veritable empire of the South, to protect the Southern country." -Woodrow Wilson, 28th President of the United States / in the film Birth of a Nation

This is racist.

Just the morning, we were headed to Woodrow Wilson Elementary School. My son is in kindergarten and gently asked me, "Who is Woodrow Wilson?" In that

moment, I had to tell the truth. I immediately replied, "He was President of the United States and a very racist man." My son didn't miss a beat, "So, why is our school named after a racist?" I immediately replied, "Because racists named it and racists continue to protect the name." I dropped him off shortly thereafter. Walking outside, I looked up, "Woodrow Wilson Elementary School." I wondered, "How can we ever teach our kids not to be racist when we educate them in spaces that honor racists?" We can't.

Amen.

December 6, 2017

Tell Me The Truth: Thoughts on Our Times

Tell me the truth.

One of the oddest beliefs in human existence is in this idea of truth. There is no truth. There is only us. We are truth. There is only now. It is truth. Or maybe there is nothing at all.

I don't know the truth.

I have long been fascinated by the events at Jonestown. Nearly a thousand people committed suicide under the guidance of Jim Jones. How did such a thing happen? Almost unanimously, people call the events at Jonestown evil. However, multiple letters were found amidst the bodies that tell a different story. For some, there was a deep and abiding righteousness about what was happening. They took their own lives for truth...their truth. Can we deny them their truth?

The truth is undeniable.

Deconstruction is the most human of activities. We find meaning in breaking down what is. The truth we find is always fake and we are left digging for more. At numerous institutions, I have earned degrees that have bestowed on me titles denoting expertise. While I consider myself a historian, I have long distrusted the field. I don't even know if it is real. How can we know that there is a past? What if the evidence isn't real? Who's to say that we are real? What is real? Can truth even be touched?

Truth isn't real.

This morning I watched the resignation speech of Senator Al Franken. Numerous women have come forward to accuse him of sexual harassment. I have no doubt that each of the women believe their accounts to be truth. I believe them too. We live in a society where we are encouraged to believe such accounts until they

are proven false. Such truths are difficult to prove false. I was surprised this morning to hear Sen. Franken respond to this situation with such defiance. In more or less words, Sen. Franken denied much of what he has been accused of. Sen. Franken left no doubt what his truth is. So whose truth is truth? Does belief make things truth? Maybe it's all truth.

Truth is a ghost that constantly haunts us.

Tell me the truth.

Amen.

December 8, 2017

Dead Body Disqualifies Valdez

*Dallas Morning News Editorial // appeared online on December 9, 2017

On drugs and out of his mind, Joseph Hutcheson raced around Dallas. It was Aug. 1, 2015, and Hutcheson knew he was taking a ride for his life. With every second, he felt 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 10:24 a.m., 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 incompatible 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.

CPR was not started for some time. 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 killed 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 adequate training to deal with this situation. Many departments around the country have spent considerable resources on training for dealing with people who are mentally ill or on drugs. There are plenty of options besides lethal force. Responsibility for such a glaring omission rests with Sheriff Valdez.

How many more Texans would die if a Gov. Valdez made such omissions?
As the body of Joseph Hutcheson lies on the floor, people don't seem to know how to administer proper medical

treatment. CPR was abysmally tardy. Sheriff Valdez did not put mechanisms in place to provide medical care for an incredibly vulnerable man.

How could we trust a Gov. Valdez to make sure other vulnerable people receive proper medical care?

Immediately after Hutcheson's death, Sheriff Valdez presided over a declaration that officers found drugs in Hutcheson's truck. Ultimately, the department had to admit that statement was a lie. Did the department mean to defame the victim to absolve itself?

How many more advantageous lies would a Gov. Valdez tell?

As the Hutcheson family mourned, they heard nothing from Sheriff Valdez. Even though Hutcheson died in her jail, they heard nothing. Even though her deputies killed their loved one, they heard nothing. After some time, in

the midst of rallies and protests, Sheriff Valdez released a statement of condolence to the Hutcheson family. Did politics dictate her conscience?

How could we believe that a Gov. Valdez would be compassionate?

It took weeks and weeks to get Sheriff Valdez to release the video of the incident. Friends and family of Hutcheson rallied and rallied and rallied. She wouldn't budge. It wasn't until we garnered a significant amount of media attention and spoke before the Commissioners Court that she decided to release the video. Politics won again.

How often would a Gov. Valdez refuse to release public information?

Time continued to pass. Believing that 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 death of Joseph Hutcheson. She wouldn't do it. Ultimately, a leak provided all of the names. Valdez remained an obstructionist.

How much information would a Gov. 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 is a Baptist pastor, activist and author in Dallas. He wrote this column for The Dallas Morning News. Website: revjeffhood.com

December 9, 2017

The Slaughter of Joseph or Daniel Shaver

Have you ever wondered what happened to Joseph?

He was slaughtered in Mesa, Arizona.

The early days were full of struggle. Forced to endure a difficult pregnancy, Mary and Joseph finally arrived the place of birth. Every room was full. So they found the best place they could and prepared for the birth. The loud cries of birth pierced the night sky. In the hills, there were laborers. They were awoken by a loud noise. Looking up, the heavens opened up and behold multitudes of angels cried out, "The child of the promise is here. The very daughter of God." After being told where to find her, the laborers set out. Arriving in a small room, the laborers praised the child. Mary

remained silent and pondered all of the events in her heart. Their daughter grew in mind and spirit.

Joseph worked hard to provide for his young family. In the midst of it all, the young family found out that Mary was pregnant again. Before they knew it, they had two daughters. Not long after the second birth, scholars descended on the family. The young child touched the entirety of their souls. The daughter of God was the voice of the divine. This is what they had always waited on. Although they wanted to stay, they knew they had to go. The family tearfully let them go.

Not long after the beautiful encounter, Joseph was called away on a business trip. On the way to his destination, Joseph stopped in Arizona. Taking a rest at a hotel, Joseph made some friends and together they socialized. Showing his new friends a pellet gun he used for his job, they laughed at the thought of using the weapon as a means of eliminating pests. Down at the pool someone

saw the pellet gun and freaked out. Calling police, the person said that someone had a gun a few floors up. Officers arrived shortly thereafter and began to descend upon the identified room. Joseph walked out the door with one of his new friends. The police began to shout commands. Hands in the air, Joseph complied with everything they told him to do. It was not enough. Evil had taken over. Officer Philip Brailsford was beyond rational thought. Joseph sought to pull his pants up and the officer opened fire. Tears streamed down his face. Blood mixed with carpet. There was no turning back. God brought him home.

"Well done, my good and faithful servant."

Etched into the Brailsford's gun was the words, "You're fucked."

Evil won that night and evil won at trial. Brailsford was acquitted. Evil walked out of the courtroom a free man.

The entire incident was caught on video. It didn't matter. Evil is always blinding.

There was no justice for Mary or her two girls. There was no justice for God. There was only evil.

However, evil did not win in the end.

Daniel Shaver will live forever.

Have you ever wondered what happened to Joseph?

He was slaughtered in Mesa, Arizona.

Amen.

December 15, 2017

Theologies of Santa

Growing up, I never liked school all that much. I found it to be a waste of time. In addition to boredom, I was incredibly lonely. At lunch, I told everybody around me that I believed in Santa. Multiple students began to make fun of me. It was around this time that people started making fun of me for believing in God.

I am not ashamed of the Gospel. I am not ashamed of Santa. I am not ashamed of God.

I've always loved going to the mall at Christmas...particularly when it's time to see Santa. While he usually turns out to be a grumpy old man with body odor, I don't care. He represents something so much more than the materialism that surrounds him...namely...hope.

While we were standing in line, I heard a child in front of me talking to his mom about whether or not this was the real Santa or not. You could tell from their accents that they were recently from somewhere else. While the mom just wanted to get the pictures over with, the young boy wouldn't stop. Finally, he loudly declared, "Santa isn't white!" In the midst of his continued protests, the young boy left no doubt that he was accustomed to a Santa with a darker complexion.

We believe in Santa the most when Santa meets us where we are. The same is true of God.

Just yesterday, I overheard a little girl praying to Santa. I found her words to be incredibly theological. God takes on many forms to meet us where we are. Santa found her and she found Santa. When her mom realized what she was doing, she rebuked her. In those moments, her mother explained that God is not Santa. Isn't it interesting that we always seem to know who

God is? I have no doubt that there was more faith in that little girl's prayers to Santa than in the most pious of prayers found in churches the world over.

Prayer is an outward sign of an inward grace. The little girl believed.

God show us Santa.

Santa show us God.

Amen.

December 20, 2017

Born of a Virgin: I Believe

Candles burned. Colors exploded. Music flowed. Words shocked. The entirety of my being beheld the glory of the coming of the lamb. I could see her. God was so close. I clung to the Virgin as the bearer of God. Christmas was in my very soul. I knew it would last forever.

It didn't.

The years brought doubt. Is there a God? This is too fantastical. Did God really come to earth? This is a bridge too far. A manger? This is nuts. Shepherds seeing the heavens open up? There is no way. Wise men/women from the East? Give me a break. While I had deep doubts about it all, the claim that the Virgin bore a child was the most fantastical claim of them all. The questions were killing me. I had to figure it out.

Everything seemed lost.

The candles turned my stomach. The colors were annoying. The music hurt my ears. The words were a bad fairy tale. I could see/feel/taste/smell/hear nothing. God was gone. I looked at the carefully constructed manger and grew into a rage. I wanted to take a baseball bat and destroy it all. I didn't believe any of it. In fact, I was embarrassed that I ever believed it all.

Christmas was a joke.

Knowledge was now my God. I figured it all out. If it couldn't be proven, I knew it was bullshit. Then, I met the Virgin.

My ears could still hear.

Many years into my arrogance, I met a theologian/a self-described sheologian. After I rattled off everything I thought was false, she asked me to give voice to what was true. I wasn't prepared for what happened next. She deconstructed everything I said. I was able to prove nothing. I felt empty. Eventually, she looked at me and said, "Faith doesn't seems so illogical after all."

I leaned in.

"Have you ever considered that the equality of countless women relies on how we think about the Virgin?" As a fierce believer in social justice, I was confused. "The Virgin bore a child without any man. She reproduced

on her own. How many men can do that? The Virgin proves that women can do anything on their own. God chose her. Such a choosing proves that God often chooses women for tasks that are far more important than what God chooses men for. The Virgin liberated herself and the world. This is not just an ancient phenomenon. Modern women have the ability to liberate themselves and the world. There is no stronger doctrine for the liberation of women than what the Virgin provides."

I was floored.

Certainty was no longer required. Faith became a tool in the pursuit of justice. The magic and mystery came back. Over time, God found me again or perhaps I found her again.

The Virgin saved my soul.

The candles pulled. The colors called. The music wooed. The words taught. The heavens opened up. I saw the birth. I saw God. I saw justice. I saw liberation. I saw equality. The Virgin was the healer of the world. Then I heard her sing, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace and goodwill for all...especially women." As the heavens closed, I feared that she was gone. Then, I saw her right in front of me. I have never beheld such beauty. In those moments, she grabbed me and has never let me go.

In these times of sickening inequality...

The Virgin is still saving souls.

The Virgin will bring about the liberation of women.

The Virgin will save us all.

The Virgin has brought us God.

I believe in the Virgin Birth.

...because I know that the Virgin believes in us.

Amen.

December 22, 2017

Jesus Murdered Twice in Bexar County...Merry Christmas.

Bexar County, Texas-

Tires screeched. Adrenaline rushed. Time raced. This is what these cowboys lived for. They caught her in the very act of theft. She was going to pay. Did they see a gun? It's hard to say. But don't they always see a gun? Such words are always an excuse to light somebody up. After an extended period of time, they cornered her in a trailer park. They just knew that this is where her kind of trash lived. I imagine they thought she was probably just running to her trailer. The car slammed to a stop. Desperate, she broke into the closest trailer. There she met 6-year-old Kameron Prescott and two of his family members. The deputies weren't having it. Five of them violently approached the trailer. Suspecting she had a gun, they'd already made the decision to shoot. When she came out on the front porch, bullet after bullet

immediately flew through the air. The smoke lingered for a second. Once they realized that she was dead, they congratulated each other. Trash deserved to die. Amidst the smiles, a scream pierced the air. It was coming from the trailer. Running in, they found young Kameron bleeding out in the floor. Rushing to his aid, there was nothing they could do. Cowboys can't raise people from the dead. They only know how to take life. After the bodies had set for a moment, they realized that the woman didn't have a gun. Their excuse for shooting was bullshit. Now, two people are dead because of a suspected theft. This is what happens when the cowboys get to roam wild with their guns. Nobody had to die. The cowboys just had to kill.

Jesus has bound himself to the fate of the least of these.

Jesus was murdered in Bexar County...twice.

Merry Christmas.

Amen.

more info:
https://www.sacurrent.com/the-daily/archives/2017/12/22/sheriff-explains-why-bexar-county-deputies-opened-fire-on-an-unarmed-suspect-leaving-6-year-old-boy-dead

December 24, 2017

The Baby from Bethlehem: A Palestinian Revelation

Palestinians are amongst the most oppressed peoples in the world. Everyday, the lives of Palestinians are controlled. Energy is controlled. Food is controlled. Movement is controlled. Water is controlled. Every facet of the lives of Palestinians is controlled. It makes sense that Jesus was born in the Palestinian city of

Bethlehem. The incarnation of God is always with the oppressed.

Mary and Joseph were just striving to survive. The shepherds were just striving to survive. In the midst of all of the striving, a miracle happened. God busted through all borders and boundaries and arrived as a Palestinian baby. Liberation was born.

In the stillness of this Christmas Eve, I still hear the call of Bethlehem.

*Originally Published December 18, 2016

Born to Be Murdered? : A Word from Bethlehem

The Christmas season always makes me ponder a pivotal question. Did God send Jesus to die? I'm not talking about a death of natural causes. I'm talking about a brutal painful death. I'm talking about a bloody murder. Did God know about the suffering that was to come? If God knows everything, as traditional Christian doctrine teaches, then the answer is yes. God sent Jesus to take the crown of thorns. God sent Jesus to be beaten to the point of death. God sent Jesus to be crucified. God sent Jesus to be abused. What type of God would do such a thing? Would you send your child to endure such suffering? Can you imagine rejoicing over your child in Bethlehem when you know what brutalization is coming? If traditional Christian doctrine is to be believed, God is the greatest child abuser of them all. I simply can't believe in a God like that. I choose to believe that the baby in Bethlehem represented the best of who God was and is. I choose to reject traditional doctrine. I choose to believe there is another way.

God did not kill Jesus. God didn't know what was coming. God only knew the hope of the baby. God sent Jesus on a rescue mission to save the world with no idea if it was going to work. I don't think this is just wishful thinking. I think it is the only plausible way to think about a righteous God. God has to be ignorant of what is to come. I think there is biblical evidence for such belief. Matthew 27:19 reads, "While Pilate was sitting in the judgment hall, his wife sent him a message: 'Have nothing to do with that innocent man, because in a dream last night, I suffered much last night.'" As Pilate was about to condemn Jesus, his wife begs him to stop. I see this moment as one of God's last attempts to save Jesus. God cannot be held responsible for the murder of Jesus because God didn't know. God sent the baby in Bethlehem to bring hope not to be murdered. God had no idea what was going to happen. God kept trying to save Jesus. That's why God led Mary and Joseph to the stable. God is not the great child abuser of all. We are.

Amen.

December 31, 2017

*annual letter to the editor on the death penalty

Learn to love again

Christopher Wilkins, Terry Edwards, Rolando Ruiz, James Bigby, TaiChin Preyor, Robert Pruett and Ruben Ramirez.

Supposedly, their demise made us safer. I doubt that you've heard these names. I doubt that you know you killed them.

These are the names of persons who we executed this year. To say they were executed by the state of Texas feels too impersonal.
We did it. We might as well own up to it.

I was a spiritual adviser to Christopher Wilkins. I rarely enjoyed our visits. I actually found him to be quite evil. Regardless, I never forgot that he was a child of God. I knew that I had to love him. I knew I had to love my neighbor.
I tried to save his life. Ultimately, I was unsuccessful.

We killed him.

Statewide organizations have proven largely ineffective at ending the killing. Unfortunately, we cannot rely on them.

It is up to each of us. We can turn back the tide of death.

We can learn to love again. We can be human.

May there be no more names in 2018.

Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood,

Denton

2018

January 1, 2018

Solo Words

*Walking Tall Wilmington

Impoverished.

The plea. The shout. The march. The shots. I was alone. The dead. The press. The threats. I was alone. The end. The spin. The pain. I was alone.

Loneliness is always the price of defiance. Revolution is a venture of solitude. Belief happens within and explodes without. Surely, God knows loneliness.

God hates community. Fake smiles. Fake words. Fake songs. Fake. The hollow fill pew after pew. Dribbling bullshit falls to the floor. Evil is everywhere. Loneliness is the only salvation.

There is no resolve. There is only us. There is only now.

I left. I stayed. It didn't matter.

I will always be sick. I will always be hungry. I will always be thirsty. I will always be in prison. I will

always be alone. I will always be. I will always. I will.
I.

When the day of God arrives...may I have the courage to stand alone...for I know that that is the only place where God will be found.

God is loneliness.

God is.

Amen.

January 6, 2018

The Money: A Parable of Sorts (Part 1 of 8): The Hope

The mountains have never been kind to my family.
People just keep on getting rich off our kind. The haves

have all that there is to have. We don't have a damned thing. Once or twice, I tried to consider what it might be like to live like that...but when it came right down to it...I couldn't even muster up the head magic to know where to start. I know it's wrong. I just didn't know what to do about it. I turned to Jesus and found no help there. Now, I just sit here on the corner trying to find work. I'm growing poorer by the second. How am I supposed to feed my family?

Shouts filled the air. A newspaper dropped at his feet. The state/the haves had voted for succession.

I ain't got time for no war. I ain't interested in dying for some rich man's pocketbook. I ain't got no problem with the Negroes. Why don't they concentrate on making sure that all of us got a chance to survive for a change? I ain't interested in all of this damned buffoonery. I've got a family to feed.

What are you going to do?

"Chester Drillard!" I looked at the Confederate official. This was my time. I took my orders and walked out.

The buggy is rough.

Every bounce jars me back to the reality of my predicament. I have one day. What am I going to do?

Margaret met me at the door. She knew. The Confederacy was promising to pay well. We're broke...but money don't mean everything. I don't believe in all this mess. I love Negroes and I hate the rich. Margaret got real close and said, "Fight for what is right!"

Seconds turned to days. Minutes turned to months. Hours turned to years.

I fought for so many years...that I didn't know what year it was when the whole thing was over. I just knew I was going back to Margaret once and for all. While the Yankees stayed to manage everything, we lived happily ever after. I even took in one of my Nero soldier friends, Troy. When they left, the Klan and all other kinds of vigilantes came to take their revenge. Our farmhouse was burned twice.

"Stop! Stop! Stop!"

Regardless, we all stayed put.

I've been in the bed for months. I didn't live for the money. I lived for right. The end is near.

In his final hours, Chester gathered his family around his bed and said, "Love everybody. Don't chase the money. Fight for what is right!"

When I saw the pearly gates, I wondered why there were smoldering piles of money everywhere. Then, I heard the booming voice of God declare...

"Damn the money!!!"

January 8, 2018

The Money: A Parable of Sorts (Part 2 of 8): The Crash

Death was in the air. Every step felt heavier than the last. The dew was soaking my shoes. Looking up, I saw the little mountain cabin. I didn't want to go in. I hesitated. The old cabin door swung open with a loud creak. The room was so familiar and not familiar at all. It'd been so long. I didn't know what to do.

Mom rushed over. Her warm embrace made me forget about everything...for a second. Looking up, I was brought back to reality. I could see the bed. I could see the people gathered every corner. I'm sure that they cared more about him than I did. I just didn't know him. He was so old when he had me and I was so young when I left the house. Life pulled me to the corner. I didn't want to have anything to death will any of it. Eventually, mom came over and pulled me to the bed. I was surprised that he recognized me. I was so hard. I was so...

The tears broke my heart. I didn't know he cared so much. He smelled like shit. The mountains always smell like shit. He pulled me close. In as loud of a voice as he could, he said, "Love everybody. Don't chase the money. Fight for what is right!" He took two more deep breaths and died. Chester Drillard was no more.

Now that he was gone, everybody in town felt like they could now talk shit about him openly. He was a traitor. He was vile. He was a piece of shit. He was a... The little American flag waved in the breeze next to all of the Confederate ones. The stark contrast illustrated the stark contrast of his life. He was truly willing to fight for what was right.

After getting spit on and beat up a time or two for being his son, I left again. It didn't matter...

The moment was in me. The factory buzzed those words. The ocean crashed those words. The engine roared those words. The night whispered those words. The moment was in me and I in it.

I didn't give a shit. I had to make money. If I didn't, I knew I would end up like him...dead and smelling like shit.

Mary never left me either. Through letters and occasional visits, the fire of our love continued to burn. She didn't want to come and I didn't want to go back. We met halfway. In that small tent, we made passionate love. It was devastating when she had to go. I wept. A couple of months later, I received a letter that would change my life. "I'm pregnant and it won't be long."

Arthur Drillard raced to a friend's room. "I need your bike." Within minutes, Drillard was racing through the hills and in to the mountains. Daydreaming about having a family with Mary and trying to get there to make it happen, Arthur lost control of the back tire. The slick roads didn't help. The bike catapulted Arthur over the railing. Death came quickly. There was only one question remaining, "Where was God?"

Three weeks later, Mary gave birth to Zack. When people came to visit the young child, they would mutter under their breaths, "Your daddy was a great man...but

your granddaddy was the biggest piece of shit this town has ever known." Even in the midst of life and death, the dark side ruled the day. Zack couldn't hear his grandfather. Zack Drillard could only hear the racists.

January 10, 2018

Killer of the Dream: Greg Abbott and the North Texas MLK Parade

"What would you like to be when you grow up?" The question pumped fear through my veins. I tried to grabbed my thoughts...but they wouldn't come. Finally, I stood my tallest and answered defiantly, "I want to be the President of the United States of America...just like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr." My teacher didn't correct me. I still don't know why. I guess my classmates didn't know enough to correct me. Ultimately, I figured it out on my own. When I realized that Dr. King transformed

our world as a preacher far more than any President ever would, I started to pray harder and harder. I just wanted to do God's will. I just wanted to be closer and closer to the one who gave me life. I was 6.

Many years later, I started to realize that politics led away from God and not toward God. The spirit of the words of Jesus echoed in my ears, "Give unto politics that which is politics." There is a reason that Jesus never ran for office. There is a reason that Jesus didn't become King. There was a reason... Jesus knew where God was found. Instead of inhabiting the halls of power and influence, Jesus knew that God was in the streets. Jesus knew that God was in every heart where the dream of healing and restoration stirred. In fact, Jesus was the originator of the dream. Martin just followed.

When I heard that the North Texas MLK Parade invited Texas Governor Greg Abbott to be their Honorary Grand Marshal, I figured it was a joke. No human with even

the slightest inkling of intelligence would think that inviting Abbott was a good idea. However, it seems that there was a dumbass in the mix. The dumbass has no respect for the people that Martin stood with. If so, they would've invited a keeper of the dream not a killer of the dream.

What were they thinking?

Migrants dying on the border.

Transgender folks can't go to the bathroom.

Black folk getting poorer.

The rich getting exponentially richer.

People getting executed in Huntsville.

Healthcare being slashed.

Schools going unfunded.

The evil bullshit just flows like water.

This is the guy they think needs to be the Honorary Grand Marshal?

Those who choose to participate in this event have sided with politics over Martin...politics over God. Good and evil is clear in this situation. The organizers have chosen evil. They have proven themselves to be just as evil as Abbott. Which leads me to forcefully declare...

This ain't no damn parade.

This is a damn charade.

Amen.

January 11, 2018

The Money: A Parable of Sorts (Part 3 of 8): The Upbringing

"They're fucking our women. They're stealing our shit. They're slitting our throats. We are at the mercy of the niggers. I'm just about ready to kill me one. Who's with me?" I was six. I learned early. My white skin was all I needed to survive. God chose me to be in the master race and I wasn't going to let him down.

I never knew much about my dad. I knew more about my granddad. Everybody said the same thing, "Your dad was a good man...but your grandfather was a son of a bitch." From the earliest of ages, I hated my grandfather. I declared it as loud as I could, "Any friend of the niggers ain't no friend of mine."

We was poor...really poor. I had to learn about sex wherever I could. I lost my virginity to a chicken. I fucked it so hard that I killed it. That damn thing squawked and squawked until it didn't. Momma got remarried. I hated that son of a bitch. He tried to beat momma and I one night until I put a knife in his stomach. That was when I left the house. I was fourteen.

I was terrified to jump on that thing. I kept on having visions of getting my head sliced off on the track. Finally, I ran and jumped. I missed and slid down the embankment. I was all bloodied and battered. I decided to take a break. The money was gone. I went down to the river to see what I could come up with. After a few drinks of water, I looked up to find a beautiful nigger. I was so damn horny that I decided to fuck the animal. She resisted for a second and then settled down. I pretended like she was a white woman. After I came all in her, I got her name. Sometime later,

as I was passing through again. One of the niggers on the train told me that she'd gotten pregnant right around that time and had had a little boy. I didn't need no little nigger in my life...so I just acted like I didn't even hear him.

By the time I got to Atlanta, I was fifteen. I worked in a grocery store and lived in a boarding house. I did everything as cheap as I could...except for the pussy. I bought the best I could find.

Late one night, I'd had a few drinks and came across a nigger in an alley. I beat the shit out of him. I even took the biggest rock I could and find and slammed it down on his face. I might have killed him. Fortunately, nobody cares about animals. I bent down and opened his pockets. After rummaging through everything, I took the money and ran.

Zack was getting worse.

Even God couldn't help.

January 12, 2018

Oak Lawn United Methodist Church: Where Jesus Sleeps

Though I have many dear friends that are United Methodist and love many of the teachings of Methodism, I hate the United Methodist Church. I hate the unity at all costs mentality. I hate the silence. I hate the caution. I hate the ists and isms that the denomination perpetuates. I could go on all day. So, let me make it very clear...this is no puff piece.

Sitting at a United Methodist divinity school (Emory) while pursuing one of my graduate degrees, I heard these words, "I would lose my job!!!" I will never forget the disgust that boiled in my stomach. Such words came

in response to our professor pushing us to think about what it would be like to open the doors of our future churches to those who had nowhere else to go. Not surprisingly, my classmate is not the pastor of a large United Methodist church. I'm sure the Bishop loves him.

With little thought, churches consistently lock their doors on the coldest nights of the year. During that time, people often freeze to death in our streets. Let me rephrase, Jesus freezes to death in our streets. What you have done to the least of these... There is no Jesus after that. Jesus froze to death.

In the last few days, I have been overwhelmed and surprised by the actions of Oak Lawn United Methodist Church here in Dallas. Led by their courageous pastor, Rev. Rachel Baughman, and an equally courageous staff, Oak Lawn has unlocked their doors. With a reckless love for Jesus, the church is providing places to sleep for the most vulnerable people in our community.

Encouraging people to rest on fancy chairs from days gone by, Oak Lawn is forgetting about their possessions in order to remember love. The people of Oak Lawn are being real Christians. Why are they one of the only ones?

Churches need to get saved. Churches need to unlock their hearts. Churches need to give a shit about Jesus. If they don't know where to go, they need to head on over to Oak Lawn.

They'll find Jesus sleeping on a cot.

Amen.

January 12, 2018

The Money: A Parable of Sorts (Part 4 of 8): The Exit

"I want you to welcome your new coworker!" The grocery store was in the heart of Atlanta. For years, the food-filled aisles had been his home. When the manager introduced a black man, Zack Drillard walked out and never looked back. "I ain't workin' with no goddamn nigger!"

She ain't much to look at. I'm just hungry for some pussy. We've been fucking for a while. She wants to say we're dating. As long as she gives me what I want, I don't care what she calls us. Her name is Harriet. I guess that's not all that important.

When we found out, I was pissed. She was a few months along. I tried to convince her to get an abortion. I figured that it was better to be forgiven by the Lord than have to live the rest of my life with a mistake. When all of my convincings failed, I decided to save face. We were married a short time later. During the

ceremony, I don't even know if I smiled at all. I was miserable.

"It's a girl!" Harriet wanted a kiss. In order to avoid it, I put the baby between us. Her name was Cindy. I loved her until the day she died.

Out in the hallway, one of the cleaning ladies rubbed Cindy's hair and complemented me on how beautiful she was. I snapped. "Get your nigger hands off my daughter!" She ran away crying. I was delighted. "I bet she don't pull that shit ever again." When we left the hospital, I felt like I was going to prison. The only redeeming part was Cindy.

We fought more than we talked. Everything was about the money. She was always trying to trying to give money to various charities. I was pissed. I earned every cent that I had and I was going to keep every cent that I

have. I sure as hell wasn't going to give to no charities that would probably give all of my money to the niggers.

Late one night, I packed Cindy up and made a run for it. I would school her in the old ways of whiteness. The last thing I screamed out the door at Harriet was, "Now you can go fuck all the niggers you want!"

We didn't see her again for five years.

The money was all we really needed.

January 14, 2018

Fighting for the DREAM: A Major Victory in Arlington

We don't get many outright victories. The work is hard and moral victories are what we are most accustomed to. While the knowledge that we are steadily moving

the cause of justice along is satisfying, it is always a beautiful thing when justice breaks through swiftly and mightily. Just this past week, I saw it. The hand of God moved in a way that was as remarkable as it was unmistakable.

Just a few days ago, I wrote these words:

When I heard that the North Texas MLK Parade invited Texas Governor Greg Abbott to be their Honorary Grand Marshal, I figured it was a joke. No human with even the slightest inkling of intelligence would think that inviting Abbott was a good idea. However, it seems that there was a dumbass in the mix. The dumbass has no respect for the people that Martin stood with. If so, they would've invited a keeper of the dream not a killer of the dream.

What were they thinking?

Migrants dying on the border.

Transgender folks can't go to the bathroom.

Black folk getting poorer.

The rich getting exponentially richer.

People getting executed in Huntsville.

Healthcare being slashed.

Schools going unfunded.

The evil bullshit just flows like water.

This is the guy they think needs to be the Honorary Grand Marshal?

Those who choose to participate in this event have sided with politics over Martin...politics over God. Good and evil is clear in this situation. The organizers have chosen evil. They have proven themselves to be just as evil as Abbott. Which leads me to forcefully declare...

This ain't no damn parade.

This is a damn charade.

In the midst of our anger, we held a press conference. Each of us took terms lambasting the decision to invite Governor Abbott. Our words traveled all over the Metroplex and then went national (thanks to NPR). The sponsors of the parade started to feel the pressure and began pulling out. Then, we kept turning up the heat. Ultimately, the organizers of the North Texas MLK Parade did not have the money to pay the permiting fees. As we were about to hold another press conference, we got the good news.

Canceled.

I have no doubt that if we had not held that initial press conference, the North Texas MLK Parade would have gone on as planned. Gov. Abbott would have been at the head of the parade waving and smiling and the injustice would have continued unabated. We couldn't allow that shit to go unchallenged. We were the last bastion of resistance.

Make no mistake...

We fought for the DREAM and won.

There are those who have criticized us. They have said that we should have promoted dialogue. They are ignorant. How are you going to dialogue with somebody driving by on a float? Gov. Abbott didn't care about anything but a photo-op.

Now, there will be no photos. There will only be the historic local parades sponsored by local businesses with local people. That's exactly the way it should be.

Here in North Texas, the DREAM still lives and it is our job to make sure it never dies.

Amen.

January 16, 2018

The Money: A Parable of Sorts (Part 5 of 8): The Violence

"Fuck this shit." Zack was beyond angry. "Another nigger coworker?!?" Heading to the door of the factory, Zack stopped. He knew the truth. "I can't leave." There was nowhere else he was going to find a job with this good of pay and this good of hours. "I have a child to

feed now." Cindy never left his mind. Turning around, Zack headed back to his station and stood right next to Forest. They would work together for three years.

If you can't do no better than that nigger, you need to go on somewhere else. You better not say shit. Forest knew better. Forest knew I would lynch his ass. Forest knew who his master was. I tried to get him to quit. He wouldn't do it. He had a family too.

The factory is in a rough part of town. Every morning and night, I look around and around as I walk from the bus stop. I was really lucky until I wasn't. Late one night, I was walking to the bus stop when I heard two people walk up behind me. I knew they were niggers before I even turned around. Before I knew it, one of them hit me over the head and knocked me to the ground. They took everything I had. They would have killed me...if it wasn't for Forest. While I was begging for my life, Forest ran up and knocked both of them to

the ground. As Forest got help, I yelled out, "you are my kind of nigger."

I gave Forest a reward for his bravery. His reaction told me everything. He did it for the money.

My sister Rhonda set me up with her friend from work. On account of her big tits, everyone called her Bubbles. I loved her from the moment I saw her. We got serious quick. Cindy didn't like her...but I figured that would change with time. Not long after we met, we got married. I worried that she might want me for my money. I worried about the money all the time.

One afternoon at work, I finally decided it was time. I told my bosses that I was quitting. It was time for me to go out on my own. Everything was in place to open my own business. We would manufacture syrup...the best syrup known to man. As I was walking out, I grabbed

Forest and yelled, "This is my nigger!" When the doors opened, the money started to role.

I got drunk. I guess I celebrated more than I should have. I was driving way too fast. Then, she pulled out. There was no possible way for me to stop. I slammed right into her. I knew she was dead from the moment I saw her. I killed her. I tried to flee on foot and couldn't. The cops got me. The prison was cold and wet. Eventually, Bubbles came and bailed me out. The lawyers were struggling to figure out a plan. I was in deep shit.

The money can only go so far.

The money can only do so much.

The money.

January 17, 2018

The 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 is not really a Baptist...he's actually a joke. There is absolutely no evil that he will not speak or do in order to be seen favorably by our President. I've long ran away from his example. Conscience actually matters to me. 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 will not be forgiven by future generations. Revolution is the only path to God.

I went to high school with Jeff Flake. I saw him on the football field. I saw him with all the girls. I saw him in that red convertible. I saw him wherever he wanted to

be. I never liked him. The arrogance made me cringe. The flashiness was disgusting. The bullying was heartbreaking. While I've never even met Flake, I've always assumed that this is how he was and is. His policies and politics have never made me believe otherwise. 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 phased at all. With boldness, Flake recently arose on the floor of the United States Senate to deliver a withering critique of our President's consistent denial of truth...at one point, he even compared him to Joseph Stalin. I couldn't believe it. He has joined the revolution. I guess he has grown up since high school. 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 the Muslim.
Our President has robbed Native populations.
Our President has ignored the homeless.
Our President has killed the immigrant.
Our President has endangered LGBT folk.
Our President has terrified Latinos.
Our President has tricked the worker.
Our President has damned the forgotten.

Our President has cursed the condemned.
Our President has destroyed the environment.
The evil never stops.

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

The "shithole" is not there. Through incessant oppression, our President has made sure that the "shithole" is here. Can't you smell it?

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.

The revolution is here.

Join us.

Donald doesn't stand a chance.

January 18, 2018

The Tourniquet Killer

Tonight, the State of Texas (that's us) executed (killed) Anthony Shore, otherwise known as the tourniquet killer.

Though the stories are slightly different, the result is the same. They were all murdered.

Laurie Tremblay was 14.

Maria Estrada was 21.

Diana Rebollar was 9.

Dana Sanchez was 16.

Though the story is slightly different, the result is the same. He was murdered.

Anthony Shore was 55.

Who is the real killer?

"Only monsters kill." I couldn't believe it. The words had just exited the mouth of a police officer. That's not the unbelievable part. The unbelievable part is that he'd killed a perpetrator a few months prior. Could he hear what he was saying? I didn't want to miss the chance to find out. "So, are you a monster?" The question drew anger out of his bones. I was prepared for him to punch me. I don't know how long he waited to speak. I do know that it felt like an eternity. Finally, he simply offered, "No." He knew and I knew that such a simple

response was inadequate to engage the depth of the question. There was a simple underlying principle informing our discussion...killing is killing is killing.

Tonight, the State of Texas (that's us) executed (killed) Anthony Shore, otherwise known as the tourniquet killer.

Though the stories are slightly different, the result is the same. They were all murdered.

Laurie Tremblay was 14.

Maria Estrada was 21.

Diana Rebollar was 9.

Dana Sanchez was 16.

Though the story is slightly different, the result is the same. He was murdered.

Anthony Shore was 55.

Who is the real killer?

Amen.

January 21, 2018

At the end of Trump's first year, I pray for revolution

*This column originally appeared in the Dallas Morning News on Saturday, January 20, 2018

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 forebears 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 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.

Amen.

January 21, 2018

The Money: A Parable of Sorts (Part 6/7 of 8): The Trial

The records said that I pled out. I didn't plea shit. Didn't nobody care about me killing no nigger woman. While I've thought about it once or twice, I've come to the conclusion every time that the world is better off with one less nigger in the world.

Don't judge me.

God's just as racist as I am.

The foolishness was only a minor distraction. Business was booming. We were taking in cash hand over fist.

Syrup was flowing in every direction. Eventually, we expanded all the way to Florida.

Forest and I traveled together. I guess I trusted him about as much as I trusted any nigger...but I didn't really trust any nigger. I knew he was all about the money. I kept my eye on him at all times.

Bubbles wanted a baby. I wasn't interested in no damn baby. Honestly, I'd grown tired of fucking her anyway. The money was able to buy me a much fresher piece anyways. In time, I gave in. Shelly was born on a beautiful morning. Looking into her eyes, I promised to give her whatever she wanted...and I have.

Money is still raining down.

Forest, I need you to drive me somewhere...take me to The Back Cat. I love for those nigger women to rub their

pussies all in my face. I know I'm a hypocrite...but I'm so addicted.

I knew my leg was crushed from the moment it hit. I was supposed take Bubbles and Shelley to Hawaii. I knew that shit wasn't going to happen. I've never recovered. The pain is always with me...but thankfully...I've still got the money.

Shelley grew up and got married. While I wasn't particularly pleased with her chosen husband, I went along with it all. I knew the money could keep them both in line. It didn't.

Before long, they had a child. We called him Beetle. Looking into his eyes, I knew I could make him exactly what I wanted him to be. Every year of his life, my control grew stronger and stronger.

I will use the money however the fuck I want.

January 24, 2017

Identity Implosion: The Failure to Be Human

On most days, you will find us riding around Denton, Texas on a caravan of wheels. In order to accommodate our five children, I created a bike trailer capable of carrying everyone. Needless to say, we are a sight to behold.

The meaning of life is simple...to be human. In an age of identity, desiring to be human is the apex of countercultural existence. We can talk about the ists and isms all we want...we can even completely solve these identity problems...but until we are willing to completely love our neighbor and our self...we will never find humanity...we will only find the next oppression.

Over the last few months, I have experienced a period of solitude. Much has fallen away and I've had the time to think and think and think. Though I've felt the need to hold my tongue and listen, my mind has never been far from the movement to liberate women. Throughout my profession as an activist theologian, I have been committed to engaging a wide range of issues. Certainly, we must push in all types of directions in order to become the human that God has created us to be. With that said, I have thought hard about what it would mean to go all in on women's liberation to the exclusion of all of the other work that I do. In the midst of my wrestling, something happened. God always seems to show up.

My kids love dollar stores. For a few bucks, my kids can shop to their hearts content. After an hour picking what they wanted, we were finally able to leave. We took off through the parking lot and then headed out on the

open road. After a long day of pulling them around, I got tired and pulled up onto the sidewalk. A few minutes later, a motorcyclist and a car abruptly stopped right in front of us. If we had still been in the road, there is no doubt that they would have hit us. The screaming and shouting got louder and louder. The motorcyclist was a black man. The motorist was a Hispanic woman. Racial slurs started to fly as soon as they got out of the car. "Bitch! I hope they deport your sorry ass!" "Bitch! I should lynch your ass up for this bullshit!" The back and forth seemed endless. Fuck this and Fuck that. Cunt this and cunt that. Dumbass this and dumbass that. Everything ended with each of them repeatedly spitting on each other. Two oppressed people oppressing each other.

Intersections (literally and figuratively) illustrate the failure of single identity activism. The royal rumble reminded me that oppression always exists when a lack of humanity present. In seeking to dehumanize each

other, the fighters dehumanized themselves. Humanity is found in fighting for the rights of all. Justice is spread through helping people to be most human.

Dehumanization comes in a variety of forms.

We must fight them all.

Identities are a product of oppression not the creator of them.

Amen.

January 29, 2018

The Price of Defiance: Thrift Store Spirituality

There is something about thrift stores. The colors. The diversity. The smell. The violence?

I've never grown used to it. "Rev. Hood?" "Dr. Hood?" "Are you that guy from television?" "Hood?" Though the situations are different, the objective is always the same...confrontation. Most of these folks see me as a traitor to my race. Some see me as a terrorist. Many see me. When I'm approached in public, I prepare for the worst. I've rarely been wrong. Violence always finds me.

Last weekend, it happened. "Are you that pastor from television? I really hate that mother fucker." I didn't hesitate to reach out my hand. "Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood." With the most hateful look he could muster, he walked away. If the encounter had been in a less public place, he would have hit me. Of that, I have no doubt. Almost immediately, the kids started asking questions. "Why does that guy hate you?" "Strangers don't like you?"

"Were you afraid?" In the midst of it all, I got the chance to explain to the kids the price of defiance. I don't know if they understand. They will.

I was shaken.

I've come too far. There is no way back. There is only...

Once we got back in the car, I turned the radio on. Usually, I don't like the noise. I find that it scrambles my thoughts. Not on this night...on this night...I needed the words. I tuned into an old salvation station. The preacher was just wearing it out. I didn't listen much to the message. I've heard that fundamentalist bullshit more times than I could even begin to count. Over the airwaves, I simply listened for the words. Jesus. God. Courage. Perseverance. Faith. Belief. The words stirred defiance in my soul.

I won't stop.

I can't.

Defiance.

Amen.

January 31, 2018

Seeing John Battaglia

The room was cold. It's always cold in there. I was alone. Waiting. It seems that the purpose of prison is to wait. The seat was cold too. I laid my head on the little ledge. Sleep came quickly. I can't remember if I dreamed or not. When you're on death row, everything seems like a dream...or rather a nightmare. I don't know what woke me up. Perhaps it was God. Perhaps it was the Devil. Regardless, I began to see. Everything

was blurry. Then, all became clear. A chill went down my spine. I knew exactly who he was. John Battaglia is unmistakable. Grey hair. Chiseled face. Well built. Multiple tattoos. I knew everything as soon as I saw him. Immediately, he tried to intimidate me. Fear traveled up my spine. He simply would not stop looking at me. I kept trying to look away. I just wanted to see something else. His eyes pierced my soul. I couldn't pray. I didn't know how. He stared at me throughout eternity and back. I thought he would eventually stop. He never did. i couldn't do anything but see. Throughout it all, his daughters came to me. I thought about their deaths. I thought about their lives. I knew they'd never died. God was there. Eventually, I began to see Battaglia for what he was...a very sick man. In that moment, he no longer had power over me. My ability to pray returned. I looked him dead in the eyes. There was a powerful blessing in there somewhere. The staring broke. Life had flowed between us. Love was in there somewhere. I once was blind...but now I see.

In an act of revenge against his former wife, John Battaglia shot and killed his daughters Faith (9) and Liberty (6) in 2001.

In an another act of revenge for his crimes, we will kill John Battaglia in 2018.

Evil is always incestuous.

Can't you see?

Amen.

January 31, 2018

Denton, Texas: The Noose / Racist USA

People live. People laugh. People dance. People love Denton. Everything they could ever want and more exist within the city limits. Truth is a frightening thing. Words can make reality appear much different than it is. The veil is quite thin. When pushed aside, Denton looks very different. White people live. White people laugh. White people dance. White people love Denton. Let's not forget that this is a city that destroyed the homes of people of color and ran them out of town. Let's not forget that this is a city that has pushed people of color into a specific area. Let's not forget that this is a city that maintains racist names, monuments and artifacts throughout the city. Let's not forget...

Something is wrong with my hip. Getting up and sitting down is excruciating. Regardless, I had to go pick up my kids from school. Every step was tough. I waited at the glass doors...just like always. It wasn't long before I saw both of them running down the stairs. There is nothing that melts my heart more than to hear them say, "I

really missed you." I tried to hurry them along as fast as I could. I needed some rest. Eventually, we started on our journey. Deciding to take a short cut through the park, "We walked swiftly along the sidewalk." When we turned the corner, I couldn't believe my eyes. There was a noose hanging from the tree. I got closer just to make sure. It was 30 feet in the air. So, it wasn't a swing. It was tied very securely with knots. So, someone had to have gotten up there and tied it. It was surrounded and laid on top of various small twigs and branches. So, nobody had been swinging of moving it. After a few minutes, I came to the conclusion that I had when I arrived...it was a noose.

Looking around, I couldn't believe that all of the white people walking by hadn't notice. White glasses are often blind the wearer to injustice. In the midst of it all, the noose simply blew back and forth. In the breeze, I knew what I had to do. I called the media first. Multiple photographers and reporters became involved. The

consensus was clear...it was a noose and the city will try to say that it's not. I don't trust police departments to properly engage incidents like this. Their job is to protect the city...and often the duty to protect extends to the reputation of the city as well. It wasn't long after I called the police that they arrived. One of the first things the officer said was, "It could be a rope swing." 30 ft in the air? I paid the comment no mind. I just told him that the noose needed to come down as quickly as possible.

When I went by to check tonight, the noose was still there. I guess the city didn't want news of a noose to disturb the tranquility of the evening. Make no mistake, this is a white city and they are going to take that noose down on their timeline. I bet it wouldn't take this long if it was a sign that said, "Fuck White People." That shit would've been down in seconds.

On the way home, I spoke my thoughts...

"This isn't about a noose hanging in a park. This is about a noose hanging white Denton. This is about a people hanging others by refusing to open their own eyes."

Amen.

February 5, 2018

Alone: On Being Human

Does God remember me? Dust to dust. Breathe to breathe. I am God's creation. I think. Does God remember me?

Truth was close. I could feel it. Now, I don't believe it was ever close at all. Maybe I want to. Maybe I don't. Truth has always been a liar.

Shots changed my life. They pierced the night. Somehow they found me. In the midst of the chaos, I was I. God was God. In that moment, I touched the loneliness. God is alone. I was too. In the chaos...surrounded by thousands of people...thousands...I stood in the middle of the street surrounded by no one. I don't know that I have felt God more at any point in my life. The solitude pulled me forward. I did what I was supposed to do. I did. I was. While there were people along the periphery, I was alone at the center. The cameras. The lights. The fear. What was I now? Scared. Where was I now? Somewhere. When was I now? Here. Why was I now? Fate. Who was I now? Human. The shots kept ringing. Though my feet were moving, I don't think I've ever left

that place. I'm still standing in the middle of the street. I'm still alone.

Death waits. Death always waits. Death is always on time.

Death is close.

Pain. It won't let go. Even at the end...it just won't let go. How do I survive? Is survival even possible? Maybe survival isn't all that it's cracked up to be. Pain management. Management pain. Is life about pain management? It seems that the management only leads to more pain...though management is addicting and hard to quit. Such an infatuation will eventually get us all. There is no way to manage the inevitable. The end is here. Should I wait? Pain. Should I open my eyes? Pain. Should I scream? Pain. In the end, there is only the pain of solitude. We suffer alone. We suffer and die

in God. Our resurrection is our sobriety. This is what it means to be healed.

I'm still there in the middle of the street.

Darkness. Shots. Solitude. Pain.

Is it eternal?

I don't know.

I simply stand here...

Clinging to my soul.

Amen.

February 6, 2018

"Kelly is a Piece of Shit." -Jesus

Revelation is magic.

Horrible smells seemed to be coming from every crevice of our home. I sniffed my way all around the house. I hadn't checked the kids. Surely, it wasn't one of the kids? I was expecting to find something dead. I kept sniffing. After exhausting all other possibilities, I went and checked the kids. My daughter was fine. When I got to my son, he was grinning from ear to ear. I should have known. When I bent down to take a sniff, I thought it might be the end. Eventually, I collected myself enough to clean up the toxic site. NPR was on the radio. I used the news to distract me. I needed a biohazard suit...but I couldn't find one in the house. With both skill and ease, I dismantled the diaper. Once the final flap drop, I arrived at ground zero. A huge shit

stared back at me. Then, I was distracted by something on the radio.

Amongst a whole host of other racist and problematic statements he made in the same interview, White House Chief of Staff General Jon Kelly had the nerve to call immigrants lazy.

I had to return to my duties. In the midst of finishing the change, I noticed the huge shit once more. Then, something happened. I felt divinity all around me. The divine hand reached out. We started to move together. Then, I saw the diaper. That horrible shit was still there. I saw Jesus move toward the diaper and point. In the most powerful tone I have ever heard, I heard, "Kelly is a Piece of Shit." Jesus is always right.

Eventually, I got that diaper changed. It's wild to have a revelation while you're changing a diaper.
Nevertheless, the shit was still speaking to me. I knew

that Kelly was in that diaper. Jesus had already told me so. When I dropped the diaper with all the other trash, I looked at my son and reminded him, "That's what happens to pieces of shit."

And the people of God said...

Amen.

February 8, 2018

What if Jesus had attended the National Prayer Breakfast?

Cold. Cold. It was so very cold. Jesus could feel the body breaking down. Every step seemed like it could be his last. Shelter after shelter turned him away. There was nothing to eat. There was nowhere to sleep. Eventually, he found a bridge. As the cars roared by

above his head, Jesus cried out to God to save him. As the misery deepened, he heard nothing. Eventually, he dozed. He thought his last thought might truly be his last thought. Unable to move, Jesus just laid there until some resemblance of movement returned. Dizzy, he knew he needed food quick. In the distance, he heard people talking about prayer and faith. Praising God for this blessing, Jesus followed them. Eventually, they arrived at a huge building. He knew he had to be in the presence of the people of God and the Bread of Life always in habited such spaces. Following the prayers, Jesus walked to the door. The closer he got, the more evil looks he got. As he arrived at the door, he was immediately was grabbed and thrown out onto the sidewalk. "If you come back, you will be arrested!" Everyone in line cheered the officer son. "Don't you know that the President is going to be here? No trash allowed!" Growing weaker and weaker, Jesus went around to a side entrance. A kind server let him in. "Are you hungry?" She left and came back with a large

plate of food. With every bite, Jesus gained new strength. Prayerfully, he started walking toward the main room.

Bullshit accompanied every step. "Homeless." "Predator." "Mentally ill." "Psychotic." "Lazy." The whispers grew louder and louder and louder. Once the program started, everything seemed to quiet down. Jesus expected to hear prayer. Jesus expected to get spiritual nourishment. Jesus expected something. He didn't get anything. The words were consistently evil. Jesus angrier and angrier. Eventually, Donald Trump arose to speak. Praying for a miracle. Jesus leaned forward to listen. After a few words, it became clear that Trump's God was himself. God was only a tool for beating the marginalized and the oppressed. Jesus couldn't take it any more. Arising to his feet, Jesus screamed, "Love your neighbor as your self!" Trump didn't waste the opportunity. "Get that piece of trash!" The crowd started to scream, "U-S-A! U-S-A! U-S-A!" A couple of pastors in the audience rushed him and took

him to the ground. With a "Christian" knee to his back and knee to his throat, Jesus started to lose consciousness and screamed out, "Forgive them for they know not what they do." No one could hear him...because everyone was shouting, "U-S-A! U-S-A! U-S-A!" In the midst of all the "holiness," Jesus died on the floor.

Amen.

February 11, 2018

Go to Hell CBF.

Recently, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship reaffirmed their deeply ingrained homophobia. Repeatedly, the CBF has failed to champion inclusion and equality...just like their counterparts in the Southern Baptist Convention. What a bunch of spineless cowards. God

has left the CBF and anyone with a shred of conscience should too.

On this occasion of dumbassticity, I wanted to share something I wrote about the CBF 2 years ago (February 15, 2016). Back then, I got message after message from CBF and their supporters threatening me to take this post down or face this and that. I didn't then and I won't now. Somebody has to show some courage.

Boycott the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship!

"Our church voted to leave the Southern Baptist Convention this past Sunday." Overhearing Charlie's comment, I immediately replied, "Why did y'all do something dumb like that?" Even though our whispers were escalating, we hadn't yet caught the attention of our history teacher, Mr. Jones. "Most folks in our church

wanted to ordain women." I was absolutely incredulous. "Which one of the liberal denominations did you join?" Charlie looked at me dead in the eyes and said, "THE Cooperative Baptist Fellowship." "Well, you might as well have been handing out free tickets to hell in the process. What's next? Homosexual ordination?" Angered, Charlie shouted, "You'd better take that back. The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship nor our church would ever in a million years ordain no faggots." Mr. Jones raised his head and yelled, "Pipe down or you'll be joining me in detention." When I saw Charlie at our high school reunion a few years ago, he told me that his church was still proudly in the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and ardently opposed to the participation of gay people in church or denominational life.

"The snow sets this place off." I don't know who I was talking to. I was alone. Maybe, I was talking to God. Maybe, I was just crazy. Who the hell knows? Regardless, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

is a majestic place. The year was 2007 and the President was one Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr. That's right, I was educated within the Southern Baptist Convention long after moderates lost control of the denomination and left. A short time into my tenure, I got a phone call that would change my life. For many years, my mentor served Southern Baptist churches and his last church was affiliated with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF). Though he was unquestionably more progressive, I spent many years learning from him. Picking up the phone, I heard the familiar voice of my mentor tell me that he was dying. I traveled through the night to get to him. When I arrived at the house, I walked past his family into his room. Arriving at his bedside, my mentor reached out with his cold sweaty dying hand and told me, "I'm gay and I always have been." Death came quickly thereafter. I knew that he didn't feel comfortable telling any of the churches he served. Though he was a moderate Baptist, my mentor was forced into a closet by the denominations he served.

After these events, I grew more progressive by the day and finished Southern as quickly as possible. When I was a student at Emory University someone invited me to be a part of the CBF, I replied that I couldn't be part of a homophobic denomination. This was before I learned of the official homophobic stance of the CBF.

"We're not homophobic!" When you lead with an emphatic denial of homophobia, most of the time that means you're homophobic. A few years ago, an influential member of the CBF led with such a denial. I decided to research further and found an extended history of homophobia. In October of 2000, the Coordinating Council of the CBF adopted the following policy on homosexual behavior related to personnel and funding:

As Baptist Christians, we believe that the foundation of a Christian sexual ethic is faithfulness in marriage between a man and a woman and celibacy in singleness.

We also believe in the love and grace of God for all people, both for those who live by this understanding of the biblical standard and those who do not. We treasure the freedom of individual conscience and the autonomy of the local church, and we also believe that congregational leaders should be persons of moral integrity whose lives exemplify the highest standards of Christian conduct and character.

Because of this organizational value, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship does not allow for the expenditure of funds for organizations or causes that condone, advocate or affirm homosexual practice. Neither does this CBF organizational value allow for the purposeful hiring of a staff person or the sending of a missionary who is a practicing homosexual.

(http://www.cbf.net/media/import/4ff861e3-6f0d-40a0-8eff-dba9c01f884b.pdf)

The phrase "practicing homosexual" is about as homophobic as it gets. When I read this and think about the numerous homophobic experiences I've had with CBF pastors throughout the country, I'm wondering why all these folks left the Southern Baptist Convention in the first place. From recent experiences, I know that most Southern Baptists would be very comfortable with the language that the CBF uses. Maybe the folks in the CBF might be interested in going back?

I decided to take my questions to the leader of the denomination.

*Spring 2013 CBF luncheon at Agape Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas

When I walked into the gymnasium, I couldn't help but notice how white the room was. While the tables were white, there also wasn't a single person of color in the entire room. The speaker of the hour was CBF Executive

Coordinator Suzii Paynter. After listening to her talk about all the stuff that the CBF was doing, the time for questions came. I had to think about it. When I considered the controversial nature of my question, I decided to wait to talk to her after. We'd just exited the church when I asked about the homophobic stances and policies of the CBF. For over ten minutes, Paynter would not answer any of my questions. I remembered something a lawyer friend taught me, when someone refuses to answer a question they have already answered the question. Executive Coordinator Paynter is a defender of the homophobic policies of her homophobic denomination.

Jesus commanded us to "Love our neighbors as our selves." How can you accomplish such a task and have such homophobic policies on the books? It's 2016. There is no reason to be a part of any denomination that functions in this way. On homophobia, the CBF reflects the Southern Baptist Convention far more than it

reflects Jesus. Until these homophobic policies are taken off the books and their churches decide to be inclusive spaces, I'm calling on Baptists to boycott the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. I hope this action brings about the repentance and salvation of our fellow Baptists. Homophobia is not acceptable. In a world desperate for the love of Jesus, there's no reason to partner with or pay for hate. For the sake of all of God's children, boycott!

Amen.

I'm not interested in boycotting the CBF. That time has passed. While I don't believe in any kind of literal hell, I do believe in the fiery demise of evil institutions. It can't happen soon enough for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

Go to hell CBF.

Amen.

February 14, 2018

The Fight to Rename a School: Pushing Further

*Based on My Words at the February 13, 2018 Denton (TX) Independent School District School Board Meeting

Immigrants are of the lowest of classes.

Blacks should be banned from public facilities.

I'm simply not interested in racial equality.

I hope that you are as disgusted by these words as I am.

These are the words or paraphrases of the words of Woodrow Wilson.

Two of my children attend Woodrow Wilson Elementary.

As young as they are, even they ask the question, "Why do we have to go to a school named after a racist?"

While know that you recently voted to spend over $150,000 to change the names of schools named after confederate luminaries, I want to remind you to know that there is no price too high to pay for justice. Indeed, our lives are not defined by our desire for justice...rather, our lives are defined by how far we are willing to go in order to achieve justice.

In the words of a sweet prophet of old, we are implored to "love our neighbors as ourselves." How can we love our neighbors and force little black and brown children to attend a school named after someone who believed

that they should not be able to use the same water fountains as their white classmates? We can't.

On this day, I implore you to stand up and right the wrongs of the past. Just because that's the way it has always been...doesn't mean that that's the way it always has to be. Justice is worth the cost.

Now, is the time to act.

Justice.

Justice.

and.

Justice.

Amen.

Since any recording of the meeting is not available, this account is based on what I wrote down before and what I have remembered after. Memory is a funny thing...it keeps the powerful pieces and goes grey on the less powerful. In time, I will update this post to include a transcript.

With all of these things affirmed, I want to assure you that there is no circumstance that will keep me from fighting to change the name of Woodrow Wilson Elementary School. Justice demands it.

Amen.

February 16, 2018

The Cross of Firearms (Lent 1)

There was a security breach. Somehow, a troubled young man with a gun was able to get into the building. Not long after the doors closed behind him, he pulled out the rapid firing weapon. Blood splashed against the walls. Screams echoed against the walls. Bodies kept hitting the floor. Though the response was fast...it was not fast enough. Seventeen people were dead. Countless others injured. As the nation mourned, politicians reminded the populace that there was nothing they could do.

What if it was the White House?

What if it was the US Capital?

What if it was those they loved?

What if it was something more than the news?

What if?

There was a security breach. Somehow, a troubled young man with a gun was able to get into the building. Not long after the doors closed behind him, he pulled out the rapid firing weapon. Blood splashed against the walls. Screams echoed against the walls. Bodies kept hitting the floor. Though the response was fast...it was not fast enough. Seventeen people were dead. Countless others injured. As the nation mourned, the politicians mourned too.

Stories change. Time grows. Stories stagnate. Time dies. Stories. Time.

We know better. We can be better. We.

There was a security breach. Somehow, a troubled young man almost got a gun. The doors to the mental health facility closed behind him. There was no gun. There was no blood. There were no screams. Bodies constantly swarmed to help him get better. The response was constant. Nobody was going to die. Nobody was going to get injured. Everyone was working toward life. As the nation grew healthier, politicians were shocked at how quickly gun control was transforming the nation.

Stories can change.

We can change.

Our nation does not have to be crucified on a cross of firearms.

Amen.

February 20, 2018

Firefighter Brutality: The Traffic Stop

Did you know that there are all sorts of hidden officials who can pull you over? I didn't. I do now.

I recently submitted the following letter to various publications.

Imagine. Last week, while driving down the highway with my three of my children, I noticed an aggressive white SUV. Distracted, I swerved. I was clueless. Then, the red lights lit up. I was confused. Trying to protect my children, I pulled over. Then, someone with a gun jumped out. I didn't know what to do. When the man got to the door, he was angry and incompetent. I feared that he would hurt my children. As time progressed, I realized that he was a member of the Denton Fire

Department. Alone...anything could've happened. Throughout the encounter (even after another Firefighter arrived), I was asked numerous inappropriate questions that had nothing to do with the stop. Everything was sprinkled with police aggression/brutality...except for the fact that...these guys were not the police. When they finally left, I cried...knowing we'd just survived. There were no protections in place for us. No recording. No identification. No boundaries. Nothing. The Denton Fire Department has assured me that the actions of these Firefighters will be addressed. Still, questions remain. Who can make traffic stops? How do we know who is who? The citizens of Denton deserve better than having to guess. City leadership?

The nature of evil is that it traumatizes the soul. There are few things more evil/brutal than having to guess who is policing you. The person with a gun? Black uniform? Red lights? Blue lights? Green lights? The

person without a gun? Blue uniform? The questions are endless. Here in Denton, I experienced a traffic stop that was traumatizing. While I am going to take care of it, I hope no one has to go through what I went through. Those who daily police our communities must stop hiding behind confusing car markings and light. Police brutality thrives when there is a lack of accountability. Now, I realize that Firefighter brutality does too.

Amen.

February 21, 2018

Billy Graham: ASS & SAINT

"You might not make it home! Give your life to Jesus now! Make no mistake...no choice is a choice. I am begging you. Please don't burn in hell for all eternity!"

Our church was full of these words. No matter how many times I heard them, they always terrified me. I was so young. I just followed what I was told. Outside information was always filtered. I had little hope. Hell seemed to be ever present. Options were nonexistant. I was in a dungeon of deception. There was no light. The darkness only grew. Then, I moved the antenna.

Sundays were filled with fear. I didn't want to go. On that particular Sunday (1997), I woke up early and turned on our old television. Maybe I could find something? After some adjustments, I stopped on Rev. Robert Schuler's weekly church broadcast. As the program progressed, Dr. Billy Graham joined Schuler for an interview. Our family idolized Graham. He was considered the ultimate Christian. I'd never seen him in a conversational setting, so I was curious what he'd have to say. Schuler pushed the conversation toward the wideness of God's salvation. When Dr. Graham insinuated that he believed everyone was going to

heaven, I was floored. Down in my dungeon, I saw a small spec of light. His words seeded in me and helped me to grow hope.

Though I've changed dramatically, one thing remains...my firm belief that God loves the world. I am disgusted by all of the problematic things that Graham said and did to oppressed and marginalized people over the years. He is an ASS. I am in awe of the beautiful ability he had to love and guide millions upon millions of people...including me. He is a SAINT. Now that he is touching the face of God, I am sure the SAINT has conquered the ASS. May it be true for all of us as well...

"As the music plays, I am inviting you to step out into a personal relationship with God."

Amen.

February 24, 2018

Stoneman Douglas HS School Resource Officer Deputy Scot Peterson = Jesus?

Times were tough. There was an evil everywhere. Jesus seemed to be able to allude the wrath of the authorities. His opposition to violence might have had something to do with it. Regardless, early one morning, Jesus got word that his cousin and dear friend, John the Baptist, had been arrested. The news infuriated Jesus and all sorts of thoughts ran through his head. Throughout his incarceration, Jesus kept track of John. Day in and day out, Jesus heard of the struggles that John was having. Then, horrible news hit. John was scheduled to be executed. Jesus was the Son of God. He could have called millions of angels to stop it. He could have snapped his fingers to stop it. Hell, he could have simply

thought it to stop it. None of it happened. Jesus let John get his head chopped off. As John's blood flowed on the floor, we have no evidence that Jesus was there in any tangible way to engage the situation. Jesus simply stood aside. Jesus didn't intervene. Jesus didn't move. Most modern people would just assume that he was too afraid...they would assume that Jesus was a coward.

I have long struggled with this story. Isn't Jesus supposed to be in the business of saving lives? Isn't Jesus supposed to be the banisher of death? Isn't Jesus supposed to...? The questions are endless. I too have just assumed that Jesus was too afraid. I too have simply assumed that Jesus was afraid...and therefore a coward. These assumptions have never set well with me. There has to be more to the story. There has to be some hidden truths. Jesus has to be in there somewhere.

When shots were fired at Stoneman Douglas High School, School Resource Officer Deputy Scot Peterson did not run toward the shooting...in fact, he basically did nothing. Initially, I found his actions to be incomprehensible. Most people have stopped there. He is a coward and that's it. In the light of Jesus, I can't stop there. When violence threatened those Jesus loved, he stayed away from the killing. He did nothing. In the midst of such a violent society, that demands violent (even lethal) responses at every encounter...questions remain. Perhaps the most important being...

What did/would Jesus do?

It's complicated.

Amen.

February 27, 2018

God is Dead: Sin // The Path to God

Cold. That little room was always cold. The metal chairs felt like someone was shooting snow up your ass. Maybe the temperature was to blame...or maybe the coldness of certainty choked off any warmth. Whatever it was, it was lonely. I felt it every Sunday.

"Today, we are going to find God together."

We didn't find shit. It was just another exercise in futility.

The room was dead.

Wet. We were encouraged to get in the water every Sunday. It was filthy. Never comfortable. Always suspect.

"Baptism is a soaking in God."

Seeing people run to the pool always made me question the meaning of it all.

What does God need with a cheap swimming pool anyways?

Do you have to get wet in order to know God?

God isn't here.

...and I'm drowning looking for something certain.

Dead.

"If you die tonight, do you know where you will go?"

You got to get saved. You got to get saved. You got to get saved. Just choose Jesus and you will live for all

eternity. I heard that shit over and over again. The more I heard it...the deader I felt. How could responding to a simple question be the barometer of God's presence?

"You are dead in sin!"

Such words are the ultimate put down in most churches. It sounds like playground taunts more than it sounds like true spirituality. Can't you imagine?

"You're more sinful!"

"No!"

"You're more sinful!"

"No!"

"You're more sinful!"

I feel like I've heard shit like this many times before. Who in their right mind would participate in such lunacy? Certainly not God. God is dead.

Sin is how we find God. Jesus did not know God until he experienced the sin of the world. Something is in the darkness. God is dead. God is gone. God ain't coming back...if God ever was.

There is something out there.

There is something out there.

Amen.

March 1, 2018

What can a slip of paper teach us? Everything?

I found a receipt. My grandmother hasn't known me in years. Yet, on this tiny piece of paper was evidence that she knew me long before she forgot me. Each line told a story. Maternity wear. Baby toys. Baby Outfits. The receipt was dated many months before I was born. My grandmother longed to be a part of my life very. She longed to help care for me. In the womb, my grandmother knew me.

The years were filled with love and nurture. My grandmother didn't miss anything. Baseball. Plays. Birthdays. Graduation. She even picked me up from school for years. It is an understatement to say that she was a part of my life. Now, she is gone. Maybe?

Some time ago, my grandmother stopped talking gibberish for a second. It was as if the clouds lifted for just a second. Looking into my eyes, she said, "Do you love me?" My soul immediately traveled to the words of

Jesus. I said, "Yes." Yes didn't feel like enough. Then I thought about the receipt. Before my grandmother knew me in the womb, she loved me. He love now seemed to be a calling to the great beyond? God seemed to be speaking to me. Love was breaking through. The love in the receipt was still there.

Though she has advanced Alzheimer's, she seems to be drawing closer and closer to God. Maybe in the lunacy of it all is God. Surely, the brain is included in the call to give our all to God. Maybe Alzheimer's patients are bringing God to us. "Do you love me?"

Tonight, I watched "I'll Be Me." The documentary is about country music legend, Glen Campbell. I have always loved his music. Over and over again, I have danced around my house singing about a rhinestone cowboy. Sadly, Campbell recently passed away. The film documents Campbell's struggle with Alzheimer's and his last tour. In every scene, I watched a man

slowly return to God. Memories gave way to being...more specifically, being in God. Beauty filled every seen.

Perhaps.

The end of memory is the beginning of something more...namely, life.

The receipt hasn't answered everything.

Yet.

Is it real?

Amen.

March 7, 2018

Police?/Firefighter Misconduct: The Story/Consequence of a Traffic Stop in Denton, Texas

On February 13, I was driving down the highway with my three of my children and noticed an aggressive white SUV. Distracted, I swerved. I was clueless. Then, the red lights lit up. I was confused. Trying to protect my children, I pulled over. Then, someone with a gun jumped out. I didn't know what to do. When the man got to the door, he was angry and incompetent. I feared that he would hurt my children. As time progressed, I realized that he was a member of the Denton Fire Department. Throughout the stop, I was subjugated to various forms of firefighter misconduct. Once they left and I started shaking, I took my case to the local paper (Denton Record-Chronicle) and they reported on the strange set of circumstances that I experienced. When it came time to go to court, I presented a defense that got

my case thrown out. Last night, I made a presentation before the City Council to help them ascertain what steps need to be taken to make sure that this does not happen again. Now that this particular incident is all but over, I felt the need to write our local paper a concluding letter...

Dear Editor.

Most local media outlets don't have the courage to cover less sensational instances of police/firefighter misconduct. You did. Now, yet another law enforcement agency has been put on notice that their actions have consequences. You cannot target people. You cannot write tickets for violations of laws that don't exist. You cannot bully people. You cannot threaten people's civil rights. You are not above the law.

Ever since I experienced the trauma of the traffic stop by a Denton Fire Investigator (Office of the Fire Marshall), citizen after citizen has contacted me to express that they're standing with me. I am immeasurably grateful. Such sentiments are not unreciprocated. I want the citizens to know that I stand with them. I will not stop fighting until all of our law enforcement agencies become fully accountable to the citizens that they serve. I pray that the Office of the Fire Marshall has learned their lesson.

Misconduct cannot be tolerated. We must stay awake. We must watch. We must pray. This is our time. May the pain that this incident has caused our family be a seed of justice for us all.

Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood

Amen.

March 7, 2018

The Sin of the Ballot: The Evil of Voting

Does God vote?

"Obama is going to save us all." I remember those words so clearly. Amongst the oppressed of Oxford, Mississippi, hope was spelt Obama. I was excited too. I too believed that Obama could save us all. We were all wrong. Obama was not Jesus Christ. I can't believe we expected him to be. I can't believe...in the ballot.

Some might say that voting is a necessary evil. I can't help but call it what it is...evil. Our hope is in the transformation of hearts and minds...not in winning an election. The oppressed always loses when the will of majority is assumed to be the will of the people. Justice

is about the struggle for righteousness not about the struggle to win elections. I don't care about the ballot. I care about the struggle that is beyond flesh and blood. Justice is lived not elected.

I have been so sad to watch so many people struggling for the election of various candidates. I believe their efforts are in vain...perhaps even evil.

I'm always amused to see athletes pray for the victory of their team. Do we honestly believe that God cares about the outcome of a football game or any other game for that matter? I've got to believe that elections are similar. Does God really care about who is elected? The incarnation of God didn't.

Jesus prophetically fought against his government. It didn't matter who was in power. Jesus fought.

The reason that the ballot is so sinful is that it binds us to one candidate or another. Our binding should be to justice alone. If we are living in Christ, we won't care about the ballot.

God doesn't vote.

...or have a favorite football team.

Amen.

March 11, 2018

Hell: A Vision in Blue, White and Red

Behold, I sat in a large room. There was no light. There were only smiles. They seemed to get closer and closer. I couldn't move. I could only pray. I came seeking justice. I came. Was I here by choice? Or a slave to the

colors? The woman seemed so kind. Every wrinkle on her face was a window to the past. She touched my arm to draw me deeper. Though all seemed right, something sat disturbed within me. Closer. Closer. Closer. Then it was time. The announcement pulled us out of our seats. I resisted. The woman tried to lift me. I pulled away. The seat became my sanctuary.

Behold, I saw everyone place their hands over their hearts and extended their middle fingers. Words of evil rejection of God spewed forth. It was all around me. Every word shook me to my core.

I pledge allegiance...

"Fuck God."

to the flag...

"Fuck God."

of the United States of America...

"Fuck God."

and to the republic for which it stands...

"Fuck God."

one nation under God...

"Double Fuck God."

with liberty and justice for all.

"Fuck God."

Every word another way of repeating the same statement...

"Fuck God."

Behold, I saw the repetition of words that were not true. Evil was in their midst. Everyone stared at the blue, white and red. No one looked to God. As the woman sat down, I was able to see who she was. Under her breath she hissed, "Traitor!"

Behold, there was fire coming from the cloth. No one seemed to notice. Everyone just seemed to wrap themselves in the colors. Blue was the drowning lunacy. White was the blankness of intellect. Red was the burning of consciences. The scene played out like it was supposed to. The colors were not created for truth. Such a word cannot coexist with the colors.

Behold, there was war. God fought against this space. Then, I realized where I was...Hell...or the City Council Meeting.

Amen.

March 15, 2018

The Ones Who Will Never Walk Out: The Antidote to Mass Shootings

I'd stayed after school. I had something to do. I guess I always had something to do.

When the news hit, the news hit hard. Blood in the hallways. Death in the cafeteria. Pain everywhere. I couldn't believe it. I just couldn't believe. I tried to pray. I prayed for the victims. I prayed the school. I prayed for the community. Such prayers seemed obvious. I'd always found something somewhere else.

Then, I saw their faces. Pure evil. I heard/hear it over and over again. Dumbasses. Evil is never pure.

Two lives destroyed. Surroundings that bred killers. Where did the anger they had toward their classmates come from? Why was their mental health so poor? Where were their friends? Did nobody notice the pain? Did nobody notice the loneliness? Did nobody notice? Where there lives important to those around them? They didn't start off as mass killers. Why? The question should haunt us all. I think we know the answer. We failed.

We love to deflect all responsibility for these atrocities to the perpetrator and the perpetrator alone. Legal fixes become the cure. Such thinking is devoid of love or logic. Loving those who might carry out these atrocities is the only solution. We can prevent these killers from ever developing. Depravity begins outside the soul and

then roots on the inside. We fail to love. We are responsible.

The nationwide protests led by teenagers have bothered me...not because I think they're wrong...but rather, because I think they've missed part of the point. How does teenage culture/the culture of schools contribute to the growth of these mass killers? I haven't heard anyone talk about this yet. It seems like this is the only lasting solution...loving the outcast.

When the killer/s survive, society screams for blood. Death Penalty! Death Penalty! Death Penalty! Death Penalty! Death Penalty! Death Penalty! We continue to choose death over life. We are the mass killers. We are the teachers of atrocities. We are responsible.

The mass killer of a bible study got the death penalty. We cheered. Just this morning, his sister was found with drugs and weapons at her school. We couldn't

believe it. We are dumbasses. Where was the love for her? Does she matter? We are so worried about the next atrocity that we refuse to do anything of consequence to stop it.

The killers hold the keys to stop the killing.

We would be wise to choose to do more than simply monsterize.

I wish that we had more protests about the need to love those we have deemed, "pure evil."

The ones who will never walk out of prison or death are the cure to keep these mass killings from ever happening again.

Love for pure evil is the only antidote.

Amen.

March 18, 2018

Magic. THE Word of God.

In the beginning...

"She just disappeared!"

Memories of something flood my brain. I used to know exactly what it was. I used to believe. I used to see. I long for those days. Where do I go?

"She didn't disappear."

There are no memories. Nothing ever happened. It was a mirage. It was fake. I refuse to believe. Knowledge has saved me. I will never return to that bullshit.

"Maybe...she disappeared?"

Something is out there. Actually, it was here and now it's there. Everything seems hazy. The world is blurred. I can see. I feel. The heart is my guide. Something just happened.

...was the WORD...

I didn't care anything about going. I resisted. I saw a show. The magician did it all. I couldn't figure everything out. I tried. I looked closer. I tried. I couldn't. I opened my eyes wider. I couldn't. I tried to listen more closely. I couldn't. I took in the smells. I couldn't. I got up to touch it all. I couldn't. The senses failed me. Though I tried, there were some things happening that I just couldn't understand.
Then..."MAGIC!" With the word, the guy just disappeared. I still have no idea what happened...and he never came back.

...the WORD was with God...

Spirituality is magic.

When I put to death the God I could find, I found the God who will never die. Certainty is the murderer of faith. Certainty is not with God...only magic. What good is a God that has to constantly be certain of things? Magic is about never ceasing and always growing. The magic of the mystery guides us all into deeper beauty...it guides us to greater levels of magic. The magic of it all never ceases. The magic is with God.

...and the WORD was God.

God is the great magician. Despite the difficulties of love, God pulls us closer and closer. The mystery woes us. God is ours...the magic is ours...if we will only let go and dream.

Amen.

March 25, 2018

Beware of the Palm Wavers

*Originally Posted on Palm Sunday 2015

The people of Jerusalem waved their palms madly to celebrate the entry of Jesus into their town. Less than seven days later, Jesus was tortured and executed in the same place. Though Palm Sunday is a time to celebrate, I can never get past the fact that the same palm wavers either participated in or did nothing to stop the execution of Jesus. The lesson of the juxtaposition should be one of caution.

Emily and I don't have a tremendous amount of close friends. We are too skeptical for that. Truth be known, we have experienced far too many showdowns where no one showed up to help. We have known many palm wavers who stand on the sidelines waving palms at us in the moments of triumph and who run for the hills when times get difficult. In our ministry, we have learned to love generously and trust cautiously.

How did so many people praise Jesus and either participate or do nothing when he was executed less than a week later? While certainly a complex question, I think one should never underestimate the desire that humans have to praise and be praised by institutions. The people decided that power was more important than love.

We live in a day and age where everyone wants to talk about power. The palm wavers thought that Jesus was about power and they wanted to be on the winning

team. When everyone realized that he was about love, the execution went pretty smoothly. Thousands of years later, people largely remain the same.

Love is always going to be far more dangerous than power.

Beware of the palm wavers who might try to convince you otherwise.

Amen.

March 28, 2018

Good Friday's Execution

Good Friday always beckons us to think deeply about our role in the execution.

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. Everyone wanted justice. Believing some level of due process was necessary to keep from giving their power over to the mob, local officials restrained themselves. Everyone knew that this

was a big one. Insult after insult flew. 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. 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 any longer, he was there.

There was no question what everyone wanted. Death was in the air. 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 own 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. The religious people seemed to be the ones shouting the loudest. 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, the man 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. But this narrative is not about Jesus. This is a narrative of Rosendo Rodriguez, convicted of killing two women and stuffing their bodies into suitcases. Texas executed him last Tuesday. God was there and so was I. Under the rain, I watched. While I cannot say what Rodriguez' crimes meant for his soul, I can say what his execution means for ours.

The message of God died on that gurney. We killed our neighbor. We damned our persecutor. Surely God hates what we have done. Like it or not, our death penalty makes killers of us all. How are we any different than he? Only abolition can save us. The offer of life is on the table. Will we take the deal?

Amen.

March 31, 2018

I AM: The Resurrection of Jesus Christ & The Deadly Consequences of Liberal Theology

The room was electric with anticipation. Every eye was glued to the stage. Everything but the speaker was a waste of time. We were about to hear one of the greatest liberal theologians of all time. Finally, he arose. I couldn't believe how old he was. The pictures made him look so young. I guess that's a trick of publishing. Keep recycling an old picture to make the writer appear relevant. When he started speaking, I wasn't surprised to hear a bunch of church jokes. I was surprised that they took so long. I was ready for the meat. Then it hit. For multiple hours, I listened to John Shelby Spong ravenously deconstruct everything he could think of. By the time he was finished, everything was figured out and there was nothing left to believe in. Jesus was dead and that was it. No hope. Just death.

I didn't know what to believe. The stars made me dizzy. The fundamentalist had sown the evil of certainty into my soul. I cried out to God. Immediately, I was taken to another place. I saw. I...saw. Rev. Jim Jones stood up to slowly deconstruct all ideas of God until God was no more. Ultimately, Jones was the only God left standing. All mystery and magic was gone. Death and tragedy came quickly. Then, I saw a great litany of liberal theologians destroying the magic and mystery of the resurrection. I begged God to not make it so. Then I heard words thunder out of the sky, "I am." My eyes were opened. To believe in the personhood of every individual...to believe in the "I am" of every person...is to believe that life never ends. Einstein was one of the scientists who revealed to us, "Life (matter) (energy) is never created nor destroyed." Science proves the resurrection of us all. I believe in the magic of the resurrection of Jesus Christ because in it I find the magic of the resurrection of us all. I will not let fundamentalism destroy the resurrection. I will not let

fundamentalism destroy our hope. Jesus is alive. We are alive. Jesus was the death of death. We are the death of death. The resurrection never stops.

Jesus is risen.

I am.

Amen.

April 5, 2018

Fire Before the Fort Worth City Council: In Response to the Beating of Forrest Curry by FWPD

Good Evening, My name is Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood. I'm not here to dialogue with you. I'm not here to talk about policy or provide recommendations. I'm here to see if you have soul. We keep on getting video after video

after video out of Fort Worth, Texas...giving this town that is often called "Cowtown" evidence of why such a name is appropriate...because y'all treat people like animals. A CLOSED FIST! A CLOSED FIST! A CLOSED FIST! Imagine if one of your children got drunk and was subdued on the ground... Particularly my white brothers and sisters... Imagine if it was your child (at college...first time being drunk)... A CLOSED FIST! OVER AND OVER AND OVER! You see we are no longer at a place for dialogue. We are at a place to check the pulse of this city council! We are at a place were we want to hear from you! Do you care?!? DO YOU CARE?!? How in the world could I bring my children without fearing a serious altercation with the police? Who wants to go to a place where they get a hashtag next to their name for entering? This is not a time for dialogue. This is a time for doing. This is a time for being. How many more videos are we going to have to see? MAYOR?!? How many more videos are we going to have to see? Every time I hear you speak on the television...it is a statement

of moderation. I need you to step. I need for my family to feel comfortable in this city. I need for y'all to understand...I was at the front of the line...I organized that protest on July 7...I saw the shots...I saw what happens when a city refuses to address police brutality. That is what happens! I am here to offer you a warning...a warning... If this continues... You cannot expect a population to get pummeled with violence over and over again without responding violently. This is your warning.

Amen.

April 8, 2018

The Righteous Suicide: On Chosen Sacrifice

I thought about suicide.

Darkness fills the room. Light floods my eyes. I am blinded for the moment. I sit up in bed. Is anyone there? Squinting, I see something in the distance. Sight returns. I see a man burning. I hear God. I've never seen such righteousness.

"Kill his ass!" "Let me at him!" "Rip his dick off!" "He won't be teaching that bullshit around here anymore." "Who in the fuck does he think he is?" Fire spewed out of their throats. Sweat dropped from their lips. Rage filled their souls. They grabbed. They kicked. They drug. They bit. The cliff was rapidly approaching. Death was certain. Then, Jesus somehow slipped away. In the midst of it all, the disciples hid to escape death. None of them could believe it when he returned. They were even more shocked when he declared, "My time is not yet here." His time? He was just a dead man. Now, he's declaring that he picks his own time? What manner of man is this?

Suicide is a intentional death at a chosen time by a chosen method. Jesus decided to die when he knew it was time by the method of execution. Such an argument is bolstered by the fact that Jesus didn't choose to die at a chosen time by a chosen method earlier. He could have ran. He could have hid. He could have done so many other things than what he did. Jesus chose his intentional death. Jesus committed suicide by proxy. Jesus committed a righteous suicide.

"I have been to the mountaintop..." As the crowd cheered, Dr. King sat down and resigned himself to what was ahead. Death was closing in. Dr. King did not hesitate to move forward. When we intentionally move forward with a chosen death, we are committing suicide. When the bullet pierced his body, Dr. King died in the same manner that Jesus did...by righteous suicide.

What happens when a suicide is universally condemned? Does the perception of others determine the righteousness of the act? Righteousness seems to deal in motive not perception.

Jim Jones led hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of people to commit suicide or be murdered. Every single one of them were told that they were dying for each other and as a witness to the world. Many, if not most, believed these words to be true and laid down their lives for others. These deaths were righteous deaths...righteous suicides. Those pictures of the countless bodies might look different if the viewer considered that many of the dead actually followed the way of Jesus.

The path. The way. The journey. They all lead to the same place. Giving life so that others might have life. Jesus calls us to give our lives...our bodies...our everything. There is no other way.

Righteous suicide is sometimes the culmination of a life well lived...in the pursuit of the call of Jesus. Be careful how you judge. The departed might know Jesus far better than you do.

I arose out of my bed. Within a few steps, I was in the parking lot of a strip mall. I saw him pour the gasoline. I saw him light the flame. I saw him explode. I knew I should be horrified. I wasn't. The light drew me closer and closer and closer. Ultimately, I ended up in the flames. I felt the burn. I felt everything. I felt eternity. There God found me and in God I was found.

Charles Moore.

I thought about suicide.

Amen.

April 11, 2018

The Ultimate Thing: Parental Advisory / Explicit Theology

Creek. Creek. Creek. I knew where I was going. Maybe I didn't. Every step brought me closer. Though I'd traveled up there many times...the summit was different and different again and again...something new was always bubbling up in my soul. Though I'd been up here many times before, I knew that this was the first time. The old door always stuck. It was as if it always wanted to reminisce for a second before giving way to a whole new world. I sat there for a moment. Well, I don't really know how long I stood there. Nevertheless, the door popped open. I assured it that it was often on my mind. There were many memories in that door. Maybe I always left a little bit of me with it. Maybe not enough. I couldn't find the light. The darkness just would not

give. I embraced it and it embraced me. Were my steps guided? It sure did seem like it. When I touched the bulb, I realized that one flick of my wrist would mean goodbye to my friend. For a few moments, I paused to thank the darkness. This would not be our last time. Surveying the dusty room, my heart spilled onto the floor. I started to move...but before I did...something moved me. The boxes were so beautiful. Many I recognized. Most I didn't. I closed my eyes. I released my feet. My body was no longer mine. I'd given it over to something else. Creek. Creek. Creek. The noises became sounds of worship. Everything in me was compelled to one box...to one thing. I knew that the thing was in me and I in it. I knew that this was the way. As I knelt before it, every breath was a prayer. My hands reached out with no knowledge of what I might find. The cardboard was electric. We were one. I lifted the lid piece by piece. I felt something going on. My body began to shake. I opened my being. Every crevice of me began to tingle. I couldn't believe my eyes. God

was a thing.

Amen.

April 12, 2018

The Devil is a Christian: On Immigration

In my teenage years, gas was freedom. Without it, I was stuck at the house. With it, I was the master of my domain. I'd saved up my money all week. I had to make sure I had gas.

Holding the pump, I dreamed about what I was going to say when I picked her up. I wanted her to know that I was really interested...but I didn't want to scare her off. When I returned from my dreams, I looked up to see that warning.

You know the warning. The one that tells you every possible way you could blow yourself up while pumping gas. They don't warn you about the people around you.

In the midst of it all, I heard someone call my name. It was an older guy I knew from church. He was pissed and he wanted me to be pissed to. "Do we still live in the United States of America!!!" The languages bothered him. The colors bothered him. The cultures bothered him. When he couldn't get the pump to work, he called the attendant. He couldn't understand their reply. In that moment, he completely lost it. "Fuck Immigrants!!!" When he jumped in his car, I was shocked. I wish I could have said something. As he sped off, he yelled at me, "That shit is in the Bible boy!"

Little did he know, I was about to pick up an immigrant.

I don't know if Jesus was at that gas station...but...I do know that the Devil was...and he was a Christian.

Ever since then, I've known that discussions about immigration and Christians don't go together. There are too many Devils in that camp. I am much more interested in what Jesus has to say on the subject.

I think back to that day often. What would I say if I had it to do all over again? In my older years, I've arrived at a firm conclusion. When he said, "Fuck Immigrants!!!"...I would have turned to him and said, "Fuck You!!!"

Amen.

April 16, 2018

David Buckel: The Burning Christ

David Buckel self-immolated on Saturday, April 14, 2018 around 6:30am at Prospect Park in New York City.

I didn't know David Buckel. I only know his fire. That is enough.

Traveling throughout the land, David healed people. His medicine was fire. Repeatedly, David fought against evil to secure the rights of LGBT persons. His miracles often took place at weddings. That doesn't mean he stopped there. David spent the later days of his ministry fighting to save the environment. On issue after issue and with person after person, David gave his life. There is no greater love than to give your life. David loved.

On the night before he was given unto death, David struggled with what he was about to do next. Can't breathe. Can't drink. Can't see. Can't hear. Can't feel. David knew that something drastic was necessary to wake people up. The environment was imploding and

people didn't care. David grew more and more ready for what had to be done. Throughout his body, David could feel the anxiety. Wondering if there was any other way, he turned inward. After every possible thought, he knew what the answer was. Observing the environment around him, David declared, "Into your hands I commend my Spirit." With that, he was on his way.

The sidewalk felt different tonight. It was as if his feet stuck with every step. The agony of picking each foot up was overwhelming. Yet, David continued. Something seemed to push him along. Unsure of what it was, David continued. Step. Step. Step. There were numerous times that David thought about laying down the supplies. Love is what held them up. Picking up his computer, David sent his final words to the world. It basically said, "May my love for our planet ignite in you a love for our planet." Not too much later, David arrived at the hill. It was time.

Kneeling, David poured a fossil fuel all over his body. After numerous thoughts about his love for all of us, David struck a match. Though the fire was immense, it was no match for the fire that burned within him. In those moments, David Buckel shared his love with the world. I can still see his flame.

"For David so loved the world that he gave his only life/love...so that whosoever believes in love will not perish but be one with justice forever."

God/Love occasionally incarnates amongst us. Such a phenomenon is called Christ. You will know it by its' love. Can't you see it?

The Burning Christ will never die.

Amen.

more info:
https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/14/nyregion/david-buckel-dead-fire.html

April 20, 2018

The Story of the Other Thief on the Cross or Jesus was My Murderer

Things crashed. Money disappeared. Pain exploded. I was left with nothing. Everything crashed. Home was no more. For much time, I tried to do odd jobs to try to survive. In a society of religious people, honesty just didn't pay. One morning, I woke up in the dirt. I could barely move. From that day forward, I decided to steal as long as I could. Bread. Water. Fruit. Vegetables. I stole whatever I needed to survive. Then, I met a homeless woman with children. I decided to steal for them too.

How could I just let those little kids die? Things were going good until I stole from the wrong cat.

Sneaking up under his table, I grabbed a large piece of meat. The man yelled. The man chased. The man cried out. Before I knew it, the entire market was chasing me. I ran until I could run no more. Finally, I collapsed. Everyone jumped on top of me. As I lost consciousness, I was screaming out that I was just trying to eat. It didn't matter. Money was more important than life. Before I knew it, I woke up in front of the authorities.

I could barely. I tried to explain. Before long, I realized that the man that I stole from was the brother of the man that I stood before to be judged. I hadn't even stood there that long before he declared me guilty and told the guards to prepare me for my death. Blood was all that I knew. Humanity was dead. As death was almost upon me, I was given a cross. Every step was excruciating. Constantly, I wished that they would go ahead and kill

me. Pain. Pain. Pain. Eternity passed with every step. I prayed...louder...louder...louder. I heard the voice of God. "Jesus will save you." While I had no idea who he was talking about, I figured I better look for Jesus. Hope got me to the top of the hill. Nails put me up on that cross.

The agony was making me go in and out of consciousness. When I finally realized that it was Jesus who was next to me, I cried out for help. Immediately, he started spouting some bullshit about heaven. I begged him to stop and get me down from the cross. God told me that he could do it and I had faith. When he did nothing, I knew that he was responsible for what came next. In my final moments, I cried out to Jesus one more time. From his cross, he just watched me die. I can assure you that it was no paradise. All the shit you've heard is exaggerated at best and flat out lies at worse. Nobody has recounted like I have.

Murder is a premeditated act of killing. Jesus had a long time to think about the situation before he killed me by doing absolutely nothing. Accomplice or murderer? Who cares? The fact remains that he could have saved me and didn't. Ultimately, I'd call it murder. Regardless, I'm dead.

Amen.

April 22, 2018

Black Breasts and White Impotence

*This piece is based on an incident that recently happened to 25-year-old Chikesia Clemons at a Waffle House in Saraland, Alabama

The hour was late. Though she wanted to go to bed, she was still hungry. Every true Southerner knows about Waffle House. I know I've found myself there many times. Desiring something a little quicker than a full service meal, she had placed a meal to go. Sitting at the counter, she noticed the nasty stares that the waitress kept on giving her. She knew what it meant. Every true Southerner does. She was surprised. She'd just been in the restaurant the night before and didn't have any problem. When the food finally arrived, the nasty waitress wanted her to pay fifty cents for the plastic utensils. Outraged, she refused. After further exchange, she demanded the contact information for the district manager. While she waited, multiple police officers entered the restaurant and immediately became hostile. Suddenly, they grabbed her and slammed her on the ground. In the midst of the unprovoked attack, they ripped her shirt and her breasts crashed onto the floor. The officers seemed to enjoy the spectacle of it all. Ultimately, arresting her and charging her. In the midst

of such evil, the people in the restaurant just sat and ate their waffles.

Can you imagine if she were white?

What if those breasts had been white?

This shit would have never happened.

The woman would not have been rude/racist.

The plastic utensils would have been free.

The police would never have been called.

The other customers would not have ignored a woman getting her ass kicked.

The answer is clear.

This shit would never have happened.

White breasts could have saved her.

Black breasts did not.

The impotence of whiteness is represented by all of
those pieces of shit that remained seated at their tables.

Amen.

April 27, 2018

Henry County: Land of White Dreams and Black Nightmares

Every blow looks like all the rest. A black person being brutalized by white cops. You can hear the desperation. You can hear the rage. You can hear the racists. The brutalization of Desmond Marrow is not an isolated incident. This explosion has been brewing for quite some time.

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"For God so loved the world..." Growing up, I heard it incessantly. We were a large church, though not large for someone to come down the aisle every Sunday. But when they did, everyone celebrated. We just knew that God had brought us a piece of the world. That is, until the world started to include black folk.

In the days of my youth, our community started to change rapidly. The City of Atlanta seemed to shift down. Clayton County became a scary place for racists and they started moving to Henry County. Much of our church joined churches a couple of exists down the Ferociously resistant to change, our church started to dwindle rapidly. Nobody could figure out what was going on. That is, until they did. Finally, somebody said, "Let's just invite the community in!" Everybody left was all in, until our first black member joined. I remember people standing and leaving. They all went to the land of white dreams, Henry County.

The brutal beating of Desmond Marrow by the Henry County Police Department doesn't surprise me. In fact, it wouldn't surprise me if some of those officers once went to church with me. In their faces, I saw the same faces of those who stormed out of our church. When fear and racism mix, violence comes quickly. White dreams become black nightmares. Whether they know it or not,

these brutalizing officers are racists. They are defending the white dreams that folks migrated for. Many cannot believe what they're experiencing. They moved to run from black people. Now, black folk are back. There will be consequences if the racism continues.

Years after growing up in Clayton County, I moved to North Texas. Since my migration, I have become a leader in the movement against police brutality. On July 7, 2016, I organized a large rally in Dallas. The mood was soaring. Progress was ours. I was up front. Shots rang out. Not far from were I stood, I saw a bloody tragedy unfold. Five officers were dead and untold others were injured. Racism brought us unspeakable tragedy.

In the midst of it all, I thought about Clayton County. The place where I was taught to embrace change. I hope Henry County thinks about its neighbor as well.

Desmond Marrow didn't deserve this. Now, Desmond Marrow deserves to see swift change. Officers must be fired. Officers must be prosecuted. The Police Department must be reformed. Desmond Marrow's life must be restored. If Henry County will stop fighting change and embrace their community, they can avert the tragedy of Dallas. No more white dreams. No more black nightmares. If they do not, greater violence is inevitable.

Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood
Theologian and Activist
North Texas

May 4, 2018

NRA! PRESIDENT TRUMP! WE ARE GOING TO SHUT YOU DOWN!!!!!!! / Words from Dallas

*From press conference against the proliferation of guns at Dallas City Hall on May 3, 2018

Good morning. Let's get started. It hasn't been too long since I was with my friend Dominique Alexander organizing a rally. you see, on July 7, 2016 we were marching peacefully down the street...we were collaborating with our police department...we were exercising our first amendment rights. I was in the middle of the front of the protest when shots rang out. Brother Micah Johnson struggled with mental issues. The Brother should have never had a gun in the first place. The Brother needed help and we gave him a gun. 5 officers were slain in our streets. The blood of 5 officers flowed downtown. AND PRESIDENT TRUMP IS GOING TO COME TO THIS CITY?!?! AND TALK ABOUT GUNS?!?! HOW WE NEED MORE PEOPLE WITH GUNS?!?! THE NRA IS GOING TO COME TO THIS CITY?!?! AND TALK ABOUT GUNS?!?! THAT WE NEED MORE GUNS IN THESE STREETS?!?! It is that type of

thinking...It is that type of mentality...that led to the deaths of these 5 officers in this city. We can't talk about the tragedy of July the 7th without talking about the idiotic policies that put a gun in the hands of Micah Johnson. I am tired...I am worn out...I am exasperated...with politicians talking about the need to end mass shootings...and providing the guns that are used to carry these shootings out. When I see all of these people proclaiming their faith in God...I am reminded that they have forgotten the old adage about loving your neighbor as yourself. How can you love your neighbor as yourself and keep supplying guns to their neighborhood? You can't. I have one message I want to leave with you. NRA! PRESIDENT TRUMP! WE ARE GOING TO SHUT YOU DOWN!!!!!!!

Amen.

May 7, 2018

Rallying in Dallas: DAMN THE NRA!

*From May 4, 2018 at Dallas City Hall

Good Evening. We've gathered here tonight to talk about guns. It wasn't too long ago that we had a conversation about guns. It wasn't too long ago that here in this very city we had a major tragedy involving guns. In these very streets...we marched for justice for Philando Castille and Alton Sterling. We were demanding justice with all that we had. We were demanding a reprieve from gun violence. As we got to the end of the march, gun violence visited us. Five officers murdered in our streets. Blood running down the streets of Dallas. AND THE NRA HAS THE NERVE TO COME TO OUR CITY!!! PRESIDENT TRUMP HAS THE NERVE TO COME TO OUR CITY!!! I don't want anybody in that convention hall to talk about these five offivers... Because it is there ideas...it is the ideas of President

Trump...it is the ideas of the NRA that were responsible for that tragedy...for the deaths of those five officers...and for every instance of gun violence that takes place. Why would anyone need an assault weapon? People want to talk about safety. These weapons are about killing as many people as possible. I am a minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I am a follower of the Gospel of Jesus Christ...there are so many people in that convention hall and throughout our society claiming the same thing. Jesus talks about...loving your neighbor. How in the hell can you love your neighbor as yourself and keep sending guns to their neighborhood? What does it mean to be angry? Tonight, I want you to know that I am angry. There is nothing wrong with being angry. In fact...if you're not angry...you don't have a soul. It is in our soul that we figure out how to love those who have experienced the tragedy of gun violence. It is in our soul that we begin to work. It is in our soul that we begin to think about what we can do. It is in our soul that we put one foot in

front of the other and march to change our world. As I finish up, I have one message that I want to leave with you.

DAMN THE NRA!

DAMN THEIR MONEY!

DAMN THEIR POLICIES!

AND

DAMN THEIR GUNS!

Amen.

May 10, 2018

Jump or Burn?: On Dr. David Goodall

Do you think you could do it? Do you think that you could press a button to end your life? Most couldn't.

Terror filled the air. Nobody was getting out of the skyscraper alive. The fire got closer and closer. The flames birthed two options...jump or burn.

"Hell awaits those who would dare defy the plan of God." I heard it repeatedly. I guess they didn't want us to kill ourselves...or perhaps misery loves company.

Pain has never been the will of God. How are we to fight back? How far would you go?

Earlier today, internationally renowned botanist and ecologist Dr. David Goodall died. This was no ordinary demise. Dr. Goodall had traveled from Australia to Switzerland, to end his life at a clinic dedicated to death. Dr. Goodall lived his life a fierce proponent of

euthanasia. When the 104-year-old's health declined past the quality of life that he desired, he chose the only other option he had...suicide. Dr. Goodall saw only two choices...jump or burn.

There is nowhere that God is not. Nothing can separate us from the love of God. Hell is out of the question. Love is not. Our job is not to judge those who seek escape from their suffering. Our job is to love people no matter what decisions they make.

In his final moments, Dr. Goodall listened to Beethoven's "Ode to Joy." I know of few more beautiful songs. As he slipped the bonds of humanity, he was healed and made whole.

Whether you agree with Dr. Goodall's choice or not, it was his choice to make.

One day...it might also be yours.

Jump or burn?

Amen.

more info: http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-44069885

May 11, 2018

Jesus Smokes Weed: Rallying for Marijuana

*Prepared remarks for the DFW Marijuana March 2018 / Delivered May 12, 2018

Good afternoon. It is interesting for me to find myself amongst you. I don't smoke. However, I do know how to recognize injustice. I am a Minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I have committed myself to fighting for the

rights of all. While I don't know if Jesus and the disciples smoked or not. However, I do know that Jesus is standing here smoking with you. Jesus is smoking with those who smoke to lift their spirits. Jesus is smoking with those who smoke to lift their health. Jesus is even smoking with those seeking to lift their mind. Jesus is in the lifting business. Those who are not...are peddlers of bullshit...not followers of Jesus. Surely the center of the message of Jesus is to love your neighbor as you love yourself... How can you love your neighbor as yourself and stand asidehkki7gym78my7h7jgtgjg68j6gj6g78687tg8g8678867676676676786767768676767867868678678676876547vbtcfcxbczdgXH4444444444444444444444444444404040040404040404040404004040040404004040404004040400404040040040

and withhold medical marijuana from the sick? How can you love your neighbor as yourself and participate in the removal of children from families because the parents smoke marijuana? The answer to these questions and many more are you can't. How can you love your neighbor as yourself? By granted them unfettered access to a beautiful creation of God...marijuana. I want you to know that I stand with you. I encourage anyone who has a soul to join me. Together, we will win. May God damn all that stands in our way. Jesus smokes weed.

Amen.

Submission. Submission is what battle is always about...making the enemy submit.

Unexplainable. Unexplainable calls are always forced to submit...submit to explanation.

Death. Death is always about a denial that seeks to submit the deaths of others to explainable circumstances...until we can figure out how to make death die.

Death will not submit.

Death will not be explained.

Death will not die.

So here we are.

Night after night, he was tormented by what he'd experienced. There was nowhere to go. There was nothing to do. There was only the lostness and nothingness of the present hour. There was only his

misery....until he met his savior. Each shot made him powerful. Each shot declared his courage. Each shot declared his importance. The guns were the tools of his salvation. He prayed about the submissions...he prayed about the explanations...he prayed about mortality. His prayers became actions. The guns were loaded. The door was opened. The steps were taken. The blasts rang out.

Submission motivated.

Explanation demanded.

Death lived.

Every call is an adventure. Cowboys love the force. Every roll of the tire is the sound of hoofbeats. Every siren is a battle cry. Every encounter is a showdown. Energy flowed throughout his body as he skid to a stop. Jumping out of the saddle, he ran. Out of nowhere, a

naked man jumped out at him. Within seconds, he shot and killed the stranger. There was only one threat at the scene...the cowboy.

Submission motivated.

Explanation demanded.

Death lived.

He felt that there was only one way out. His body was failing. He knew that there was only one way out. His mind was failing. He increasingly believed in nothing. His soul was failing. Everything was failing. He had to act while he still could. The journey was long. The destination a small room of exit. The medicine was deadly.

Submission motivated.

Explanation demanded.

Death lived.

I had to go. I had to see her. The flight was long. The darkness was overwhelming. There was nowhere to go. There was nothing. There was only me. There was only her. Would I get there fast enough? God doesn't even seem to know.

Submission motivated.

Explanation demanded.

Death lived.

Amen.

May 22, 2018

Delayed Flight

Journeys through darkness are never light. They weigh on your soul. The colors fly by. The gas station. The grocery store. The strip club. The drive is a preparation for the destination. Nothing is light.

Everyone stares. What are you doing here? I just need. I put the sustenance in the cart. Who is checking me out? I see. It's over. I'm gone.

Destination draws closer or maybe closer draws closer to destination. It was late. I opened the door. I was transported to the days of my youth. Sitting in the kitchen. Watching that little television. Praying for more. I couldn't stay there. I had to take my medicine. I had to brush my teeth. I had to go to bed. Darkness was so close. I embraced it.

I saw her before I closed my eyes. The hospital bed engulfed her. Her skin hung like a hammock. Her eyes stayed buried in her eyelids. Her breath was departing. Her. Her. It was her. Really?

Dreams came quickly. Nightmares did too. Mine eyes beheld the sign. Exit. I journeyed toward the door. The handle was cold. The door was stiff. I tried as hard as I could to get it open. Then, I felt a hand behind me. With a swift kick in the ass, I was in. I didn't open my eyes. I couldn't. I didn't know what I would see. The fingers pushed me further. I was awake. Finally, I could see. I didn't want to.

Move! Talk! Stand! She couldn't do any of them. In the midst of a bed that wasn't supposed to be there, she shuffled toward the end. I told her that she was shuffling to a beginning. I didn't believe my own words. I guess belief is complicated in times like these. She was

hungry. The sustenance made her grunt loudly. Every bite was a bit of energy to further her demise. The shell was empty. Then, I cried out loudly, "I love you very much." The response was divine. Code from the great beyond...a grunt.

May 24, 2018

The Offense of a Backyard Sign: Real Patriotism in a Time of Fakers

"Thou shall have no other Gods but me..." One of the earliest teachings of the known God is to not have other Gods. I would imagine that the worship of a God of cloth would especially enrage God. Hypocrisy has long been at the center of this experiment known as the United States of America. From the beginning, we have declared our love of God and our hatred of our

neighbor. Genocide of Native populations. Slavery of persons of color. Incessant injustices perpetuated against marginalized and oppressed peoples. To say that we have not lived up to the values that we espouse is an understatement. The flag that so many have worshiped has become a symbol of terror to countless peoples. God demands fidelity because anything other than fidelity leads to brutality. God is not red. God is not white. God is not blue. God is God and the United States of America is not.

Board after board. Nail after nail. Screw after screw. I didn't think we would ever finish. After multiple minor injuries, we finally nailed the last boards into our masterpiece. When we got down and walked a short distance to look up and admire our work, one of our young children suggested putting a "justice message" on the side facing the road. The next day, I painted one panel white and inscribed the words, "End Police Brutality" over that. I knew that a call from code

enforcement would be imminent. Sure enough, one of my racist/ ignorant neighbors got pissed about the message and reported the sign. When the code enforcement officer called to tell me that the sign was against code, I asked him what was not, he quickly responded, "Flags." From there, I traveled to a local junk store that always has everything and found a huge old USA flag. When I got home, I brought all five of our children in to make sure I painted it just right. In the midst of scorching heat, I secured the flag well over twelve feet in the air. It was a spiritual experience. God was with us. Those who idolize country more than God were not.

The first angry neighbor stopped by less than ten minutes after the thing was up. "Do you know that you are defacing our flag?" Yes." "You're ok with that?" "Yes...and I'm not ok with the flag of a nation that continues to brutalize persons of color." The disabled Navy veteran proceeded to give me a lecture about

patriotism. I responded that there is nothing more patriotic than fierce dissent in a free society. "I'm going to report you! This is Texas!" I guess she didn't know that desecration of the flag is protected under the First Amendment.

While there have been others (including an explosion amongst local folks on Facebook), I am not fazed. I guess these folks don't realize that injustice/police brutality desecrates all of this red, white and blue shit that people demand that you muster. Our flag isn't going anywhere. I actually believe it is an incarnational representation of my faith. "Thou shall have no other Gods before me..."

Surely, the lives of persons of color are more important than any piece of cloth.

Multiple people have mentioned that Memorial Day is coming up. Great! Could there be a greater memorial

than making sure that all people in our nation get to live into the ideals that so many have sacrificed for?

Be a real patriot. End police brutality.

Amen.

May 27, 2018

The United States Flag at the Front of YOUR Church is Blasphemous

*Originally Published May 2014

A United States soldier processed the flag of the United States of America in to our sanctuary as we stood at attention singing "God Bless America." The veterans in our midst were honored as we sang the "Star Spangled

Banner." The "Battle Hymn of the Republic" proceeded the pastor's fiery sermon on the coming destruction of our beloved nation if we "...did not turn from our wicked ways." Somehow gays, abortion and popular culture always made it into these services...but that is another story. The service concluded with an invitation to salvation as the congregation sang "God of Our Fathers." To say that the services of my Baptist youth were precariously wrapped in nationalism is an understatement...we believed that God's military was the United States military. Despite the fact that we did so much else that was problematic, my mind remains focused on the United States flag on that gold stand up on the altar.

In many Memorial Day services throughout our nation, some of those who have fallen victim to our thirst for violence and power will be honored and celebrated. We will remember the soldiers and attempt to reconcile their sacrifice with our faith. Unfortunately, there will

be little conversation about peace and preventing the deaths of any one else. There will be no conversation of the millions and millions of people who have died as a result of our failed foreign policies and military interventions. The words of Jesus will be forgotten amidst the words of patriotism and nationalism.

No one will recite Jesus' words in Matthew 26:52, "...those who live by the sword will die by the sword." Matthew 5:44 and Jesus' reminder to "love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us" will not make an appearance. Least of all will we remember the millions and millions of people who have died in places with names like Hiroshima, Hanoi, Waziristan, Nagasaki, Kabul and Baghdad in the infernos created by our bombs...those "least of these" dead because we failed to see Jesus in their midst. No these words won't be remembered... and I know most congregations won't be talking beyond the soldiers who have died and will miss

the opportunity to have a conversation about the wider call of Jesus to peace and justice.

My mind wonders back to that flag though. To put the United States flag on the altar of a church is to insinuate that somehow the United States has a claim to the grace of God that other nations and peoples do not. To put the United States flag at the front blurs that glorious declaration "For God so loved the world..." Can you imagine what someone from another country thinks when they see that United States flag up front at our churches? There is no nationality barrier to the altar of God. Jesus does not love the United States more than any other nation...to put a flag at the front and bless the atrocities committed by an incredibly powerful people in the name of Jesus is blasphemous.

A real conversation about the non-violent love of Jesus and our purpose as followers can only happen when we take down the United States flags in our sanctuaries that

stand in the way. If we want to truly honor slain soldiers we will stop perpetuating the nationalism that killed them. So let's toss out all the flags and have a real Memorial Day next year...one that memorializes and celebrates a time when we began to emulate Jesus' love for all people and put to death the nationalism that fooled us into thinking that violence can bring about peace.

Amen.

May 29, 2018

Existence as Threat

"Hell yeah!" The kids were pumped up. The park is a sacred space for our family. Communion meets us at the swings. Baptism meets us at the creek. Worship meets us everywhere. In such a spirit, I peddled swiftly.

Upon arrival, everybody jumped out of the cart. I was scared that somebody was going to get hurt. They were not.

Playing is strenuous. No doubt about it. I had to sit down. Exhausted, I threw myself down on a bench. I didn't notice the woman sitting next to me. I was a little surprised when she spoke. After exchanging some pleasantries, the subject of police brutality came up. For the life of me, I can't remember how we got there. Regardless, we did. The woman explained that her husband was a cop. I found her discussion of their hopes and realities to be interesting. Attempting to be transparent, I explained that I was an ant-police brutality activist and that I had organized the protest were the five Dallas officers were killed. We continued to talk and then departed with further pleasantries.

This conversation transpired at least a year ago.

Just this past weekend, the officer got in touch with me. He declared that I had researched, tracked down and threatened his family. This man had constructed an entire narrative around a completely innocent/random (and almost boring) conversation. I was shocked that he was so afraid (afraid for his life) of having a high profile activist living in his neighborhood. He's the one with the gun, right? I don't know whether to pray for the cop or encourage him to seek psychiatric help for fierce anxiety. When I offered to meet up with him and talk things through, he repeatedly said no. Even after I apologized and explained the interaction, he was still afraid.

The conversation made me realize that there can be tremendous power in mere existence.

Love justice and you will forever be a threat.

Amen.

June 1, 2018

The Death of a Stranger

Train done gone.

The mind is a precious thing. Never is such a fact more obvious than when it starts to shutdown. Memory. Function. Relations. Those who loved the person are eventually forced to love a stranger. It doesn't matter what the sickness is...the diagnosis for the remnant is heartbreak. The journey doesn't stop with death. If so, one would be able to simply let the person go. In fact death is a further affliction for the survivors, because one is left to the storm of their own memories. Do I remember the person before the stranger? Did I love the stranger? Did the stranger love me? The stranger captures the mind and refuses to let it go. The questions

are suffocating and there are always more to be asked. The stranger haunts you. Until, strange is your home and strange is the only path forward.

I remember the first time she forgot me. I'd lived many places over the years. I guess I'm a vagabond of sorts. Regardless, I called her on my birthday. I knew that she might not remember this year. I was surprised when she didn't even know who I was. It was stranger than strange. Throughout my life, she had been the drum major of celebrations. How could she forget? Though she was oblivious, pain crept into our relationship. It's difficult to be around those who cause you pain. It's even stranger to want to be around them.

Have you ever seen someone hopelessly chasing a train or plane or bus that's already departed? We are the runners...chasing something that is no longer there.

The shit.

The falls.

The choking.

The sleeping.

The anger.

The eyes.

The mumbling.

The stranger.

Amen.

June 6, 2018

A Homily for Gladys Dillard, My Grandmother

What are we doing here? Really... What are we doing here? I look down. I see a box. In that box is a corpse and that is about it. Gladys Dillard has done gone and she ain't coming back. So, why are we here? If it ain't about Gladys, then who is it about? It's about us. It's about what we can learn. It's about what we can feel. It's about what we can know. It's about who we can be. This gathering is not about Gladys...she is gone. We are here to see if we can take a little bit of Gladys with us out into the world. Can we rub up against each other and find a little love at this hour? It's the only reason that we are here. We are gathered for each other. Shall we love each other in spite of our differences...or better yet...because of our differences?

Anyone who knows Gladys and I...knows that our differences grew with time. Regardless, she never

wavered in her love. There are lessons from her love that will remain with me forever...

Some years ago, there was a battle to save the life of Troy Davis...a death row inmate who had been convicted of killing Savannah Police Officer Mark McPhail. There were many questions about the case and many were involved in the movement to save his life. During the campaign, I stopped by my grandparent's house...with my "I am Troy Davis" shirt on. Upon seeing my shirt, Gladys expressed her disgust. To say that we were on opposite sides is an understatement. Then, something magical happened. "Troy Davis was my brother's name." From there, we talked about what it meant to love Troy Davis. In the midst of difference...love brought us together to talk about love. Imagine...love transcending hate through connecting us with each other.

Throughout much of my childhood, I watched Gladys sign receipts, "Mrs. Jack P. Dillard." One day, I decided to ask why. Gladys responded, "I don't know. I've never thought about it before." From that day forward, I never saw Gladys sign a receipt with anything but "Gladys Dillard." She didn't change to disrespect my grandfather...she changed to respect herself. Gladys was my #MeToo moment before #MeToo ever hit. Gladys taught me about loving myself.

Before her mind left, Gladys wanted to talk. With my hand in her hand she told me, "I love you and there is nothing you can do to ever change that. I am proud of you no matter what you do." These words will stick with me for the rest of my life. May they embody what we strive to be. Lovers of humanity...no matter what.

As we leave this place, take Gladys with you. God will meet you right outside.

Amen.

June 11, 2018

The Funeral Sermon: Preaching to Bigots

"Don't say anything controversial." Ominous words for an ominous time festered ominously. After years of suffering, Gladys Dillard died. This was not any old death. This was the death of my beloved grandmother. When I was asked to preach her funeral, I knew that this would be a dangerous assignment. You see...my family is filled with bigots. They hate anything or anyone that doesn't look or act like them. Since it was a funeral, I convinced myself that I had to construct a message that would provide comfort. After numerous attempts to think it through, I couldn't do it. How do

you comfort bigots? Something festered in my soul. Fire struck from on high. I let it burn.

Outlines seem so dead. God's words don't need no ordering. Regardless, I had the sermon roughly outlined in my notes. It didn't matter. I didn't use it. I just let it rip.

The funeral home was filled with countless people who've been openly hostile to me in the past. After viewing my grandmother (+she looked more like a salamander than my grandmother), I bent down to give my grandfather words of condolence and a long hug. I knew that he wasn't going to like anything that I said (he doesn't like much that I say in general). In fact, I'm surprised he didn't stop me. I don't think he could have. The wind of God was at my back.

Dirty looks and condescending words flowed like wine through the halls of death. When people

condescendingly shared that they'd been concerned about me, I responded that I'd been concerned about them too. Before we entered the chapel, I offered a prayer. As my words boomed throughout the viewing room, every ass was chafed. My prayer greatly bothered the bigots...and I hadn't even got started yet.

The beginning of the service was surreal. Pain festered. Love was somewhere. I was disturbed. Before I knew it, the time arrived. I lifted my robe and scaled the steps. Looking out amongst the bigots, I began to belt out the sermon that my grandmother would have wanted me to preach (especially since she'd met Jesus). The word of God flowed from my lips. Beauty surrounded me.

What are we doing here? Really... What are we doing here? I look down. I see a box. In that box is a corpse and that is about it. Gladys Dillard has done gone and

she ain't coming back. So, why are we here? If it ain't about Gladys, then who is it about? It's about us. It's about what we can learn. It's about what we can feel. It's about what we can know. It's about who we can be. This gathering is not about Gladys...she is gone. We are here to see if we can take a little bit of Gladys with us out into the world. Can we rub up against each other and find a little love at this hour? It's the only reason that we are here. We are gathered for each other. Shall we love each other in spite of our differences...or better yet...because of our differences?

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As we leave this place, take Gladys with you. God will meet you right outside.

Amen.

Electricity popped in my veins. God was actually with us. The casket rolled. I could hear the wheels. I felt the bounces. I was right there. After the door slammed, I

looked back at the casket. "Well done...grandson..." I actually heard her. I didn't need anything else.

For the last few days, I've received relentless hateful comments, threats and messages from my family about my message. "I'm watching you!" "Fuck you!" "I will never forgive you!" "You might as well have taken a big shit on your dead grandmother's face!" "Don't you dare come around here again..." Bigots are going to be bigots. Hate flowed freely. It hasn't stopped. Such are the ways of cowards.

When someone asked me what I'd like to say to all of these bigots, I declared, "Go to hell."

RIP GLADYS DILLARD

I know I made you proud.

Amen.

June 15, 2018

On the Caging of Children: Words from an Immigration Rally at Dallas City Hall

*Delivered on June 14, 2018

First of all, I don't speak Spanish. I'm sorry. With that said, I do speak love. I understand what love looks like in practice. I do understand that keeping children in cages is not love. I brought my son with me today. There is a part of me that wants him to know how lucky he is to not be in one of these cages. But the bigger part of me, wants him to know what it looks like to give your life to get these children out of these cages. I want him to know what the Gospel says about, "Loving your neighbor as your self." I want him to know what it looks like to put your body on the line to get these children

out of these cages. Our motto these days seems to be, "Cage your neighbor as you cage your self." We are encaged by our hatred, bigotry and patriotism. We cannot help these children until we bust out of our cages.

Make no mistake...this is not an isolated incident in the history of our country. Oppression is normal. From slavery to the genocide of Native populations to the denial of civil rights for all sorts of populations, we are experts at hate. This is simply a continuation of what has always been. So...I'm not asking you to be a good American...I am asking you to be human. Throughout the scriptures, we read a familiar phrase, "That which you reap...you sow." Without a doubt, we live under the most evil administration in the history of this country. "...you reap what you sow!" Thankfully, "God is not mocked!" "...you reap what you sow!" The perpetuators of evil will get theirs. Our job is to protect the innocent from their aggressions.

As I think about this moment for all of us gathered here tonight, I think about the fact tha... We don't need people who just show up at a rally. We don't need people who just hold signs. We don't need people who just want to post on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. What we need is a revolution in this country. We need a revolution of love. The revolution begins in our hearts. It begins with a question... How far are you willing to go to get these children out of these cages? How far are you willing to go to save these children? What are you willing to give? You see...the revolution requires sacrifice. I believe that a God of love is calling to us this very night. Don't just give words. Give everything you've got. ...And that my friends is the way of love.

Amen.

June 17, 2018

Estrangement as Salvation

Is estrangement always a negative thing? We certainly treat it that way. "I've been estranged from my brother for decades." "I haven't talked to my kids in years." "I never want to talk to so and so again." "You are dead to me." These statements produce horror. There is an assumption that such estrangements are the worst thing that could happen. Maybe not.

"There is nothing you will ever do that will pull me away from you." When I heard these words, I believed them. Now, I don't. Since the death of my grandmother, multiple family members have refused to talk to me. The sermon I delivered at the funeral (http://www.patheos.com/blogs/jeffhood/the-funeral-sermon-preaching-to-bigots/#comment-3943796774) did

not sit right with various family members...including some particularly close family members. Mentions of social justice in a sermon do not play well in a room full of bigots. While I guess I should have thought about it before I spoke, I was simply trying to be faithful to the message that God had given me. I know that I was. I guess my family responded from their own bigotry. Maybe that's too simple. Maybe they thought my grandmother was a bigot and they wanted her to remain just like them. I disrupted their reality. Disruption is always the source of hate. I saw my grandmother as a representation of love and a growing sense of justice. They saw my grandmother as a representation of hate and intolerance. Maybe estrangement is a form of salvation.

The Jesus who said that he would "never leave us nor forsake us"...walked away from people throughout his life. Maybe he left his love and withdrew his presence for the sake of moving on. There was too much to do to

stay in one place. Like Jesus, our health depends on our willingness to walk away. When people hurt you, you must never be closes to reconciliation/forgiveness...but don't spend your life knocking at a door that will never open. Maybe your life depends on it.

Amen.

June 20, 2018

The Congressman and The Press: Fighting Family Separation

*From Congressman Michael Burgess' Townhall at Denton High School in Denton, Texas on 06/18/2018

JH (Jeff Hood): Dr. Burgess my name is Reverend Dr. Jeff Hood I'm a theologian and an activist here in North Texas.

CB (Congressman Burgess): I'm familiar with your work.

JH: I want to begin by saying that I am very angry at you right now. I find the things that I hear from you in the media to be absolutely disgusting...instead of as a critic...I am here primarily as a follower of Jesus Christ. I believe with all of my heart that Mary, Joseph and Jesus sought asylum in Egypt and I feel in this moment...and it's breaking my heart...and I know you're to come back at me with some righteous explanation...but it bothers me to thing that Mary, Joseph and Jesus would be ripped apart at our border.

[Applause]

CB: ...forever not to seeking asylum

JH: hold on...hold on Congressman

...when we talk about loving our neighbors as we love ourselves...loving the marginalized...loving the oppressed...loving the stranger. Dr. Burgess I want you to have an opportunity to respond...because there's so many times where I disagree with you...again with all of my heart...but I want you to have the opportunity to be a witness to your faith the faith...that you constantly talk about...I want you to talk to this crowd...I want you to talk to these cameras...tell them Dr. Burgess...at what point are you going to stop claiming Jesus and start acting...voting...and doing Jesus.

[Applause]

CB: You know this problem did not just start this week or this month...it has been going on for several years. I

don't recall hearing this passion from you at a town hall in 2011...when the same problem was going on.

JH: With all due respect Congressman, this is a town hall...where I question you...not you question me. I asked you a question Congressman. And sir and sir...I think it is again disgusting and despicable to tell me that in 2011 I didn't care about immigration. I've been caring about the gospel of Jesus Christ the entire time. I'm asking you if you care about the gospel of Jesus Christ.

CB: well the answer to your question is yes...good we'll move on.

JH: I look forward to seeing it Congressman. I look forward to seeing it and let me say it one more time...

I look forward to seeing it!

[Applause]

CB: [Side eye]

*From a Press Conference Fighting Family Separation at Dallas City Hall in Dallas, Texas on 06/20/2018

Good afternoon. I arise this day to engage you with a story. I want you to imagine a child in Guatemala...starting off with their parents on a very treacherous journey...traveling with all of these towns and cities that are often more treacherous than the towns and cities that they left. Facing danger every hour. Imagine this family crossing the border. Imagine that child being ripped from the arms of their parents. And lastly, I want you to imagine that that child is white. You see...we don't have this going on our northern border. We seem to have a bunch of white folks who don't care about this issue...who seem to be comfortable

sitting in their living rooms watching these images and shows...you constantly hear them saying, "Well..they shouldn't have come across the border." Let me tell you something...I am ready for the white people in this nation and in this city to step across the border of hate and stand with all people. Let me make it plain... If Jesus crossed our border...he would be put in a detention facility. I want to let all the Christians out there who think they know Jesus... If you haven't been down to the border...you don't know a damn thing.

Amen.

June 22, 2018

God is Mocked.: Churches Respond to the Migrant Separation Crises

For the second time in less than a week, I was forwarded an email from a pastor to their congregation explaining their process for responding to the migrant separation crises. Both emails went something like this:

Greetings.

I am writing to express my grave concern about the separation of immigrant families on our border. We must respond quickly to this atrocity. The Gospel of Jesus Christ demands it!

Our social justice group is meeting in a week to discuss how to move forward. After thoughtful diliberation, the group will offer next steps. I am expecting this process to take no less than two weeks.

Then, the leadership of the church will meet to discuss how to proceed. We will begin to pray about moving the

congregation forward. I am expecting this process to take no more than three weeks.

Following these meetings, we will discuss formulating our policies. We will also discuss what the risks are to our ministry. I am expecting this process to take no more than a week.

Then, we must meet with our leadership council and social justice groups to discuss consistent facts. I expect this to take no more than a week.

Then, I will call a church meeting. Due to difficulty of scheduling, I would expect this to take about two weeks.

At this point, we will hold the church meeting and decipher what was decided. I would expect this to take no more than a week.

Then, church leadership will meet to decide the exact wording of how to proceed. This should take no more than two weeks.

Following all of these steps, we will vote on how to move forward.

Then, we will need to gather the relevant groups and councils to discuss how to implement the decisions we have made and the steps that we have taken. I don't know how long this will take.

I look forward to heeding the call of Jesus to respond to the pressing issues of our world. I am proud to be your pastor. We will move as quickly as possible through these steps so that we might be a relevant voice in our age.

With speed.

Your Pastor.

What in the fuck? Three months to respond to an immediate need? Such a response is evil. These needs cannot wait. Jesus is dying and we are meeting to talk about why and how. God is mocked.

Amen.

June 25, 2018

The God I Do Not Know

For years, you have struggled to find the perfect toys for your child. You want him to have fun. You want him to learn. You simply want him to be a kid. Your son treasures his independence. So, you leave him to play in his room. So as not to disturb him, you quietly walk toward his room. Peaking your head around the door,

you realize he is gone. Panic sets in. Frantically, you begin to scream his name. You don't stop. You scream and scream. Then, you remember he cannot speak.

Dalton Robertson was 6. Unlike the majority of his peers, Dalton was autistic and non-verbal. Wearing a pull-up diaper and rubber boots, Dalton wandered/wondered away from his Terrell, Texas home yesterday afternoon. Every law enforcement agency that could get to the scene searched and searched. It became increasingly apparent that even more resources were necessary. Dive teams were called in to search all bodies of water surrounding the home. That's where the search ended.

The diver jumped into the small pond. Dirt flew. The water was cold and dark. Relying on extensive training the diver searched. The light seemed to be doing little good. Everything was so thick. In the distance, the diver thought something looked strange. Swimming

closer, the diver found a large piece of trash. There was no disappointment. When you are searching for a child, you obviously hope you don't find anything. The diver couldn't quit. There was more pond to search. As the diver turned around to keep looking, he came face to face with Dalton Roberson. There was no warning. There was only the face of a child.

I followed the story all afternoon. I prayed and prayed. I was desperate for Dalton to be found. In the midst of his inability to speak, I could hear him. The heavens remained silent.

Unable? Unwilling? Unconcerned? Unstable? Uncompassionate? Undetermined? Unmoved? Unloving?

The God that didn't save Dalton Robertson is...The God I Do Not Know.

Amen.

July 2, 2018

St. Gladys: On Dreams and Such

I was alone. I am often alone. I don't try to go there. I just do. I was writing. My work has long called me to spaces of solitude. In the midst of it all, something in my spirit moved. I moved with it. Then, out of the corner of my eye, I saw the news, "Pope John Paul II Dead." One name and one word can have so much power over us. Such a combination can turn our lives upside down. Such words give no warning and are not respecters of time or space. As I thought back to the many years of studying the Pope's oratory and writings, I began to hear the cries of the faithful coming from around the world, "Santo Subito! Santo Subito! Santo Subito!" or "Sainthood Now! Sainthood Now! Sainthood Now!" The

cries sent shivers down my spine. The Pope had meant so much to so many for so long that the faithful wanted to give him the honor that he was due...now!

I didn't feel that way. She'd been gone too long.

Belief creates something more than we can see. Belief takes us beyond where we stand. Belief opens are minds to endless possibilities. I didn't believe.

I went to see her one last time. The journey was long. When I got there, nobody was home. There was a body laying there...but it wasn't her.

When she died it got worse, I hadn't known her in 4 years. Her mental condition wouldn't allow it. How are you supposed to mourn someone you don't know? I'd already done my mourning many years back.

Then...

The resurrection found me.

Not long after she died, I was working on the sermon for her funeral. In the midst of it all, I saw her again. It was the grandmother I'd knew long ago. In those precious moments, she told me what to say. Tell them about love. Tell them it's not about me. Tell them about love in the midst of differences. Tell them about the liberation that comes through strength. Don't let anybody hold you back. You preach my message. ...and I will be with you until the end of the days.

I did.

The sermon wasn't received well. It's hard to preach to bigots and assholes. My extended family has always worshiped racism far more than Jesus. Regardless, she came to me at night. The dream was wild. We were together. Repeatedly, she kept telling me to keep

fighting for the least of these. Her hair was puffed up. Her makeup was on. She was even wearing her glasses. It was her. Love swirled all around us. Carry my love with you.

I have.

Just last night, she told me not to listen to anybody that questions my work. Jesus is guiding you. Follow him and you will be the resurrection.

I will.

She is here.

She is here.

She is here.

Intercessor.

Healer.

Prophet.

Santo subito?

I think so.

St. Gladys.

Amen.

July 3, 2018

God Damn Donald Trump: A Call for Revolution

"People are dying. Unless you want to save them...we have nothing else to talk about."

"Can't we just talk civilly?"

"Civility is an evil word most often used by evil people to put up a smokescreen in front of their evil actions or inactions."

"I just think we are missing each other."

"No. You are missing the point."

"Isn't it beautiful that we are so blessed to live in a country where we can have these types of conversations?"

"Blessed? We live in a country that is ruled by the most evil leader in the world that is leading us in a direction of becoming the most evil nation on earth. Blessed?"

"I guess we will just have to agree to disagree."

"I'm not in agreement. I am in revolution."

Masked men took them hostage. For days, they didn't know whether they were going to live or die. Eventually, they let them go. There was no money for the rest of the journey. They were forced to do things they didn't want to do in order to keep going. The journey seemed to grow more treacherous by the day. Exhausted, they finally made it. After declaring their intent to apply for asylum, the officers ripped their children out of their arms. When they screamed why, one of the officers declared, "Ask Donald Trump."

Death was there.

Unable to breathe, he checked himself into the local hospital. While he didn't have insurance or the money

to pay, he figured that debt was better than dying. His diagnoses required expensive drugs. Unable to pay, his health got worse and worse. Despite numerous applications, he couldn't get any help from the government. When he asked the doctors why he couldn't get any help...they replied, "Ask Donald Trump."

Death was there.

Nations have come together for decades to discuss human rights abuses. For many years, the United States has led the way. Not anymore. Recently, the US has pulled out of multiple international human rights organizations. As a diplomat walked out of a recent meeting, an ally wanted to know why...and he replied, "Ask Donald Trump."

Death was there.

Excited to get his future started, a young man pulled up to his new college and raced inside for orientation. When he opened the door to the packed gymnasium, everyone in the room was white. While he had heard that race had been taken out of the application process, he had no idea that a racist admissions process could create a college that was all white. When he protested to the dean...he replied, "Ask Donald Trump."

Death was there.

Death is here.

No more!

No more!

No More!

No more asking. No more civility. No more abuse. No more death. No more! Now is the time for doing. God will damn Donald Trump in due time. Don't worry about that. Until then, let us be the hands and feet of the revolution. Let us overthrow the evil that surrounds us. Let us do more than simply whimpering for change. We can be the revolution. Now is not the time for asking. Now is not the time for civility. Now is the time to get up off of our asses and fight. On the day we beat back the tyranny of this administration...we will truly be able to celebrate an Independence Day.

In Jesus name...

Amen.

July 8, 2018

Micah: A Tale of Human Rights

Hands and fists were flung wildly in the air. Jesus was being lifted high. I had my eyes clothed. Then, I felt someone tapping me on my shoulder. Startled, I jumped as if I had just had an encounter with the risen God. I hadn't. It was time to go.

Winter is dark in the South. Ghosts ride on every chill. I felt them all. The road was dark. In the high beams, I searched for the light. In every moment, I was scared. I just didn't know what I was going to find.

Basketball always spoke to my soul. I was terrible. However, basketball had a way of making me feel stronger each time I played it. When we arrived, I went straight in to join my team. The coach never looked real kindly at tardiness. Not long after I ran a few drills, a black police officer walked in with two angry men. "There!" The officer rushed to arrest one of my teammates, a large black guy named Micah. After he

found the CD in Micah's bag, the officer declared, "I'm going to handle this out back!"

Micah had no rights that night.

When human rights are denied, justice is too.

I never know where to start.

For the sake of brevity, I'll start with the shots. Immediately, I turned to get people out of there. For some time, I didn't know the full extent of what was going on. Then, I saw it on the screen, "Shooter Kills 5 Dallas Officers."

Micah Johnson wanted to cause as much terror as he could. His actions were those of a monster. With five officers dead and scores of others wounded, everyone thought that there would be more blood running down the street that night. It was a desperate situation.

Ultimately, Chief David Brown and his officers cornered Micah. Negotiations proved unfruitful. Brown decided to take matters into his own hands. Using explosives strapped to a police robot, Brown gave the order to blow him up.

Micah had no rights that night.

When human rights are denied, justice is too.

It's been many years since that night.

I remain haunted.

Injustice is not the precursor of justice...

and it never will be.

Amen.

July 22, 2018

Fuck Love: A Primer

This is not a guide to making love. We will let the professionals take care of that. This is something else.

Have you ever been locked up or locked in? I have...but not in the sense that I'm getting at. You see, what I'm about to describe is an event. As problematic as I now realize such phrasing is, "lock in" or "lock up" were our names for overnight youth events. One night, I hung out with a particular young woman. We talked all night...discussing our hopes and dreams. By the time the morning came, we kissed. I was in love. Then a few hours later...in typical teenage fashion...she called me to tell me that she just wasn't feeling it. Preserving my

dignity...I waited until we got off the phone to cry. After regaining my composure...I responded with the only words that I felt like could capture what I was feeling..."Fuck Love."

While in college, I ran around with a group of very conservative guys. In full disclosure, I believed much of what they believed back in the day. As I grew, I became more and more skeptical of the prevailing thoughts that were floating around this group. One night, I experienced a moment of revelation. We were walking downtown, when we heard a voice coming from our feet, "Can you spare some change?" Feeling convicted, I grabbed some change out of my pocket and gave it to the man. It couldn't have been much...but these guys jumped all over my ass. "There is nothing loving about what you just did! The real way to love that man is to not enable his laziness." I didn't hesitate to respond, "Fuck Love."

"We are calling you out...We are embarrassing you...because we love you." The young woman was crying her eyeballs out. She got caught having sex with another church member. Where was he? Nobody cared. In the midst of the abuse, everybody just kept talking about love. "Fuck Love."

Let's be careful when we talk about love. We might not actually be talking about love.

Amen.

August 4, 2018

Dangerous Times, Resistance & a Vandalized Flag

Nobody has to tell any of us. We live in dangerous times. Messages of hate permeate our entire culture.

Justice and equality are under constant threat of extinction. Truth is manufactured. Love is fake. How now shall we live? Our only options are to fight or to die. Jesus fought. We will too.

My life was forever changed that night. I feel like I talk about it too much. It's hard not to talk about something that so many will never understand. I was there. The shots pierced my soul. Though the world has moved on, a part of me will never be able to.

Our children are very young. Throughout my work as an activist, they have only been able to grasp pieces of what I do. Sometimes, those pieces have come together and grown into understanding. They know that we live in a country where police officers operate with relative impunity. They know that police are brutalizing people in our streets. They know that they could be next. They know.

The treehouse was a monster project. Countless hours and days went into our outdoor house of wood. Eventually, we finished it. To celebrate and raise awareness, we decided to paint a message on the side facing the street, "End Police Brutality." It wasn't long before many people in the neighborhood were in an uproar. Code enforcement made me paint over it. After a little research, I realized that all flags are permissible. So, I painted "End Police Brutality" on a large US flag and raised it up. The uproar grew. Ultimately...a few nights ago...someone jumped our fence, climbed to the top of our treehouse and vandalized the flag (shredded it and yanked it down). While we certainly felt violated, we were not surprised. Hate is often bold.

I didn't hesitate to start working on a replacement. In the light of the evil that had befallen us, we decided to paint one word, "Resist."

Amen.

August 20, 2018

Whatever Happened to Sin? : Thoughts on Our Times : Weinstein/Argento

The further away I traveled from my evangelical origins, the more distasteful the idea of sin became. In one of the liberal theological schools I attended, I remember a professor shouting out, "Sin is dead!" Everybody wanted to trade the word "evil" for the word "sin." I guess such a switch depersonalizes it a bit. I bought into it for a time...then, I traveled back to reality.

Some time ago, I worked at a church that had a large white gay male population. I celebrated everyone in that church. I refused to engage in any talk of sin...for fear that it would turn my friends away. I made it my

job to make sure that everyone felt loved. Things were beautiful.

In time, I started noticing disturbing things. Repeatedly, I saw ministers use their power to have sex with parishioners. On multiple occasions, I received calls about sexual abuse. In terms of sexual ethics, there were no rules...just sex with whoever you wanted to have sex with...whether they offered consent or not. I didn't know what to do. Truthfully, I didn't have the vocabulary to talk about personal sin anymore.

In the midst of my questions, I sat in the sanctuary and prayed. Looking up at the beautiful cross that adorns the sanctuary, I remembered all of the verses that talk about sin in scripture. Something changed.

Those times prepared me for our times.

I watched woman after woman tell their story of Harvey Weinstein sexually assaulting them. Every detail was more and more disturbing. Tears flowed down my cheeks as I considered the pain. Something has got to change. I grew to hate Weinstein. Truthfully, I think I still do.

Love the sinner...hate the sin.

For all have fallen short...

Asia Argento is a powerful communicator of her abuse at the hands of Weinstein. A leader of the #MeToo Movement, Argento has traveled all over the world to empower women. Her triumph over adversity has inspired me on countless occassions. Then the script flipped. Just yesterday, it was revealed that Argento had sexually assaulted an actor/musician by the name of Jimmy Bennett when he was 17 and that she had paid

him 380,000 to settle a potential lawsuit. How are we to respond?

What Weinstein did is evil.

What happened to Argento is evil.

What Argento did is evil.

The only way to explain the evil personal nature of such transgressions...is "sin."

Maybe there is much less that separates us from Weinstein and Argento than we thought.

For all have sinned...

There is no one righteous, not even one...not even us.

Whatever happened to sin?

Sin never left.

Thankfully, God hates nothing about us.

Amen.

August 22, 2018

Jesus Was Not Successful / Having Sex With Animals

August 22, 2018

Jesus Was UnSuccessful / Having Sex With Animals
2 Short Blogs in One

Jesus Was Not Successful

"I am so concerned about you. You have all of this education. You have all of these degrees. You are brilliant. You are more than capable of doing anything you want. Yet, you have chosen to sit at home and watch 5 kids? What is wrong with you? God has called you to so much higher purposes than this. Seek God and you won't be sitting around with those kids much longer. Life is too short to be lazy. You have the ability to be so successful. Why are you throwing it all away? I am just so disappointed in you. You make no money and think that those kids are your job. Wake up! Before it's too late..."

Jesus had no job.
Jesus had no insurance.
Jesus had no car.
Jesus was homeless.
Jesus was a criminal.
Jesus was uneducated.

Jesus had to scavenge.

Jesus was unsocial.

Jesus had no retirement plan.

Jesus had no life insurance.

Jesus had few clothes.

Jesus had no money.

When I graduated from high school, I was named, "Most Likely to Succeed."

I doubt I've lived up to the expectations that accompanied such a designation.

When we are children...we think like children.

Jesus was unsuccesful

and...

I thank God for that.

Amen.

Having Sex With Animals

"3 Pa. Men Facing More Than 1,400 Counts Of Allegedly Having Sex With Dogs, Horses, Cow & Goat" -KDKA CBS Pittsburgh

Read that headline one more time.

Terry Wallace, Marc Measnikoff and Matthew Brubaker basically set up their own personal animal sex farm. Authorities also found a huge volume of videos of the acts. While disturbing, I think it's too easy to simply call these guys crazy and be done with it. It's important to remember that bestiality has always been a part of human culture and will continue to be. Our job in the

midst of such strangeness is to listen and think. After all, these men are still children of God.

The basic underlying premise of the animal cruelty charges that these men face is the fact that these animals could not consent to these sexual acts. While mostly true, science is certainly helping us to realize that animals are increasingly evolving to higher and higher levels of intelligence. In fact, scientists have told us that some animals are smarter than we are. So if animals could consent or we discover that they can consent, would having sex with them still be wrong? The issue is far more complicated than just a disturbing headline. These men are obviously attracted to animals and they are not alone. These types of stories keep coming out. What are we to do?

Love is the only way. Wallace, Measnikoff and Brubaker are in desperate need of our generosity right now. Followers of Jesus shouldn't hesitate.

Amen.

August 29, 2018

What I Planned to Say If Roy Oliver was acquitted in the Murder of Jordan Edwards. // Burn it Down

Fellow activists and I planned for major responses if Balch Springs Police Officer Roy Oliver had been acquitted in the murder of 15-year-old Jordan Edwards. For many days, I worked on what I wanted to say at the rally we were planning. Truthfully, we planned for an acquittal. This is Texas. Yesterday, we got the surprise of our lives. Roy Oliver was found guilty of murder. Today, Oliver was sentenced to 15 years in prison. Though I planned to just throw this speech/sermon away, I didn't.

We gather on this horrific evening because we don't know what else to do but gather...maybe we even seek some level of salvation in our gathering. We're an angry people...and have every right to be. Don't let anybody tell you to calm down. God is disgusted by the calm down crowd and so am I. Now is the time to allow your anger to proceed to rage. Jordan Edwards is worth our rage. Tonight is not the night to be calm. To those who keep on saying that they are afraid of what could happen tonight...I say "great!" They need to feel what all of us feel. They need to feel what it feels like to live under the stress that you can be the victim of violence at any given moment. "Let them be afraid!" By the grace of God, we are not afraid. Our rage gives us the energy that we need to carry out the will of God. Though Roy Oliver is the face of this case, all of this is about more than him. He is simply a representation. He speaks to all that is wrong with policing. Why in the fuck did he have an assault rifle? Why in the fuck do any of them

have assault rifles? What in the fuck? What in the fuck? Oh God, give us the rage.

Throughout the scriptures, fire is spoken of as a purifying device. Jesus came to burn up all that would hold us back. Fire is salvation. Tonight, we have gathered because we want change and we want it now. I beseech thee oh God to send us your fire. Let us take your fire into our hands and go to work! Let us burn down injustice! Let us burn down hate! Let us burn down inequality! Give us fire oh God! Tonight is the night that we go to work. May the flames guide us all. Let us remember that fire can change the world. So, tonight I invite you to burn it down. In the name of Jordan Edwards and the many more that are less known, let's burn down everything that stands between justice and us. God is with us. Light the fire in your soul and let's go.

Amen.

September 5, 2018

The Assassination of an Exotic Dancer

She was fiercely loved.

She mattered.

She matters.

On March 11, 2018, Shniquia Simington stood in front of the mirror. She knew how beautiful she was. There was no need to do too much. There never was. Tonight was her night. When the car pulled up, she jumped in with her friends. Before too many greetings were exchanged, they were off. They went to one of their favorite spots, King's Cabaret. Though it was a strip club, it didn't feel like that to them. Shniquia had

danced there for a long time. Many of the people who worked there were practically family. When they hopped out of the car, they walked quickly. There were so many people that they were excited to see. Right when they walked through the door, the celebration began. Everybody was having fun when one of the managers approached Shniquia and ordered her to leave. Though she had a great relationship with many other people at the club, she didn't have a great relationship with the management. Shinqua's employment at the establishment had ended with conflict. Out of nowhere, security guard Dan Taylor (white) appeared. Shniquia and Dan knew each other. She was surprised that he was being so rough with her and her friends. Embarrassed and angry, Shniquia pushed through the door with a fervor. The entire way to the car, they were all popping off at Dan. Empty threats flew in every direction. Shniquia got in the backseat of the car with a slam. Upset, she started eating some ice to calm her nerves. With every window

raised, the car began to reverse. Out of nowhere, a shot rang out. Everybody in the car looked back. The guy that they had known as Dan had just blown their friend's head off. It was a direct hit. The bullet flew through just the right spot in jus the right window. He was standing the perfect position. As the smoke from the gun cleared, it became very apparent that this was no accident. This was an assassination.

It should not be surprising that Dan Taylor has been treated like the victim. The police interview was friendly. Taylor was not arrested. The Dallas County District Attorney has done little to no work on the case for almost seven months. It's actually been months since the family heard from anyone. All the while, Taylor gets to live his life as if nothing ever happened. Why?

Our society sees exotic dancers as trash.

It seems like authorities have similar feelings.

Amen.

September 12, 2018

The Savior of Dallas: Botham Jean

"Cowardice in the face of injustice is damnable. God is not mocked. In this time of brutality, you will reap what you sow."

Bullets fire. Bullets strike. Bullets kill.

Jesus got ahead of the bullets.

Leaving work, Jesus had to take a second to compose himself in his car. After a few deep breathes, he headed home. Though the drive was short, Dallas had a way of

making sure that it was hell. Though he never liked the looks of the building, he was always glad to see it at this time of the day. Grabbing his bag, he slowly moved to the door. The key easily slid in and out. His heart was heavy and he didn't know why. In silence he reached out to God. Peace returned. Dinner was short and sweet. After a few calls, he dozed off. In the darkness, evil came. Just like in Gethsemane, he was unsure of what to do. Every step was heavy. Rounding the corner, he squinted to see. Unsure of what was happening, he saw a figure at the door. Before he could take too many steps. Two shots rang out. As he bled out on the floor, he saw a woman. Amidst the pain, he managed, "Forgive her for she knows not what she's done." Botham Jean was dead.

Jesus is the way. Sometimes pain is too great.

To be embraced. To be loved. To be human. Every encounter prepared us for the next. Cameras and lights

assembled before us. I could see the apartments were he was murdered. There was something holy about that space. There was a resurrection there. We were drawn to the microphones by the impatient looks on the faces of the assembled journalists. Every speech was beautiful. I kept being drawn to the face of Botham Jean. By the time I stood to speak, I had a word from the Lord. Though I talked for a few minutes, I only remember one sentence, "How our we supposed to love our neighbors as we love our self...when they are coming into are homes and murdering us?" The Gospel became relevant to our moment...our movement. God was with us. God was amongst us. God would not fail. There would be justice...and there would justice now.

Jesus is the way. Sometimes it's hard to see.

Night grew rowdier by the second. Screams and shouts illustrated the grief. In the midst of it all, I stepped forward to speak. Puzzled faces looked back at me.

Stand and deliver. Megaphones sometimes weigh me down. Not tonight. I shouted as loud as I could. Botham Jean was within me. "God damn white Dallas! God is here! Not there! You can't know God without marching down Lamar!" Our feet carried us closer to Botham Jean. We stopped where he died. People began to block traffic. That was our way of sharing the Gospel. We marched again. Horses pushed back. Pepper balls rang out. Justice was not slaughtered. Despite choking and headaches, people moved in closer and closer. One of those assholes aimed his weapon directly at me. I could smell the fear. Truth is terrifying. Rage grew. Amidst the sickening injustice, tables started to topple. There would be no stopping us. By the time we made it back, people could barely see. We walked by faith and not by sight. I arose to bless all of those who made it to the end, "Our God is justice. Now, let us go and worship." Salvation was ours. Then, we wandered into the night.

Botham Jean died so that we might live.

Can you feel it?

Amen.

September 16, 2018

The Downfall of Civil Disobedience

"Come to the table..." These three words change lives. The table beckons us to be something new. Communion is magical. One is able to taste and see that God is good. However, not all tables are quite so magical. For some, the words "Come to the table..." are an invitation to exclusion or even annihilation.

The table was round. National activist groups always seem to have round tables. I've been told that the roundness of it is a symbol of equality. The only

problem is that most of the time there is no equality. I was invited to a prominent table last year. I was told that we would be discussing criminal justice reform. When I arrived, I was greeted warmly and asked if I needed anything. After grabbing a cup of hot tea, I went to their conference room. Before long, other prominent activists from all over the country joined me. The conversation was going great until we got to the topic of developing acts of civil disobedience. While everyone started throwing out ideas, I began to consider the ramifications of our actions. Eventually, I decided to speak. "Is civil disobedience not exclusionary of the people that we are trying to help? How can someone who is under indictment, recently released from prison or even in the middle of their case...not to mention many of the people who are under harsh conditions in prisons...participate in actions that involve civil disobedience without putting themselves under tremendous risk? Civil disobedience seems to be an incredibly privileged action to be able to participate in."

Nobody like what I had to say. In fact, people reacted so strongly that I didn't say much for the rest of the meeting. I don't think it would have done much good anyway. After all was said, I caught the next flight home. Later, I saw proud pictures of a bunch of privileged people getting arrested. I couldn't help but wonder what the people who are affected by the criminal justice system had to think when they saw these pictures.

I would imagine that they didn't feel like they got a seat at the table.

Maybe they wouldn't even want one.

Amen.

September 18, 2018

United Methodist of All Colors Walk for Justice? // Injustice in Dallas

Is this a joke? Sadly, I don't think so. Local United Methodists have organized a, "United Methodist of All Colors Walk for Justice." This is some "All Lives Matter" respectability bullshit. It must be called out.

Back in 2015, I was marching through the streets of Dallas. "No justice! No peace!" "Whose streets? Our streets!" "Say his name!" There was no doubt that we were growing louder as the night went on. Eventually, we turned a corner and the police started arresting folks. Right next to the sidewalk, an officer who looked a decade past retirement snatched me up. I simply stood there. He acted like he was wrangling a bull. Shouting over and over, "Stop resisting! Stop resisting!" By the time we got in the back of the van, everybody was talking about who was going to get them out. The guy next to me said, "I know my church will get me out."

"What type of church do you go to?" "United Methodist." I didn't want to break his heart. Hope is hard to come by when you are on your way to prison. With that said...it didn't matter how many times he called...didn't no United Methodist come to his aide. Eventually, he figured out that it wasn't respectable to get arrested at a protest. He got out...and United Methodists didn't have one damn thing to do with it. This certainly wasn't the first time or the last time that United Methodists chose respectability over justice. In fact, if United Methodists are involved then you might as well go ahead and understand that you are not at a walk for justice...you are at a walk for respectability. I am disgusted and you should be too. God never has been and never will be respectable.

"You shout 'Justice!' 'Justice!' and there is no justice."

You have got to be a real dumbass to create a march for justice that excludes everyone who is not like you

(United Methodist)? There is never justice in exclusion. There is only ignorance. Surely United Methodists know that there are a plethora of other Christians that have been fighting a hell of a lot harder/longer than they have.

All Colors? These folks must have missed the memo about who is getting gunned down in our neighborhoods. "All Lives Matter" is an inherently violent phrase...such language dehumanizes the struggle. All lives don't matter. It is clear that America has a preference for the lives of white folk . It seems like the United Methodist church does too.

In the pursuit of justice, God doesn't walk...God runs. The description of this gathering as a walk speaks to the speed with which United Methodists move on social justice issues. Jesus ain't got nothing to do with that shit. Jesus is out in the street getting hit with pepper balls.

I just don't think United Methodists understand what justice is. Unity and justice are not synonymous. Usually, unity actually leads to further injustice. We have seen this in the United Methodist Church repeatedly. In an attempt to maintain unity, many conferences/districts in the United Methodist Church did not desegregate until the 1980s. Some of the laity and leadership in the church today come from many of these districts (even served as pastor in segregated churches). Are these the folks you want leading the charge for justice? Presently, the United Methodist Church excludes LGBT persons from many positions of ordained leadership...amongst a whole host of other injustices. The United Methodist Church is a space that has harbored injustice since it's inception. This is who is leading this march.

I have many friends who are United Methodist. Some of them might even be at the walk. I love them dearly. Judging from the way they chase after justice, I have

always known that they aren't really United Methodist at all. They are evangelists to in an evil space of injustice. Let's pray that they succeed.

Amen.

September 23, 2018

Southern Baptist Performs Poly Wedding

Let it be known far and wide, Greg Aldrich and Annie Thomas are getting married on September 29, 2018. Sounds simple. It's not.

I couldn't hear her. I was staring too hard at her hair. The light bounced off her mane like a mirror. She was a dinosaur. Slowly, she opened her Bible. Slowly, she taught us the lesson. Slowly, she answered our questions. Everything was slowly. I think she'd been

teaching for well over a hundred years. "Mr. Hood!" I was jarred back to reality. The conversation had turned to this whole three in one notion of God. Some call it the Trinity. Others call it something else. Regardless, our teacher called it truth and that was supposed to be that. Meekly, I raised my hand. "If God is married to the church and God is three bodies, wouldn't that be a whole bunch of people in one marriage?" The dinosaur roared. That shit got on her so bad that she ran to get my parents. When she told my parents that I was suggesting that God was involved in some kind of orgy, I got slapped on the spot. Though the sting wore off, the thought of God as polyamorous never has.

Being a Southern Baptist is about as natural for me as breathing. I was dedicated in a Southern Baptist Church. I was saved in a Southern Baptist Church. I was baptized in a Southern Baptist Church. I was licensed in a Southern Baptist Church. I was ordained in a Southern Baptist Church. I was educated at the

Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Though they sure as hell are going to deny this article...they cannot deny me...I am their creation...I am their child. Everything that comes next is thanks to them.

In deep refection, Cris Thomas looks on as his wife marries Greg.

Darkness settled over all the land. I couldn't see. I didn't know where to go. Nothing made sense. Then, three great lights appeared in the sky. I heard a great commotion. "These are my beloved children in whom I am well pleased!" Slowly, the lights began to draw closer and closer to each other. Ultimately, the lights made a screen. I couldn't see what was on it. I just heard typing. Every click sounded like thunder. Closer and closer the screen traveled. Time stopped. Then, I read. "Cris, Greg, the girls and I would like for you to do the wedding and join our family together immediately after." Raising my hands to the sky, I shouted praise

God. Since that moment, the screen has never left. God is still speaking. The darkness has lifted. I can see where I am going. This polyamorous family is light perpetual.

Joy erupted. Cris and the girls raced up. With hands held high, I declared them to be what I already knew they were...a family.

In the midst of it all, something flickered. I squinted to see. There in the distance was God. Their name was polyamory.

Amen.

September 24, 2018

The Pentecost of Polyamory

God is happening.

Annie Thomas and Greg Aldrich are getting married.

Annie Thomas and Cris Thomas are already married.

Together, they've got two girls.

In just a few days, they will be united as a family.

I will officiate the ceremony.

I don't understand it all.

I don't have to.

Love is always enough.

The bride and groom married. They weren't supposed to. They came from two entirely different economic classes. Their union wouldn't be recognized by the state. They married anyway. Love has a way of overcoming injustice.

The bride and groom married. They weren't supposed to. They were different nationalities. Their union wouldn't be recognized by the state. They married anyway. Love has a way of overcoming injustice.

The bride and groom married. They weren't supposed to. They were different races. Their union wouldn't be recognized by the state. They married anyway. Love has a way of overcoming injustice.

The groom and groom married. They weren't supposed to. They were the same sex. Their union wouldn't be recognized by the state. They married anyway. Love has a way of overcoming injustice.

The bride and groom married. They weren't supposed to. They were three people. Their union wouldn't be recognized by the state. They married anyway. Love has a way of overcoming injustice.

Time is not kind to those who obstruct love. History proves as much. Justice is always marching on. Polyamorous marriages are here to stay. God is making sure of it.

In the distance, I heard something. There was an explosion. Then, the words found me. I couldn't believe my soul. "Love is not dead. Love lives. Though you tried to kill love. Love is back. The resurrection is yours. Open your hearts." I opened. Immediately, I began to violently shake. Love electrified me. I could not understand. Tongues of fire descended upon me. The words were from somewhere else. Dreams filled my vision. I was whole. Love would not let me loose. I

wanted nothing else. Closing my eyes, I saw the world made right. The polyamorous were celebrated for their multiplicity. Love was truly enough.

What kind of asshole would have a problem with that?

Amen.

September 26, 2018

Multiplication Not Division: The Polyamorous Gospel

"Be fruitful and multiply!"

Presently, I'm on my way to perform a polyamorous wedding. This is my first time. Though I'm not quite sure what to expect, I know that God will be there. God is always there when some multiplying is going on.

We used to have an old preacher that would climb up into the pulpit and scream about the downfall of marriage in our society. I'm not sure if he didn't have any other sermons or if he was just really passionate about everyone else's marriages. I had a feeling it was a little bit of both. Regardless, one morning the preacher raced to the pulpit and began to talk about how he'd fallen in love with another woman. It was a really strange to hear. I guess practicing and preaching really ain't the same thing. His final line still resonates with me, "I want to be with them both." I remember wondering, "Why not?" Tears flowed as he stepped down...from him of course. The rest of us couldn't believe what we'd just heard. We'd been told that marriages were always worth saving. So, wouldn't multiplication be better than division?

Love ain't enough for most people. They want to argue and immerse themselves in all types of division. There is one major problem for the scriptural contrarion...the

scripture is full of polyamorous relationships...history is too. It's almost as if God is screaming out over and over and over throughout time and space, "Be fruitful and multiply! Be fruitful and multiply! Be fruitful and multiply!" Real love is like that.

Have you ever thought about bringing someone else into your marriage? If you do, know that God loves you and blesses your decision. Go for it. Love is under attack. It is time that we love courageously. The God that multiplies will be with us all.

Amen.

September 27, 2018

"You're going to hell!!!" Polyamory as the Cure

Polyamorous post.

"You're going to hell!!!" While not the first time I'd seen the line in my inbox, there was something different about this one. I felt that this person was more frightened than hateful. After giving it time, I messaged the person back. In a very calm manner, I asked the person to engage me in dialogue. They weren't having it. "You're going to hell!!!" Most of the time, I don't even reply to shit like this. I just simply move on and let them drown in their own evil. For some reason, I felt especially burdened for this person and tried one more time...things didn't get any better, "You're going to hell!!!" At this point, I decided to kick the dust off my feet and move on. However, the message continued to torment me.

Polyamorous wedding.

Alaska is cold as shit. Over the last few days, I've tried to stay indoors as much as possible. Needless to say, I've

had some time to think. Earlier today, I allowed myself to get lost in the magnitude of what was happening. With the wedding just hours away, I incessantly prayed for the family...two husbands, one wife and three kids. Polyamory was never on my radar...until I began to consider that God's love the marginalized and oppressed extended to polyamorous families as well. Such an obvious thought changed my world. When asked to do this ceremony, I jumped at the opportunity. I knew that God would be there. Hours turned to minutes and minutes turned to seconds. Before I knew it, I was standing at the back of a beautiful clearing at the edge of a stunning mountain range. As I stood there waiting for things to start, I heard the words of the messenger, "You're going to hell!!!" Instead of dwelling on it, I pressed on. Step by step, I walked away from hell. The messenger grew fainter and fainter. Love killed him.

Maybe polyamory can save you too.

Amen.

September 30, 2018

A Polyamorous Departure: The Long Road Home

In one month, I turn 35. The older I get the stranger it is to grow old. I have a dear friend that's dying. He says he's not afraid. I don't see how that's possible. I'm often afraid of living. Then, moments find me that save me.

As the moss bounced up and down, I carried my cross. The mountains drew me. The rocks reminded me. The chill awakened me. The air gave me life. Every bounce pronounced that this was God's moment. Before I knew it, I was there. Even though there were only a few dozen or so people in attendance, the host of heaven was there. Glorias echoing through the valley. Fire

flowed through our spirits. We were alive! There was no going back. Who would want to? We do.

Two men. One woman. Three kids. Presented to a world that might not understand. They don't care. They are enough. They are love.

Photographs never accomplish everything...but they do accomplish something. Holding the glossy paper, I look deeper and deeper. The paper transforms my soul. I didn't know that faces on paper could be so revelatory. I guess the scriptures started out that way...faces on paper. Timeless. Before, I would've thought that a wedding picture with three people in it was strange. Now, it's normal. I've been saved.

Bags packed. Car cranked. Wheels rolling. The road is long. The road to get here was too. I'm tired...but not defeated. Pine trees seem to wave goodbye. There is something in me that I'm leaving behind. Innocence?

Guilt? Timidity? I know that it's all of it and more. The road before me promises more than the past. More freedom. More grace. More love.

"God is my teacher. I shall not want. God led me to this moment. God has restored my soul. I will not fear. God is with me..."

Amen.

October 1, 2018

Payton Summons is a Child of God / Cook Children's Medical Center is Not

We sent our daughter to her grandparents. She'd been asking to go all week. To say that she loved it over there is an understatement. She felt alive there. Throughout the night, they watched movies and ate treats. Giggles

and laughter filled every room. The house was a sanctuary. When it came time to go to bed, they had to convince her to go. As soon as her head hit the pillow, she was out. Her grandparents chuckled about the good time they'd had. Shortly thereafter, everyone fell into a deep sleep. Hours later, the night was interrupted by piercing screams, "Grandma! Grandma! Help! Help! Grandma! I can't breathe!" Rattled awake, her grandparents ran in just as she collapsed to the floor.

Paramedics arrived to the house quickly. Once we found out what happened, everyone assured us that Cook Children's would provide the best care possible. At the hospital, they told us that they'd been able to resuscitate her and were sending her to intensive care. We'd never been more heartbroken. Our baby was just lying there. No expressions. No words. Nothing.

For the last few days, we've struggled to figure out what to do. They tell us she is dead. We don't believe them.

We believe that life is worth preserving. Our daughter is only 9! We can't give up on her.

Just this morning, the doctors came in and tried to convince us to pull the plug. When we resisted, they backed down. Eventually, the hospital administration came in and talked with us. With compassionate dispositions, they told us we could take as long as we needed. They were so generous. Now, we're just praying for a miracle and the hospital is going to give us enough time to see what happens. We are so blessed to have our child treated at such a compassionate hospital.

We heard about a similar situation down the hall. The hospital was taking the family to court to try to force the family to take their daughter off of life support. The only difference between our situations is that our daughter is white and their daughter is black.

At this hour, Payton Summons is fighting for her life at Cook Children's Medical Center in Fort Worth, Texas. Her attendants want her to die. Her nurses want her to die. Her doctors want her to die. Her supposed advocates in the administration want her to die. In fact, they want her to die so bad that they took her family to court and asked a judge to let them kill her. Thankfully, the judge issued an injunction to save her life for two weeks. Now, the family is desperately looking for another hospital to treat their child.

If they hadn't been able to secure an attorney, their child would be dead. Payton doesn't deserve this. Nobody does. Prejudiced rich hospitals and their doctors shouldn't get to decide who lives or dies. While devastatingly sad, such situations are not unusual. In America, color has always decided who lives and dies.

Payton Summons is a Child of God.

Cook Children's Medical Center is Not

End of discussion.

Amen.

October 3, 2018

Liberation in Polyamory: A Soul Unbound

There is power in prayer. Though I didn't have a map, I knew which way to go. God was always speaking to me. Before I knew it, I was holding a cross high in the air. Jesus died for moments like this...to show us the way. I knew that my every step was being guided. There is power in realizing where power comes from. There is a wellspring of life there. In a small valley within a larger

valley, we experienced the abundant life...life centered on the liberative power of love.

Bugs. Bugs. Bugs. Gnats and mesquites seemed to out number the wedding guests by millions. Throughout the ceremony, they offered continuous hysterics. While reading the Gospel of John, I had one literally go down my throat. I hawked it up and spit it out. While everyone laughed, I kept on thinking about how many diseases I might have just contracted. But...the ceremony had to go on. The beauty pushed me through. Classic words flowed. "Dearly beloved..." "Please, repeat after me." "With this ring..." I could go on and on. While the wedding was special / just like all weddings are, beauty seemed to be a little more forthcoming in their midst.

The husband of the bride beamed in love at his wife as she married her second husband. I will never forget

that look. There was something very powerful there...namely...love.

The children of the bride and groom grew more excited by the moment. While there was a space for them to be part of the ceremony at the end, I thought they were going to run up at any moment. Joy filled their hearts.

The kids raced up and hugged their parents. Beauty was in every eye and on every face. We prayed with each other for a considerable amount of time. The rhythms of the spirit rocked my soul.

Then, the family turned around and faced the congregation. There was a wild uproar of love. My heart could barely contain it. In the midst of the power, I raised my hands and offered a blessing to the congregation. "Go and have the courage to live as they do."

There was nothing normal.

Truthfully, I didn't know what to expect. Polyamory is something that I don't completely understand. That didn't matter. Upon arrival, I tried to look for what was normal or easily explainable Quickly, I realized my mistake. Liberation is found in difference and difference alone. There is no salvation is doing what everyone else does. Throughout my time in Alaska, this courageous family unbound my soul. I will never believe in normal again.

Amen.

October 7, 2018

Rage is Salvation

You shout peace…peace…and there is no peace.

If I give all that I have to justice, but do not have rage, I am well intentioned.

Rage is impatient. Rage is not kind. Rage is envious. Rage is demanding. Rage celebrates. Rage challenges. Rage champions. Rage rages. Rage keeps a meticulous record of wrongs. Rage delights in the destruction of injustice. Rage protects the oppressed. Rage trusts the oppressed. Rage hopes with the oppressed. Rage doesn't stop. Rage never fails.

Smiles will cease. Niceness will be silenced. Truth will be proven false. Now, we know in part…but wholeness is coming. Injustice will not live forever. We rage for justice with the knowledge that it is coming.

For hours, I watched to see if there was another way. The abuse never let up. I knew I was getting to a place of no return. Person after person arrived seeking healing and found everything but instead. Their faces were

haunting me. Finally, rage exploded in my soul. I don't know if my feet hit the ground. I destroyed everything. No table or chair was left unturned. I drove out all of those oppressive assholes. When I looked up to catch my breath, I saw a multitude of oppressed peoples who'd just been freed from oppression. The church was clear…

The police did it again. Bleeding out in the street was yet another oppressed person. Tensions began to rise. People started taking to the streets. As if on cue, church folk took to their steps to scream about peace. Anyone who actually knew Jesus…knew better. Jesus was exactly where he said he would be…with the oppressed…out in the streets. As the oppressed raged… Jesus raged.

Salvation can be found in nothing less.

Amen.

October 12, 2018

Hospital Brutality

God is not mocked. You reap what you sow. The consequences of inaction will find us all. Hospital brutality is a danger to us all.

The sound jolted me awake. The pager let me know that someone was in desperate need of help. Even though I was a new chaplain, I felt like I'd been working at the hospital for a long time. Time has a way of growing you when death is everywhere you look. I didn't have time to think about it anymore. I could hear the wailing. Turning the corner, the family was in shambles. Quickly, I determined that the family was unable to speak English. Using what Spanish I could muster, I realized that they had just found out that their baby had just died. When I asked about the nurse, they told me

that she had figured out how to tell them that their baby was dead and then left. Unable to speak Spanish, the nurse had just left. The mother of the child asked me to go and place my hands in prayer on the child. I didn't hesitate. There were sick babies everywhere. When I got to the crib, I placed my hands on the child. Immediately, the baby wiggled. While I was startled, I was also overjoyed. Though the nurse said that the child had been fine all along, I was experiencing a resurrection and I knew the family would too. As soon as I walked into the room, I shouted, "She's alive!" No translation was necessary. After the celebration, rage took over. When I found the nurse, she was on Facebook. I told her that I would be filing a complaint and I would make sure that she was punished. I did. The blatant neglect of the situation woke me up to a kind of brutality that was every bit as brutal as any other type of brutality (and perhaps more frequent than most)...hospital brutality.

In 2008, Michael Herrera entered Parkland Memorial Hospital in Dallas complaining of extreme abdominal pain. Slowly his condition worsened. All color began to disappear from his face. Others in the lobby tried to get Herrera help...but nobody would listen. Herrera was not a human to the hospital by this point. Over 17 HOURS later, Herrera finally received help after another employee realized he had crashed and was in desperate need of help. Not too long after, Herrera died of a heart attack. Though Parkland has admitted to their faults and vowed to continuously improve their services, it still doesn't change the fact that they brutalized a man and his family. Hospital brutality is the constant cycle of incidents and apologies that we all experience. It seems to me that the sorrows are all for not until the brutalizations cease. Parkland is not alone. There are brutalities after brutalities that are taking place all over...often, with little or no consequences. I have engaged with many cases before...but I have seen nothing as heartless as this.

She is 9. Payton Summons. Don't forget that name. Over the past few weeks, the child has lingered somewhere between life and death at Cook Children's Hospital in Fort Worth. The situation is tragic enough before you ever get to the legal battle that is presently going on. You see, Cook Children's is determined to terminate Payton's life support...so much so...the hospital has taken the family to court to make it happen. The hospital that is supposed to be taking care of Payton is in court determined to kill her. I can think of few more brutal of situations. Money seems to be the driving factor in this situation. Isn't it always? Hospital brutality happens when the hospital places more value on the hospital than it does the patients that it cares for. Such dehumanization is disgusting...but unfortunately...not uncommon.

For the last few years, I've been in the streets fighting against police brutality. While I don't intend to ever

stop, I think it's incredibly important that we add this idea of hospital brutality to the conversation. Persons of color are often brutalized by hospitals. Poor folk are often brutalized by hospitals. Mentally ill persons are often brutalized by hospitals. I could go on and on. Hospital brutality is a pandemic. Just go into any ER and you will see. Those with means get the best and those without get the rest...and sometimes they get nothing at all.

I cannot love my neighbor as myself without standing between them and the potential brutalizers they might encounter at the hospital. From threats to neglect to outright homicide, we have to push back against every case...big or small. Hospital brutality must become a common phrase or idea used to describe what is taking place. What do we want? Justice! When do we want it? Now! Perhaps, all of our lives will be saved in the process.

Amen.

October 15, 2018

jwilson@dentonisd.org

Dr. Wilson.

Superintendent. I am furious. My name is Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood. All five of my young children attend DISD schools. My oldest two boys (age 5) are in kindergarten at Woodrow Wilson and my youngest three are in preschool at Gonzalez (single/4 and twins/3). I am a public theologian and activist (my bio is here http://www.patheos.com/blogs/jeffhood/me/). You might remember me for demanding a name change for Woodrow Wilson last year (based on his racism). Before I went public with the present situation, Amber Briggle

encouraged me to reach out to you. So, here we are. Last week, my wife (Dr. Emily Hood) had a conversation with our daughter Madeleine's (age 3) teacher (Metzler/Gonzalez) last week. Halfway through the conversation, Metzler started talking about our son Lucas (Madeleine's twin/age 3) and his propensity to wear dresses to school. There was a heavy insinuation in the conversation that there was something confusing or morally wrong with his decision to wear dresses and our decision to let him. Metzler is not even his teacher. We are concerned about how are child is/will be treated at Gonzalez. He has very little understanding of gender/he just likes dresses. I am still furious. At the very least, Metzler needs immediate sensitivity training. I truly feel like she is a danger to our child. Preferably, I would like to see all of the teachers at Gonzales get sensitivity training. My son is not the first and will not be the last. I thank you for your attention to this matter. I would appreciate a phone call after you engage this email / 4042106760. Many blessings.

He is 3.

Dr. Hood

October 24, 2018

Sermonizing at the Strip Club

King's Cabaret
October 21, 2018
1am

We have talked. We have met. We have done everything we can think of and more. We have been brought to the place of a fundamental question: "How long oh God...how long? How long? How long?"

(A patron of the club walks through. Protestors tell him about the murder and beg him not to go in. He declares that he needs to go in. Turning away, he walks away smiling.)

The nonchalant response that we just saw is the reason that the tragedies keep on happening. Nobody is acting like a young woman was slaughtered in this parking lot. These people have forgotten her name. Say her name! Shniquia Simington! Shniquia Simington! Shniquia Simington!

All of these dancers are coming out her and saying how much they love Shniquia. If they love Shniquia, they would be out here with us. People are so turned around. It seems that people don't even know what love looks like anymore.

What's wrong with these folks? What's wrong with this club? What's wrong with this security guard? What's

wrong with our world? What's wrong with our world? What's wrong with a world where 27-year-old mother has no value? Complacency and inaction are the answers. However... We are going to choose to be different. We are not going to be complacent or inactive. We are going to stand for justice. We are going to stand for Shniquia. We are going to keep on keeping on. We are going to stand out here protesting until Shniquia's killer...Dan Taylor...is in jail!!! We are ready to do whatever is necessary. As long as we have breath, we are going to shout. As long as we have feet, we are going to march. As long as we have brains, we are going to know what happened here that night. We are going to know that Dan Taylor was Shniquia's killer. We are going to know that the King's Cabaret has been destroying and withholding evidence. We are going to know.

(Two men walk toward the door of the club. They stop to speak with us. Members of Shniquia's family beg

them to not go in. I explained the situation. After they considered the situation for a second, the two men turn around to go somewhere else. We all thanked them and cheered.)

Let me tell you something! You can call it God. You can call it Allah. You can call it love. Whatever you call it, something just happened. We just experienced a transformation...a resurrection. When we first got here, everybody was concerned that the crowd had shrunk from last time. I can tell you that we didn't experience the miracle that we just experienced last time. We are marching on. Without fail, we are going to get justice. We are going to see that miracle. We are going to get justice.

"What do we want???"

"Justice!!!"

"When do we want it???"

"Now!!!"

"What do we want???"

"Justice!!!"

"When do we want it???"

"Now!!!"

"What do we want???"

"Justice!!!"

"When do we want it???"

"Now!!!"

"Amen...Amen...& Amen."

October 26, 2018

Quadritarianism: Revelation of the Tree of Life

Fog finds often finds us when the times are idle. I've known such times. Wetness drowns my soul. Darkness covers my spirit. Fear is all that I know. Even in the midst of such, I chose to walk. I chose to feel my way along. I chose to push through the suffocation. I chose...to open the door. I never looked back...although there was really nothing to look back to.

Carpet gathers sediment unlike any other domestic surface. It is almost like there is an archive beneath our feet. Daily we leave donations to step on tomorrow. I knew there was something more with me...something that I couldn't explain. "God help me." I'd been praying

such words for many days now. I was unsure if anyone heard me. I just knew the fog. God is often like that. I've never understood such a God...such a God has never understood me.

You have to pull with all of your might to get the damn thing open. I planned it like that. I wanted to make it heavy enough to keep the kids from getting in. I underestimated their strength. With a thud, my office was open. Though the fog was thick, I dropped to my knees. I immediately regretted it. Cold wetness shot up my legs and into my heart. I shot up before feeling the need to ease back down. Prayer found me. I sure as hell didn't find it.

Before I could think, I was there. The fog lifted. God was there. Four manifestations of God became apparent. When they spoke, I knew exactly who they were. The fog lifted further. Billions and billions of

manifestations were behind them. The fog was gone. I could see clearer than ever before.

Then, shots rang out. Nothing was clear. The sting of death shot up my spine. I was taken back to that night. Those moments that changed everything forever. Worship died. I will never forget. Dallas and Pittsburgh are the same.

The Creator loves creation.
The Auara longs to hear.
The Instigator pushes us further.
The Detonator ignites our being.

Quadritarianism is the revealation God.
Quadritarianism is the revelation of the Tree of Life.
Creator in the midst of the horror. Auara in the midst of the cries. Instigator in the midst of the fear. Detonator in the midst of the stagnation. God was there. God is there. God is with us.

God is one.

For God is Creator, Aura, Instigator & Detonator...now and forevermore...

Genesis 1:1
John 1:1
Acts 2
1 Corinthians 13

World without end.

Amen.

November 3, 2018

Would Jesus Vote? // Moral Decisions in Immoral Times

*From Congressman Dr. Michael Burgess' Townhall at Denton High School in Denton, Texas on 06/18/2018

JH: With all due respect Congressman, this is a town hall...where I question you...not you question me. I asked you a question Congressman. And sir and sir...I think it is again disgusting and despicable to tell me that in 2011 I didn't care about immigration. I've been caring about the gospel of Jesus Christ the entire time. I'm asking you if you care about the gospel of Jesus Christ.

CB: well the answer to your question is yes...good we'll move on.

JH: I look forward to seeing it Congressman. I look forward to seeing it and let me say it one more time...

I look forward to seeing it!

Have you ever felt it? That feeling when you know that you've made the oppressor listen? God is in those powerful moments. I was feeling it when I walked out of auditorium. People kept coming up to me and congratulating me for my work. I shook the hand of Dr. Burgess' opponent, Linsey Fagan. After a few other superficial conversations, I started quickly heading for the car. Just when I thought I'd made it out, one of Fagan's canvassers literally grabbed me and started to demand all kinds of information. There was an assumption that I was voting for Fagan. There was an assumption that I wanted a sign in my yard. There was an assumption that I was ready to give everything I had to see Fagan elected. I was not. Confusion set in. I tried to explain. That made it worse.

"I don't even vote. I'm a follower of Jesus. The most faithful way that I can engage the electoral process is by refusing to engage. My prophetic calling is just too important to me to expend my energy on candidates....my job to challenge them all. The path of Jesus is about the pursuit of perfection not the compromise that inevitably comes with voting. Does that make sense?"

Flames filled his eyeballs. It became very apparent that our views differed. Honestly, I thought he might hit me.

"You are a complete dumbass. What kind of minister are you? Do you think Jesus wants to keep Trump in there? Haven't you ever heard of vote or die? You are definitely going to die. I'm through with you."

I think he felt like I was devaluing what he was doing. Maybe I was? Regardless, I thought it was important to let him know why I wouldn't be doing all of this stuff he

wanted me to do. I think there is a clear reason that Jesus got lost in the conversation. We simply worshipped different Gods.

Then, I looked to the heavens. I saw Jesus at the entrance. Deeper inside...I saw the booths. Enraged, I watched Jesus destroy it all.

While Linsey Fagan seems wonderful, I won't be voting for her...or anyone else for that matter.

Amen.

***Since writing this piece, I've had a slight change of heart. Donald Trump is the most evil leader our nation has ever seen. Seeking greater insight on how to live in perilous days like ours, I have studied the struggles of German Lutheran pastor and theologian, Dietrich Bonheoffer. Caught plotting to kill Hitler, Bonheoffer was executed. Throughout the entire ordeal, Bonheoffer

always struggled with whether his actions were moral or not. While Bonheoffer's decision certainly doesn't equate with the simple decision to vote, it does illustrate that dark times may require more than what our minds or consciences can understand. With that said, I am prayerfully considering voting Tuesday. I pray that you will join me.

November 10, 2018

The Resurrection of Jonestown: Words at a Memorial Service

Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood
North Texas
Public Theologian
Frequent Contributor, The Jonestown Report

Is this a time to reflect upon death? A common question that is bound to elicit a common answer. Surely, we have had enough of common thought when it comes to Jonestown. Everyone seems to be able to explain everything with one word...evil. Unfortunately, things are always much more complicated than that. To some degree, even justice exists far beyond explanation...it is somewhere out there in that inexplicable space of transformation.

Let's just go ahead and get it over with, Jim Jones was a real piece of shit...but we all are from time to time. In the midst of this remembrance, those who remember Jones mostly...remember wrongly. The outcome of the tragedy at Jonestown actually has nothing to do with Jones. Soul after soul was transformed into the fullness of justice that they'd always dreamed of being. You see, I don't believe in death without resurrection. Those who cling to the sting of death have not followed the

saints of Jonestown...oh no...those saints are marching on. Salvation is found in marching with them.

Listen!

They're marching against racism.

"Fuck the police!"

They're marching against sexism.

"Bash patriarchy!"

They're marching against homophobia.

"Love is love!"

They're marching against transphobia.

"I am who I am!"

They're marching against ableism.

"There's nothing disabled about me!"

They're marching against economic oppression.

"Healthcare is a right not a privilege."

They're marching...oh God...they're marching.

As we battle the evils of our present, may our energies not be enslaved to the past. Do not look for the souls of the departed in Jonestown. They are not there. They are here. Feel their flame of justice my friends. Let it burn within you. May it devour all of us...until we burn as brightly and as fiercely and as strongly...as they did...as they do...and as they will forever.

Now may the fire of God...the fire of the people of Jonestown...guide your heart, mind, body and soul...so that you might get up off your asses and follow them.

Amen, amen and...Hallelujah... amen.

November 11, 2018

Are Veterans Inherently Dangerous? // Happy Veterans Day?

"My brother...what's your name?" I don't remember how I met Quincy...but I know I'd never met someone more familiar. Over the years, we talked about the future. There was something deep within us that made us think that we could will the entire world to right. We were wrong.

"Check it...I need to talk this over with you...look at all of this shit you get...this might be my ticket." I looked at all of the pamphlets Quincy pushed into my chest and didn't know what to say. I obviously didn't say the right thing. "I need to think about it. This is pretty heavy for me." I watched his expression change immediately. "Fuck you!" The person that had become one of my closest friends stormed off. I didn't know how to proceed. I was lost.

Time seems often complicated. I can't remember how long it'd been since he left. I just know that the Quincy that arrived for dinner was not the same Quincy I'd known. He just kept talking about how much he wanted to kill some shit. I didn't know if I was going to make it through dinner. That was the last time we ever talked. I just knew that he was going to accomplish what he set out to do.

After numerous deployments and a variety of tragedies, Quincy put a gun to his head and pulled the trigger.

The only thing I was surprised about is that he didn't take more people with him.

Other situations have ended differently.

That night is forever etched into my mind. I was so close. The bullets. The screams. The blood. We had organized a march not a massacre. It didn't matter. A veteran named Micah Johnson stepped in and perpetuated the most significant mass shooting that the city of Dallas, Texas had ever seen. Though his reasons were many and the situation was complicated, Johnson's military mindset and training made him particularly lethal.

5 Dead.

Things had just gotten started. Everyone was right were he wanted them to be. In an instant, veteran Devin Kelley interrupted services at the First Baptist Church of Sutherland Springs, Texas and began to fire. Kelley fired until he could not fire anymore. Blood was everywhere. The precision of it all was unmistakable...Kelley was trained.

26 Dead.

On a mission, Charles Whitman climbed to the top of the University of Texas Tower. Relying on his military training, Whitman fired his sniper with pinpoint accuracy. Bodies dropped throughout the campus.

17 Dead.

People were just trying to get their bags. Historically, Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport had been considered a safe place. In the midst of it all,

veteran Esteban Santiago-Ruiz opened fire. Thud after thud after thud hit the floor.

5 Dead.

Shortly after the Dallas shooting, veteran Gavin Long ambushed and opened fire on police in Louisiana.

3 Dead.

I could go on and on and on.

There are dozens of cases just like them.

Of modern mass shootings, veterans have carried out somewhere between 30-35% of the atrocities...while only making up somewhere between 10-15% of the population. Which means that veterans are over twice as likely to commit a mass shooting. Beside gender

(male), military service is the most common characteristic of modern mass shooters.

Veterans are more likely to commit suicide.
Veterans are more likely to exhibit violent aggression.
Veterans are more likely to be unable to cope with their surroundings.

I could go on and on and on.

These facts are not an indictment of veterans. They are an indictment of us. We are the ones who keep fucking people up so that we don't have to live with the consequences of war. If veterans are inherently dangerous (and I don't think they are) or even slightly more prone to aggression...we are the ones who made them that way. Where is our desire to rectify the situation? Where is our desire to help? When in the hell are we going to learn to love veterans as we love our self? Ending war would be a good start.

Amen.

*more info:

List of Mass Shootings:
https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2012/12/mass-shootings-mother-jones-full-data/

Disproportionately Veterans:
https://worldbeyondwar.org/u-s-mass-shooters-disproportionately-veterans/

PTSD/Murder Rates:
https://slate.com/technology/2014/04/ptsd-and-violence-by-veterans-increased-murder-rates-related-to-war-experience.html

November 15, 2018

Jemel Roberson & the End of a Movement (Black Lives Matter & Against Police Brutality)

Over the last few days, I have engaged other activists about responding to the murder of Jemel Roberson.

Repeatedly, I've heard the same response...

"Who?"

"Who?"

"Who?"

"I got this." Who was he talking to? It didn't matter then. It doesn't matter. What matters is that Jemel Roberson was dedicated to being the absolute best that he could be. When he arrived at Manny's Blue Room

Lounge in Midlothian, Illinois, he was ready to do his job. Throughout the night, Roberson randomly thought about his partner and his children. Though he missed them, he knew that he was doing this for them. In fact, Roberson was working extra shifts to secure more money for the upcoming holidays. There were minor incidents off and on all night. That's the nature of working at a bar. Regardless, what happened next was more than anybody expected...well, anybody but Roberson. When the gun battle erupted at the bar, Roberson sprung into action and quickly apprehended one of the shooters. Taking great care to keep everyone safe, Roberson held the shooter down. When Midlothian police arrived, Roberson felt some relief. Now, he could go help everybody else. Despite repeated cries from bystanders that he was a security guard...police opened fire and killed him. The hero was struck down by the villains (in this case...the police).

Jemel Roberson is no different than Michael Brown.

Jemel Roberson is no different than Jordan Edwards.
Jemel Roberson is no different than Botham Jean.
Jemel Roberson is no different than Philando Castile.
Jemel Roberson is no different than Eric Garner.

The names of those that the police have slaughtered are endless.

Our collective energy is obviously not.

Why is it that the cases of all of the above names got more exposure that the case of Jemel Roberson?

Unfortunately, I believe that we have reached the end of the life cycle of the Black Lives Matter Movement and the Movement Against Police Brutality (a heightened national moment of sustained attention to and protest of numerous/if not most cases involving police brutality and racial violence). We are just not seeing these cases get the exposure that they would have a few years ago.

The hasthags are simply not as plentiful. The marches/actions/protests are not happening quit so often or as quickly. There is no need to belabor the point. Signs fill our times.

So, what comes next?

Whatever it is, I hope it's better than what #JemelRoberson is getting right now.

Amen.

November 18, 2018

918 People Dead / 40 Years Since Jonestown : Words to the Official Memorial Service in Oakland, California

*For many years, I've been a theologian of Jonestown. The 918 people who died have long been my teachers.

Though November 18, 1978 seems like a long time ago, it feels very fresh to me. The words. The pictures. The cries. The screams. When I was first asked to come to Oakland to deliver these words, I was terrified. How does one speak to the families and loved ones of 918 people? Ultimately, I was unable to go...but I sent these words instead. I hope they loudly proclaim my admiration for the social concerns of the people of Jonestown from Evergreen Cemetery to the world. Surely, God loves us all.

The Resurrection of Jonestown

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Now may the fire of God...the fire of the people of Jonestown...guide your heart, mind, body and soul...so that you might get up off your asses and follow them.

Amen, amen and...Hallelujah... amen.

November 22, 2018

Armed WHITE Men: Thanksgiving?

Manufactured.

Thanksgiving? Evil. We give thanks for the rapes perpetuated by armed white men. We give thanks for the eradication of native peoples by armed white men. We give thanks for the enslavement of persons of color by armed white men. We give thanks for a culture of oppression built and maintained by armed white men. We give thanks for the white God created and protected by armed white men. We give thanks for armed white men. Thanksgiving? Evil.

Spoiled.

Our children know not to blindly accept the histories they are fed at school. After being immersed in multiple classic problematic stories about Thanksgiving, my son came home and wanted to know the truth. I didn't hesitate. "The true story of Thanksgiving is genocide." "What does that mean again?" "Armed white men from Europe got off of boats in America and killed as many native people as they could...as rapidly as they could...until they had complete power. To talk about what happened in any other way is to erase the truth." "Do my teachers know about these armed white men?" "Of course they do...but people are afraid to engage the truth." "I'm not. Don't you say that God and truth go together?" "I do." "I'm sticking with God on this one." Spoiled food makes us sick. Spoiled history does as well. Which is exactly what everybody is going to be consuming with all of this armed white men triumphalism that is wrapped up in Thanksgiving.

Raw.

The armed white man waited in the darkness. Cars sped past the officer as if he wasn't there. Nobody could see him. I was sitting at the gas station and wondered what he was waiting on. Then, a car slowly travels by. When they came to a stop right in front of me, I figured out quickly what he was looking for. There was a young white girl driving and a young black girl in the passenger seat. He approached the car with his hand on his gun. Before he even asked for license and registration, he wanted to know what they were doing together. By this point, I already had my phone out the window. He didn't notice at first. He declared that this was all about a dim headlight. I knew what that shit was code for. He was growing more and more aggressive. So, I screamed out, "I'm filming!" I was full of shit. My battery was actually dead. Then, he turned his attention to me. "What are you doing?" I just kept holding my phone. Eventually, he gave them a ticket

and burned a tire next to my car. When it was all over, I drove over to make sure the victims were ok. Immediately, they both declared, "You saved our lives!" There was no way I was going to take credit for that. I did tell them that there are forces much more powerful than armed white men. "Now, that's something to be thankful for."

Amen.

November 23, 2018

God, Please Damn Black Friday

Stuff. Stuff. Stuff. How much turkey/dressing/pie/corn/casserole/rolls can you get down that little whole? Stuff. Stuff. Stuff. Once you are

about to shit all over yourself and can't consume anything else, you stop. Unable to move much, you pull the newspaper across the table. The ads fall out all over the table. Beautiful images adorn every page. Regardless of it all, you know what you want. Your television just isn't as clear as it was when you got it six months ago. You are desperate for another one. Praise God! Wal-Mart is next. There on the second page is exactly the television you want. Unbelievably, it is marked down 500 bucks. You've got to have it. Though quick goodbyes are necessary, you get out of there as fast as you can. Neglecting to do anything else...you race to bed. Just before you close your eyes, you pray that you will get the television...because you know that you deserve it.

Beep. Beep. Beep. You feel like death. The television is the only thing keeping you going. Bam. Bam. Bam. It's your ride. Racing outside, you look at your watch. Praise God! You're running early. Your ride drops you

off at the front door. You stand right against the glass. The crowd behind you grows bigger and bigger as the hours pass. When the security guard timidly opens the doors, humanity bursts forward. In your rush to the television, you knock down him over. Nothing is going to keep you from that television. Once you grab it, you sit there and hold it for a second before you take it to the register. As you head to the front, you give people the look of death and dare them to come near you. Once you get your receipt, you lift your hands up to God in praise.

Standing at the front of the store, you wait on your ride. When you look up from admiring your television, you see numerous emergency vehicles. The closer you get, the more you realize that there is a body just inside the front door. When you ask what happened, a firefighter responds, "Some greedy asshole knocked him over and a bunch of other greedy assholes trampled him to death. Surely a damn television isn't worth a life?!?!"

RIP Jdimytai Damour

Trampled to Death at Wal-Mart

Black Friday 2008

Amen.

*More:

https://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/30/nyregion/30walmart.html

November 24, 2018

St. Ray of Houston: Protector of the Margins

*Back info: Civil rights legend Ray Hill's obituary in the Houston Chronicle

https://www.chron.com/news/houston-texas/houston/article/Ray-Hill-a-Houston-icon-and-civil-rights-13418968.php

The first time we met...

"Damn! You're cute for a Baptist minister." "Thank you?" "Although, most Baptist ministers really are ugly as shit." "Fuck you Ray Hill."

Nobody would have mistaken Ray Hill for wealthy. He lived in a small apartment full of mementos from days gone by. Regardless of the (typical) insulting/humorous banter, the space provided context for the man. Ray loved to talk and he had no problem telling me what stuff was and why it mattered. The more we looked the holier the space got. Every object seemed to be turning into a sacrament. How could it not? From abolitionist

to LGBTQ campaigner to prison reformer to Supreme Court plaintiff to inmate to radio personality to all sorts of other places, Ray had led an amazing life. I couldn't help but be in wonder. In the midst of my awe, Ray broke in again.

"Do you drive better than you look?"

Needless to say, the drive to Galveston was anything but quiet. Ray took me to the greasiest place that he could find. I could see the grease dripping off of my fried shrimp. Without hesitation, Ray brought up religion. Since I knew he was somewhat agnostic, I hesitated.

"Come on preacher boy! Ain't you going to try and convert me? What's the matter? You scared?"

Occasionally, God breaks into our lives in ways so real that it cannot be denied. Wind. Waves. Birds. Sand.

Light. While standing there on the beach, I heard Ray mutter...

"If there is a God, she's got to feel something like this."

Much time passed before we got together again. Ray was older. So was I. It was close to Christmas. Ray claimed that our restaurant destination had the best food in Houston. Ray was wrong. Despite the cuisine or perhaps because of it, we got to celebrate life that night. Providing sacrament after sacrament of love and justice, Ray was the priest. At the end of the night, I didn't want to leave.

"Go on preacher boy...I'll take you to church again soon."

I made one appearance on his radio show. I have no idea what we talked about. I just know that I had the time of my life. Something about those microphones felt

like communion...perhaps teleporters to beyond. Ray knew how I was feeling...

"Radio is the good shit Jeff. "

When I walked in, I knew I was in another one of Ray's hole in the wall restaurants. We were meeting so that he could discuss the death penalty with a camera crew I was taking around. From start to finish, Ray's passion was obvious. Fists. Eyes. Shakes. Points. Inflection. He had it all going that afternoon. As we were about to leave, Ray pulled me aside and said...

"You know you're the best minister in the State of Texas on the death penalty?"

I knew it was just another one of Ray's tall tales...but it made me feel strong as hell. He had a way of doing that. Uplifting the troops in the midst of the battle for justice. When I heard he died today, I was convinced that his

voice was gone forever. Then, I closed my eyes and heard a familiar voice.

"Don't stop fighting queerbait!"

St. Ray is still speaking

Amen.

November 26, 2018

EJ Bradford: Martyr of Hoover, Alabama / Home of Racists

Did they know they'd hired a racist? It's possible. Maybe they didn't know how to identify a racist? Pointed questions could have helped. Maybe they didn't care? Concern is born out of relationship and there is none. Maybe this is the way they want it? Truth.

Racism disguised is still racism. Hoover, Alabama is open to everybody. Bullshit. Hoover is open to white folk. Racism there is barely disguised.

After arriving early to meet a friend at a restaurant next to the Galleria Mall (the scene of the crime), I watched a police officer let dozens of white people speed by him. As soon as he saw a young black man, he flipped the lights on. I couldn't even figure out what he did wrong. Once he had the young man stopped, the officer jumped out of the car, ran towards the drive and started screaming commands. Everyone in the restaurant thought that they were about to watch this officer shoot this young man. The theatrics seemed to grow bigger and bigger until the officer noticed all of us pressed up against the glass. Eventually, the officer let the young man go with a warning. Consistently, the officer looked back at us to make sure that we saw that he let the young man off. While everyone around me saw a

compassionate officer, I saw an officer who would have killed that young man if we hadn't all been there. The next day I called the Hoover Police Department to talk to somebody about what happened. This being the days before body cameras, there was no proof to validate what I was saying. I'll never forget what the desk officer said, "Sometimes we have to shoot first and ask questions later." The conversation ended there.

Though many years have passed, I immediately wondered if it was the same officer.

Why was he out? Who gives a shit? He was a young man living his life. Maybe he wanted to buy some new sneakers? Maybe he was getting a bite to eat at the food court? Maybe he was simply hanging out with friends? There are a million positive reasons why he could have been there. Was he involved in an altercation? Who knows? One thing is certain...he didn't kill anybody. The officer didn't care.

A number of years ago, I lived near Hoover. I have actually been to the spot of the shooting many times.

Embodying the spirit of days gone by in Alabama, a police officer has killed a black man. Immediately after shots were fired in the Galleria, an officer ran toward the scene. When the officer saw that EJ Bradford had a gun...he shot him in the face. Not only did EJ not kill anybody...there is no proof that he did anything wrong at all. It is quite possible that EJ was actually trying to help...or at the very least defend himself. Police speculation don't ever make fact...in fact...their speculation consistently makes injustice. Knowing Hoover, the officer might not have speculated at all. Maybe he just saw this as an opportunity to kill a black man. I wouldn't be surprised.

Now, an innocent man is dead...a killer is on the loose...and Hoover remains one of the most dangerous cities in our country to be black in.

"Shoot first and ask questions later."

This is AmeriKKKa.

EJ Bradford is our latest Martyr.

Amen.

+more:
https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/alabama-police-suggest-black-man-killed-officer-shouldn-t-have-n940036

November 27, 2018

Trans Immigrant Killed in Federal Custody: Roxsana Hernandez

Imagine.

"Disgusting!"

"Oh my God!"

"I will kill you!"

Assault.

Torture.

Murder.

Tegucigalpa has one of the highest murder rates...not just in Honduras...but in the entire world. Roxsana Hernandez was just trying to survive. You see, there is a Trans genocide going on in our world and Tegucigalpa is one of it's epicenters. I don't know what the final straw was that made Roxsana flee...but I do know that it must have been very intense to have made her embark on very dangerous journey...with perhaps even more risks...to get to the United States. Perhaps Roxsana knew the obvious...she didn't have any other options.

"Disgusting!"

"Oh my God!"

"I will kill you!"

Assault.

Torture.

Murder.

Desolate area met desolate area as she journeyed north. The longer the journey the more obvious it became that Roxsana was Trans. Danger met danger with every encounter. Everybody stayed away out of fear of what could happen to them. Loneliness birthed greater loneliness. Tears often met her cheeks. Through it all, she somehow maintained her grip on hope. Death was the only other option. The further north she got the more she realized that she could actually make it. Grinding. She pressed on.

"Disgusting!"

"Oh my God!"

"I will kill you!"

Assault.

Torture.

Murder.

Roxsana thought things would get better. They didn't. Undeterred, she pressed toward her promised land...the land of freedom...the United States of America. The border towns were rough. She didn't want to stay long. She just wanted to get over that border. Eventually, she did. The result was not what she was expecting. Instead of being welcomed, she was arrested. Due to her gender, she was treated like an animal. Slurs filled the air. Disgust recycled repeatedly. Bodies didn't matter. Nothing mattered. There was nothing she could do.

Fighting back would be suicide. Time made things worse. Beating after beating took a toll on her body...until the day came. There would be no asylum for Roxsana Hernandez. This was the end.

"Disgusting!"

"Oh my God!"

"I will kill you!"

Assault.

Torture.

Murder.

Amen.

+more:
https://www.cnn.com/2018/11/27/us/transgender-asylum-seeker-wrongful-death-claim/index.html

November 28, 2018

God Makes Love With Trans Women

"Look at that shit! Unreal. Simply Unreal." The site was a basketball game at Southwest Atlanta Christian Academy and the player was Dwight Howard. No one had ever seen this level of player. Everybody was in awe. When he was selected with the first pick of the 2005 NBA Draft, nobody that had seen him play was surprised. Now...more than a dozen years later...Howard is currently playing for the Washington

Wizards...reaching the twilight of a Hall of Fame NBA career. While I have long admired his skills...

Most people don't know that I'm a sports fan. I don't write about it much. I don't talk about it much. I'm pretty incognito about it. Occasionally, something happens in the sports world that requires engagement.

Men's professional sports are not open spaces. In fact, I don't think I can name one current out athlete in any of the top leagues. So, any time there is a story about an athlete's sexuality...it makes news. Just this past weekend, a man named Masin Elijé came forward and declared that he had been in a relationship with Dwight Howard and dumped him when he found out that he was going to sex parties with Trans women. Elijé further declared that he had been harassed and threatened by Howard to keep quite about it all. Instead of showing concern for Elijé, every reaction I saw was transphobic.

We shouldn't be surprised.

"Disgusting!"

"Oh my God!"

"I will kill you!"

Assault.

Torture.

Murder.

These types of atrocities are perpetuated against Trans people everyday.

Many years ago, I remember telling a "friend" that I found a Trans woman attractive and almost getting my

ass kicked. What's the deal? Who gives a shit? Humans often find other humans attractive for a variety of reasons. It's natural. If Dwight Howard harassed and threatened Masin Elijé, he should suffer the consequences...but if his only "sin" is being attracted to or having sex with Trans women then he is in good company.

God knows all and has experienced all. God is intimately connected to the oppressed and marginalized. God is deeply involved with the pursuit of justice. God delights in equality. In fact, God is love. When we make love we are making God...for God is love. So when God and Trans women get together they are creating something beautiful that should be a revelation to us all.

Amen.

December 5, 2018

Phenomenological Musings on Death and Resurrection

The flight was so early. New York grew closer and closer. The guy next to me slept and slobbered the entire flight. It's always strange to experience such intimacy with a complete stranger. I don't like it.

Hours upon hours had passed since I got off the plane. I had filled every second with something new...art...theatre...music over and over. You name it...I did it. By the time I found myself wandering around in Times Square, I was too tired to pay attention to anything. Then, I saw everyone looking up at the news. I think my head turned instinctively. The words flashed across the screen over and over, "Ronald Reagan Dead at 93." I heard so much negative chatter around me. I didn't know what to think.

The flight was so early. New York was gone. I don't remember any of that flight. My body wouldn't let me. Once we arrived in DC, I truly had no idea where I was. Slowly, knowledge came.

When the aide opened the door, I felt like I was being ushered into a deeply spiritual place. I guess I was. When John Lewis reached out his hand and grabbed mine, I felt the presence of God. Before long, the subject of Ronald Reagan's passing arose. There were some hisses and boos from his staff...but Lewis was having none of it. "That man is a child of God just like any of you are. When a child of God dies...we should all mourn...because God dies...or at least a little piece of God does."

In the last few days, I've been tempted to call President George H.W. Bush every name but a "child of God." Every time such temptation arises, I think back to the words of John Lewis and remember who I am...a

follower of Jesus...whose mission is to see the God in all and to mourn the God that dies in all.

Dr. Tom Altizer...founder of the modern "Death of God" Movement...also died a few days ago. Continuously, Altizer impressed upon me that there is no such thing as death without resurrection. I need to remember that shit now more than ever. I guess we all do.

Amen.

December 8, 2018

Response to *We recommend Carolyn King Arnold in Dallas City Council District 4 in Dallas Morning News (December 6, 2018)

To the Editor.

Privilege spews forth. While I expect Editorial Boards to judge candidates on their merits, I don't expect them to be judged on their socioeconomic positioning. In your District 4 City Council endorsement, you had the audacity to make an issue out of the fact that a young single mother of multiple children (now candidate Keyaira D. Saunders) had almost gotten evicted twice in her past. Basically, you are insinuating that anyone with financial struggles is disqualified from holding public office. Not only is such a sentiment demonstrably ludicrous, it disenfranchises all sorts of people whose talents are desperately needed in government. While I doubt such will be given, I am calling on the Editorial Board to issue an apology/correction that plainly states that the socioeconomic positioning of a candidate shouldn't have been...should not be...and will not be a factor in their endorsements. Surely, the readers of the Dallas Morning News deserve more than blatant classism.

Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood

Public Theologian

December 9, 2018

Keyaira D. Saunders. = Hope.

Greetings! This is Rev. - Dr. - Jeff - Hood. I am calling you with a very important message. On December 11, there will be a runoff election for Dallas City Council District 4. On the ballot, you will only find one candidate who shares your progressive values. Her name is Keyaira D. Saunders. Do not miss this opportunity to transform City Hall! Vote Keyaira!!! This message has been paid for by the Keyaira D. Saunders campaign.

It felt uncomfortable. It felt like I was going against my beliefs. It felt... This was the first time I'd ever done a robocall before. The campaign sent it all over the city. Though I was glad to help my dear friend Keyaira Saunders, I have long held that voting is a problematic exercise for the follower of Jesus. I've long thought that we should exist outside of the political spectrum. I've always believed that mine is a work of social justice not politics. I can't imagine Jesus voting. With all of this said, I think that there are times that become so evil...that we are forced to step outside of our comfort and fight for the lives of others. In an age of Trump, I have decided to fight.

The Dallas Morning News' endorsement of Keyaira's opponent was awful...but one paragraph disturbed me more than any other.

"More concerning, court records from Collin and Denton counties indicate apartment complexes have sought to

evict Saunders in recent years. A mother of three children, Saunders said she had fallen on hard times financially but settled debts and was never evicted. Nonetheless, we find this troubling."

-https://www.dallasnews.com/opinion/editorials/2018/12/06/recommend-carolyn-king-arnold-dallas-city-council-district-4

Criticisms based on policy are fair...but fuck anybody that would judge a single mother of three children who has struggled to pay the rent.

I responded thusly...

To the Editor.

Privilege spews forth. While I expect Editorial Boards to judge candidates on their merits, I don't expect them to be judged on their socioeconomic positioning. In your

District 4 City Council endorsement, you had the audacity to make an issue out of the fact that a young single mother of multiple children (now candidate Keyaira D. Saunders) had almost gotten evicted twice in her past. Basically, you are insinuating that anyone with financial struggles is disqualified from holding public office. Not only is such a sentiment demonstrably ludicrous, it disenfranchises all sorts of people whose talents are desperately needed in government. While I doubt such will be given, I am calling on the Editorial Board to issue an apology/correction that plainly states that the socioeconomic positioning of a candidate shouldn't have been...should not be...and will not be a factor in their endorsements. Surely, the readers of the Dallas Morning News deserve more than blatant classism.

Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood

Public Theologian

I doubt I will work this hard in future elections...but we need single mothers of color in governance to look out for all of the single mothers of color and all other oppressed/marginalized peoples...because right now nobody is.

Hope is in short supply these days.

Jesus stands with the least of these.

Jesus stands with hope.

I do too.

VOTE KEYAIRA.

Amen.

December 18, 2018

DANGEROUS WORDS: A MANIFESTO

OUTRAGE. Does the Editorial Board of the Dallas Morning News think we're not paying attention? Repeatedly, we have seen these "unbiased" participants in our democracy consistently show tremendous BIAS toward persons of color, women and the poor. The final straw for us was the publication of the two almost evictions of Keyaira Saunders in the recent Dallas City Council District 4 runoff election. Who do these people think they are? We have never seen the Editorial Board publish such intimate financial information when it comes to white candidates, male candidates or wealthy candidates. This example is merely a symptom of a much larger disease. BIGOTRY.

With such affirmed, we the undersigned of DANGEROUS

WORDS demand the following INTERDEPENDENT actions:

- APOLOGY. While Keyaira Sunders deserves a personal apology, we believe that the Editorial Board owes the wider city an apology for the bigotries that it has maintained throughout the history of the Dallas Morning News.

-MEETING. We believe it is important for the Editorial Board to hear our concerns and determine a way forward together.

-COMMITMENT. We want to know what the Editorial Board is going to do specifically to keep this from happening again. While we believe that a Diversity Review Board would be a good step, we are interested in what ideas the Editorial Board might have to cleanse their writings.

HOPE. Now is the time to open your hearts. Now is the time to change. Now is the time for justice. We hope you will hear us. Do not delay. The future of your souls as a participant in our democracy depends on it. ACTION. NOW.

IN SOLIDARITY,

Olinka Green / Community Activist
Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood / Public Theologian

December 20, 2018

Dangerous Words

*Though this piece is written about the Dallas Morning News, it could be written to the vast majority of our media outlets.

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.

Amen.

December 25, 2018

The QUEER CHRISTMAS: A Revolution of Sorts

*This work is dedicated to my children.

Many Christmases ago, I prayed for something more. I needed greater revelation. Following the queerness of God, I dared to dream. While I know this piece would be different if I wrote it now, God found me then.

In the days of Governor Rick Perry, there was an old minister named Bob whose partner was named Tommy. For many years, Tommy had wanted a child and now the couple was old. One evening as Bob was alone praying for a child in the living room, a bright light came over him. Standing and turning, Bob tried to run away. The light would not let Bob go. In that moment, the light began to speak, “I love you. You do not have to be afraid. I want you to know that you are about to adopt a child and her name will be John. She will bring good news of salvation and liberation to the world. The child will be queer beyond imagination and

filled with the Spirit of God." Bob couldn't believe what he was hearing, "How will I know that this is true? Don't lie to us. We are too old." The light responded, "I am Gabby and I stand in the presence of a God that is queer beyond your wildest imagination. I have been sent to tell you that the queerness that flows from our God will fill up your daughter John. To make the situation queerer, I have been told to take away your power to speak until the day these events transpire."

When the light appeared, the doors to the living room slammed shut and the windows closed to lock Bob in. Tommy heard all of the commotion and ran downstairs to see what was going on. Some neighbors who had heard everything raced to join Tommy. After some time, the door slowly opened. Bob walked out with a really intense tan and covered in glitter. Everyone tried to ask him what happened, but Bob couldn't speak. Tommy ran a tablet over and Bob typed out that

a daughter named John was on her way. The two men embraced and jumped up and down. The neighbors couldn't figure out what was going on and decided that the couple must have really lost it this time.

After a few months of nesting in faith, a Child Protective Services (CPS) agent named Marina called to ask Tommy if they would be interested in adopting a little girl named John. Although the child did not meet any of the identity criteria the couple had previously and perhaps selfishly asked for, Marina thought she would try. Bob knew that he had heard the voice of God and this was the child of their dreams. Marina was shocked when Tommy replied with an emphatic "YES!" for both of them and was even scared to tell them that it was still going to be some time before their little girl John would arrive. However, nothing could dampen the excitement of Tommy and Bob. Tommy told Marina they would wait forever on John.

Months later, Gabby was sent by God to a queer woman named Mary in a town called Dallas. While Mary's partner Josie was at work, Gabby appeared to her in a great light, "Hello! God is with you." Mary was deeply perplexed. Gabby replied, "Do not be afraid. You are chosen by God to conceive in your womb a child named Jesus. The child will be the child of God who shows the world the power of love." Mary immediately replied, "How can this be, I only sleep with my partner Josie?" Gabby replied, "The Spirit of the Queer will come upon you. The love of God will overwhelm you. The child will be queer. The child will be the perfect Queer of God. And even right now in their old age, your cousin Tommy and his partner Bob have a daughter named John they are going to adopt. Know that nothing is impossible with God." Mary fell to the feet of Gabby and declared, "I love the Queer and I will do whatever God

asks of me, may your words be accomplished and more." Gabby dissolved in front of her.

A few days later, Mary went up to Denton. She went directly to Bob and Tommy's house not too far off the Square. Mary met Tommy in the driveway and greeted him with a loud shriek of excitement. Right after a collective embrace, the phone rang. Tommy picked up the line and Marina asked if he would briefly like to hear John for the first time. On the other end of the phone, Tommy could hear a little baby cooing and he began to cry tears of joy. Then Tommy was filled with the Spirit of God and he cried aloud, "Mary you are indeed carrying God! The fruit of your womb will be the queering of all nations. Who am I, that the carrier of the Queer shall visit me? Did you see that? As soon as you walked up, I got to talk to my little daughter John for the first time on the phone. That was no accident. You brought God into this space. I know that the

promise of God, the promise of the Queer is going to be fulfilled in you."

And Mary said: "My soul rejoices in the queerness that I have found. For my God has found me. I rejoice in the savior of my life. I rejoice in the Queer. I am so unworthy of a miracle of God, yet God dwells in me. From this day forth generations will count me queer, so wonderful is this God-granted discovery. Praise be to the creator of queerness. God's name is Queer. The queerness of God endures from generation to generation. This is the God that is so queer that God refuses to be anything but queer. The keepers of normativity will be restored to their queerness. The hungry and poor will never want again. God will stand on the side of the Queer forever."

Mary stayed with Tommy for about 2 weeks and then returned home.

Not too long after, the time came for Tommy and Bob's daughter John to arrive. The entire community knew how much the couple wanted a child and rejoiced to God with flowing champagne when the baby arrived. Unfortunately, Bob was still unable to speak.

When it came time to baptize the child, many tried to ask Tommy if he and Bob wanted to change the name of the child. "Don't you know that she won't know her gender identity if you name her John? Plus, who exactly are you naming the child after?" consistently remarked family and friends. The group gathered for the baptism motioned for Bob and asked him one last time about the child's name. Bob typed out on his tablet, "Her name is John!" All were amazed. Immediately, as he displayed the tablet, Bob's tongue was loosened and he began to speak, praising God. This queer series of events scared the shit out of all of Denton. Everyone wondered, "How

did Bob lose and gain his ability to speak? If this child is chosen queer by God, what will the child become?" There was no question that the hand of God was on the situation.

Then Bob began to speak words of justice and peace, "God loves us. God has redeemed us. God has raised for us a queer savior. God will save us from the keepers of normativity and make us queer. God is unfailing in God's love and you my daughter John will be called the prophet of the Most Queer, for you will go before God to prepare God's way and give knowledge of salvation to all people. The queerness of God will dawn on us, to give light to all who dwell in darkness and death, to guide us to the place of peace."

John grew and became strong in spirit, and she was in the wilderness of Denton until the day she appeared publicly in Dallas.

While Mary was incredibly excited about the coming baby Jesus, Josie couldn't figure out what was going on. Regardless of Mary's story, Josie felt like Mary must have cheated on her with a man. Now, Josie felt unsure of Mary's sexuality or basic identity. Josie decided it would be best to break up with Mary privately, as she was not interested in having a dramatic public break up. Not long after Josie made her final decision, she fell asleep and began to dream. A bright light appeared to Josie and said, "Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife forever, for the child conceived in her is from the Spirit of God. She will bear a queer child and you are to name the child Jesus, for Jesus will show the world the danger of normativity. The child shall also be called Emmanuel or 'God is with us.' Now, go and make her your wife."

Mary and Josie were married in a religious ceremony.

During that time, President Barack Obama sent out an executive order stating that the entire nation should register. This was the healthcare registration and was taken while Rick Perry was Governor of Texas. So all citizens went to their hometowns to be registered. Since there was not marriage equality in Texas, a pregnant Mary had to take the chance of ignoring the decree for legally unmarried persons to go to their hometowns and followed her wife Josie on her journey from Dallas to the town of Cooper Creek, because Josie descended from the Coopers. Feeling vulnerable and longing to be married, Mary and Josie went into Denton first to try one more time to get married before the baby Jesus was to be born.

At the clerk's office, Mary and Josie were threatened with arrest for trying to get married. Mary felt a tremendous amount of pressure in the lobby and her water broke. The baby was coming quickly. Mary and

Josie raced out of the building and sought a place for Mary to have the child. After being rejected at the hospital due to a lack of insurance, Josie tried to get a room at the one hotel in Cooper Creek. The hotel manager said that the hotel didn't allow lesbians, but that he would open his barn to the couple for free. Upon arrival to the barn, Mary collapsed with loud cries and Josie helped deliver the child.

Right outside of Cooper Creek, there were migrant farm workers living in the fields, keeping watch over their crops by night. Then an angel appeared in the sky and light filled everything. The migrant farm workers were terrified. The angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I am bringing you good news of great joy. Tonight, for you is born a savior and God in the city of Cooper Creek. This is how you will find the child…let the spirit guide you to a child wrapped in cloth in a manger." Then all of a sudden, thousands of angels filled the sky praising

love and declaring, “Glory to God in the highest and peace and goodwill to all.” When the angels departed, the sky returned to dark. The migrant farm workers looked at each other and said in unison, “Let’s go and see this miracle that God has revealed to us.” Running, the migrant farm workers found the baby lying in the manger.

Mary and Josie were holding each other next to the manger. By this time, some kind hotel workers had arrived to try and help. The migrant farm workers recounted all that they had seen and the gathered people were amazed. Mary silently pondered all the beautiful words in her heart. The migrant farm workers returned to the fields glorifying and praising God for all they had experienced.

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After eight days, Mary and Josie decided to baptize the child. The migrant farm workers joined Mary and Josie at a small creek. This was the only space available to them. A radical local minister poured water over the child's head and declared his name Jesus. The gathered cheered the queer events.

Mary had to heal a bit before they were able to travel for the dedication. When the time came, Mary, Josie, and Jesus traveled to Dallas. Upon arrival, they went to the Cathedral for Jesus' dedication. Outside the Cathedral, there was an older homeless gentleman named Simeon. Many years prior, Simeon had a vision while in a drug-induced stupor. God told Simeon that he would not die until he met the Messiah. Guided by the Spirit of God, Simeon tried to enter the Cathedral. Unfortunately, suspecting Simeon of being a drunken panhandler, some of the hired security guards would not let him in. God told Simeon to go to the side

door of the Cathedral. When Mary and Josie brought Jesus forward to be dedicated, Simeon took hold of the child to the surprise of everyone. The security guards tried to rush Simeon, but, sensing the Spirit of God at work, Mary called them off.

Praising God, Simeon declared, “Savior, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. Mine eyes have seen your queerness and know that your salvation is the salvation of all people. I have waited my whole life to hold this child.”

Mary and Josie were amazed at the events that were transpiring. Simeon blessed them and declared, “This child will be the liberation of all. The queerness of many will be revealed, especially you two.”

As Simeon finished speaking, an old bag lady named Anna stood and began to praise the child. Anna had lived in the Cathedral for many years, praying day and

night. “Jesus is the redemption of all people and in this queer we will all find our queerness.”

Mary, Josie, and Jesus left the Cathedral and made the journey to Ponder, the place they had chosen to settle down.

A few years later, monks from Asia showed up in Dallas, “Where is this queer child who has been born to be ruler of all nations? We observed the star in the sky and wanted to pay homage.” When Governor Rick Perry heard about this, he was frightened, and all the powerful elites of Texas with him; and calling together all of the religious leaders, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, “The child is to be born in Cooper Creek.” Then Governor Perry called in the monks and learned from them the exact time that the star had appeared. The Governor then sent the monks to Cooper Creek and said, “When you

find the child, send me word and I will come pay homage to the child." The monks left and continued to follow the star until it stopped over the place where Jesus was. On entering the apartment, they saw the child with Mary and they knelt down to worship. Then opening their suitcases, they offered the child gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. The beauty of the moment was overwhelming for all involved. After a night of celebration and drinking with Mary and Josie, the monks went to sleep on a blow up mattress in the living room. In their sleep, God spoke to them and warned them not to return to Governor Perry. The next morning, after saying goodbye and encouraging Mary, Josie, and Jesus to be careful, the monks traveled to Oklahoma City and flew through Canada back to Asia.

A few nights after the visit of the monks, an angel appeared to Josie in a dream and said, "Get up and take Mary and Jesus to Mexico. Remain there until I tell you

that it is safe to come back. For Perry is going to imprison every child in Texas that looks like Jesus and try to destroy their spirits in the Texas Prison Industrial Complex." Josie, Mary, and Jesus left immediately and made it to the border of Mexico by morning. Not having any identification, Josie and Mary bought water at a gas station and traveled through the desert, taking turns holding Jesus on their backs. The family settled in Monterrey. This fulfilled the prophecy, "Out of Mexico I have called my child."

When Governor Perry saw the monks had tricked him, he became enraged. The Governor imprisoned all children that looked like what he thought Jesus might look like in and around Cooper Creek. Governor Perry stole the lives of these children. Most of the state didn't seem to care or notice, as Perry had consistently imprisoned and executed seemingly innocent people before. This fulfilled the prophecy, "The unquieted tears of mothers will reveal the injustice of the system."

When Governor Perry left office, an angel appeared to Josie and said, “It is now sake for you to return to Texas.” Josie, Mary, and Jesus were denied entrance at the border, due to their lack of documentation. So once again, the family had to make the dangerous trip through the desert. Exhausted, the family arrived in Brownwood and spent the night, before returning home to Ponder. Josie had a dream that warned him to avoid Dallas, because there was a mayor there who refused to support queer families. In turn, Mary, Josie, and Jesus went to Ponder, Texas. The prophets words were fulfilled, “He will be called a Ponderian.”

Jesus grew queerer with each passing moment.

Today, the miracle of queerness still lives and the dream of a world made queer never dies.

December 26, 2018

The Beadles Wedding: A God Story

"We were there. Embracing the beauty of the night. Something happened. Heavens opened. Love enraptured our souls. Infinity everywhere. Then the voice cried out as loud as it ever had, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to all Queers, on whom God's favor rests!' We were led to a mystical place. There, God was born."

Christmas night. Depressing. Mundane. Dull. Everybody gets all thrilled up and then the thrill is gone...the mundane is back. Not on this night.

Waffle House is a family tradition. Since I was a child, I have craved those damn hashbrowns. Our kids do too. I guess it's genetic. Nevertheless, I was sitting there gobbling down those potatoes when I got the call. Now, I know how the shepherds felt. God was coming...and I was invited.

This was to be the night of all nights.

I crept up the hill...past the cascading water...and to a place of prayer. In the stillness, I envisioned what was to come. No explanation was needed. Euphoria overcame my brain. Christmas was alive. Then, I heard the steps.

Walking down the hill, I saw two figures of light. The fullness of God was with them. Reverently, we proceeded to the spot. With our hands joined together, Andrea and Chelsea spoke of the beauty of their relationship. With pride, they spoke of Andrea's transition from male to female...and how it prepared them for this transition into marriage. Rarely, had I ever heard of love spoken so clearly. Tears welled up in my eyes. I couldn't cry. I had a wedding to perform.

"Dearly beloved..."

Every word seemed to birth deeper incarnations of God. I do. I am. We do. We are. Though it was I that was performing the ceremony, it was Andrea and Chelsea that were revealing God to me. Those glasses slipping up and down on her nose with every tear. That steady reaffirming gaze of determination. The infectious giggles. Those feet shuffling back and forth in nervous expectation. While I could go on and on...it was nothing

less than magical. To try to explain it further would be an injustice to what was. Simply put, God was with us. I saw it in their eyes.

Courage. Though I'd known it before, I knew it now more than ever. I prayed for courage. They didn't need it. They already had enough and then some. In the midst of the final prayers of the ceremony, I opened my eyes to stare deeply at their closed eyes. In this moment, they were the fullness of God....they were the fullness of love. I had seen the glory of it all. There was no turning back. Christmas night was in me...and it would be forever.

God is love. With such affirmed, God can be sloppy sometimes. I know because I have seen God in action. People who really love each other tend to get all sloppy with their kisses. When I said, "Brides you may kiss your bride" they lunged in. That's what love is about.

Going all in with no regard for whose watching. God was there...slobbering all over the place.

In those moments, I saw God. It was unlike anything I'd ever experienced. It was the perfection of queer. I bet the Shepherds felt similarly. There in the hay. There in the grass. Though Andrea and Chelsea had faced many transitions and experienced much difficulty...like God...they refused to let go of love. May we go and do likewise.

Emmanuel.

God with us.

Amen.

December 28, 2018

Praying for the Apocalypse: The Queerness of Revelation

Nearing four years ago, I set out to write a theology of queerness. Referring to God as "The Queer," I set out on a journey. Pushed forward and endorsed by a motley crew of queer scholars and thinkers, the finished product (The Courage to Be Queer) speaks of a world set to rights or a world made right. As the new year approaches, I pray for the end of this world and the dawning of the world to come. Below, is my interpretation of The Revelation of John (an excerpt from the larger work). In this new year, may we all be able to stand with God and loudly proclaim, "It's the end of the world as we know it.

"The Revelation of John"

Either John is the greatest fictional writer of all time or he had an encounter with the Queer. I am convinced there are not many other ways to meet this strange book. The Revelation of John is the queerest book in all of scripture. Even though there might be moments of proclamation contained herein that are not from the Queer, we should expect to meet God in queer spaces of the text.

The words are difficult to understand. Perhaps, there is a need to try and think in the way that John did. We have to locate the text in our context. We are queers. We must bring a queer hermeneutic in order to understand such a queer book. We have the ability if we are willing to embrace the freedom. The God who is queer beyond all imagination is with us.

"The time is near" (Revelation 1:3). The prophetic words of this book are reality and are becoming reality. The battle between the Queer and the keeper of normativity is afoot. We fight against the spiritual forces of

normativity that seek to take the very core of who we are. Who will win? The Queer is the "'...Alpha and Omega'...who is and who was and who is to come..." (1:8). There is no losing for the Queer. All normativity will be transformed to queerness. The Queer is the beginning, the end and everything in between and after. Queerness is eternal and will bring all of us to the light. The boundaries and borders of closets will be destroyed. From the island of "Patmos" (1:9), John gives us a place to begin our own vision of how.

"I turned to see whose voice it was that spoke to me...I saw one like the Son of Man" (1:12/13). John stepped out of the closet and beheld the queer. Sometimes rejecting normativity is as simple as turning. The boldly queer encounter is like a stunning drag show filled with colossal special effects and you are the only watching. John describes the figure possessing: a robe, a gold sash, white hair, flaming eyes, bronze feet, a voice like soothing waters, seven stars in the right hand, a two-

edged sword protruding from the mouth and a face that shown like the sun (1:14-16). The queen called the Son of Man was ready to role. The whole scene scared the shit out of John. Falling down "as though dead," John felt a hand on his shoulder and heard, "Do not be afraid..." (Revelation 1:17). There are many who simply cannot face the queerness that is the freedom of a true queen. Seven letters go out with seven queer lessons from seven queer beings that demand our attention.

"...[Y]ou have abandoned the love you had at first." (2:4). Closets can be prisons that make us think that love can be confined to such a small space. We pose in relationship after relationship and pretend that everything is ok. Nothing is ok when you have left your first love. The lasting effect of the initial fall of humanity is that we have all left our first love. We all run from closet to closet seeking temporary false loves. We must, "Remember then from what wehave fallen..." (2:5). The way back is through the realization that we

have fallen and the memories of where we have fallen from. We had to get in the closet in the first place. The entrance and exit knobs are the same knob.

Wealth is a normative construction that sometimes fools us into thinking that we are rich. "I know your affliction and your poverty, even though you are rich." (2:9). We all know the plastic images of people smiling as hard as they possibly can in hopes that other people might believe they are happy. We are an afflicted people that is desperate to fool other people into believing that we are not. The closet cannot mask affliction. We will remain impoverished until we reach within, open the door and embrace the Queer.

"Repent then. If not, I will come to you soon and make war against them with the sword of my mouth." (2:16). It is always interesting to find a "them: when you expect to find a "you." The "them" are those that the queer being of Pergamum knows are teaching the people

falsely and helping people stay comfortable in their closets. We don't just repent and come out of the closet to save our self. We also repent and come out of the closet to save others. Through our queer being, we afflict those who suppress their queerness. The Queer within is a light to all who seek light and an offense to those who comfort those in closets. The Queer promises to bring a sword from the mouth. The words of the Queer will indict all who seek to remain in normative spaces.

The words that are written to the queer being of Thyatira remind us that temptations of normativity abound. We regularly hear false teachings that comfort the closeted. The temptations of normativities abound. We are tempted to use the bodies of others for our own gain. All of these temptations take us away form our first love of the Queer, the self and each other. In the face of temptation, we must fight back and overcome. "To the one who conquers I will also give the morning

star." (Revelation 2:28). When we receive the star of overcoming the closet, we can shine a light that can complete the queering of the whole cosmos.

"I know your works; you have a name of being alive, but you are dead." (3:1). People spend excessive amounts of time being busy. The glorification of busy is a chief sin of our modern age. We are like hamsters on a wheel that just keep on running round and round. What is the point of constant physical exertion? You can run in circles in a closeted hell of normativity all you want, but the door is still shut and you still are a fraud. You can convince people that you are alive, but if you are really dead, what difference does it make? There are those who say that people are dying in closets. I disagree. Those who refuse to leave the closet are already dead.

The Queer is the God of the open door. "Look, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut." (Revelation 3:8). So often the lies of normativity

convince us that there is no other way to live except in a closet. We refuse to look to the Queer. We refuse to look to the light. We refuse to turn. No matter how long we refuse. God is standing behind us with an open door that no one can ever shut. All we have to do is turn and walk through. So often we deny the queer name of God. We refuse to acknowledge and engage the Queer within. We keep saying no and the Queer keeps reminding us that the door is always open. The Queer is the God that waits until you turn to the light. "I will write on you the name of my God..." (3:12). May the name "Queer" be written on us all.

Returning to the closet is the second great temptation of life. There are many who want to live their lives oscillating between freedom and normativity. The Queer is not mocked. "I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either cold or hot." (3:15). The Queer desperately seeks for us to leave the closet of normativity and be free. You can't be both slave and free at the same time. God desires to free the

whole person. If you come out to some and not others or pretend to be something you are not, God says, "I am about to spit you out of my mouth." (3:16). When you're trying to be a normative queer, God spits you back into the closet. Don't nobody want to sit in a dark closet cold and wet soaking in the saliva of the almighty Queer. Through queerification, God spits us back into the closet until we are purified of our normative identities and ways. The oscillation between the closet and freedom fools no one.

No special effects or exaggeration here. John looks up into the heavens and there "...a door stood open!" (Revelation 4:1). Does he have the courage to go? John's courage doesn't matter. The voice called out, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." (4:1). The invitation to the door is an invitation to be a part of the beautiful queering that comes next, the return to Eden or whatever we were in the beginning. The Spirit of the Queer started moving and John moved

too. "At once I was in the Spirit, and there in heaven stood a throne, with one seated on the throne!" (4:1). Queer things happen when the Spirit gets to moving. John is transported away from all normativity and into the queerest heavens to see the Queer on the throne of all queerness. John had to step up to step into something queer. Upon arrival to the highest heavens, words begin to fail and queerness takes over. The diversity and majesty of the diversity of creatures is no distraction from the beautiful joyous shout, which can be heard thusly, "Holy, holy, holy, the Lord QueerAlmighty, who was and is and is to come" (4:8). The Queer has been, is and will always be queer and we get to embrace the totality of it all if we are willing to go to, with and into the Queer.

John sees strange scrolls, animals, seals, tribes and forehead stamps all building up to one moment. "After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and

peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands." (7:9). The Lamb of God which is the sacrificial love of the Queer is the only queer who has the strength to bring all the queers of the earth together. In one body, the people shout out in queer unison without losing their queer differences. The beauty of the body of God is realized in bringing people together through queerness and uniting them in the Queer. The Queer "...at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." (Revelation 7:17). The tears have been wiped away and queerness is all that is left above. However, the battle against the beast of normativity rages below the fullness of queerness.

The birthing woman brought forth life in the midst of agony. God protected the child and the woman from the dragon. Growing angrier, the dragon sought to destroy

the heavens through the uniformity of jealousy and hate. Thrown down to earth, the great normative Satan continued to chase the woman. Satan has been at "...war on the rest of her children" ever since (12:17).

Make no mistake. There is a war raging in the hearts of humanity. God is fighting for our queerness and Satan is battling for us to be just like everyone else. The battle continues until the end. On that day when all things are complete, the dead are judged "according to their works" (20:12). God seeks to purify those who refuse to let go of their normativity and throws them into "the lake of fire" (20:14) to purify their soul and bring them forth in all queerness. The fire is not to punish. The fire is to purify the soul with the flame of love. God's love is a mighty flame that will eventually purify all of creation. The purification of the partial must come before the arrival of the perfect, the Queer.
John had a vision of the beauty that is coming, "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven

and the first earth had passed away..." (21:1). Queerness consistently creates newness. When we are willing to walk with the Queer, we grow to experience a newness of life that works with and within us to create a new world. The voice of the Queer declares, "See, the home of God is among mortals...Death will be no more...for the first things have passed away." (Revelation 21:3/4). God is with us! We do not have to look anywhere but within to experience the queerness of God. The embrace of the Queer is the embrace of that which is beyond death. There is no more death because all has been made queer. The first partial things have all passed away. We read these lines with joyful expectation because we know that love will bring out the queer in us and connect us with the queer in the other and connects queers with the queerness of a planet to arrive at a place queerer than all of our combined wildest dreams where we will dwell with the God who created all things queer to begin with. "See, I am making all things new" (21:5). The Queer invites us to see and not just to look.

We must open our eyes to the queerness flowing within and all around us. The seen becomes the unseen and the unseen the seen in a restoration of true sight.

"I am the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end." (21:6). God was there in all queerness at the beginning and will be there in all queerness at the end. Our story has a beginning and an end in the queerness. Do you remember? "To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life." (21:6). We spend our lives missing the thirst-quenching presence of the totality all queerness. The Queer promises to quench our thirst if we will turn the knob of the closet, walk away from normative distractions and embrace the way, the truth and the life that is the Queer. We are the vessels that need to be filled. Will we stay in the closet of our thirst or will we drink?

"Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life..." (Revelation 22:1). The essence of our physical

being is water and in that place our essence flows through the middle of the city. The essence of our total being is queerness. In that place, the life essence of the Queer flows through the city. Queerness flows through the city. The queer essence of both God and us flows together in one uniting stream of the Queer. "...[T]here will be no more night...for the Lord God will be their light..." (22:5). Queerness will be all that we have ever needed and all that we will ever desire. For in knowing the fullness of the Queer, all of humanity will return to the true queer wholeness that we enjoyed in the beginning. Jesus says, "Surely I am coming soon." The Queers within all stand their queerest and expectantly declare in a stifling world of normativity, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!" (22:20).

Amen.

2019

January 7, 2019

Irrelevance in Print: The Dallas Morning News

"Revenues are down." Anytime you here that phrase, you know some shit is about to go down. For 43 people at the Dallas Morning News earlier today, those words were followed by, "we're going to have to lay you off." The first question that should have erupted from the lips of the gathered should have been, "You mean to tell me that our top executives have received hefty pay raises

and we're getting laid off?" Injustice cycles around that place like a tornado. It seems to happen so fast that most people don't realize what hit them...or what they hit. I will never forget their language after Dominique Alexander and I led the protest before the July 7, 2016 shooting. Clever phrasing consistently insinuated that we were responsible for what happened. One sticks out more than all others, "They led police into an ambush." I don't know that I will ever be able to forgive them for that shit. Then and now we have stood on the side of justice...they remain on the side of oppression. From lynching to segregation to discrimination to marginalizing policies, they have endorsed it all throughout their history. The sins of the white racist fathers have definitely been passed down to present generations. Of course, they have said that they are long past such things. They are not. They are haunted by souls past and they don't even know what a soul is. I don't see God is not mocked. Karma is real. You can't work for the Devil and not expect to get burned.

However you want to describe it all...we do know one thing...less people are reading the Morning News...and that's a good thing. Irrelevant propaganda has no place in a just society. Remember...God saves people not institutions. So, I'm going to pray for the demise of the Morning News so that the people might be saved.

Amen.

* Layoffs : https://www.dallasnews.com/business/the-dallas-morning-news/2019/01/07/dallas-morning-news-lays-43-company-struggles-revenue-declines

January 9, 2019

The Cowardly Cancelation or Real Talk with the Dallas Morning News

To the surprise of no one, Dallas Morning News Editor Mike Wilson has finally canceled our meeting. Though Wilson declared his desire to take on injustice, I never believed him. Dallas only rewards those who behave. Now, he's back in line....if he ever stepped out at all.

His cancelation email from January 8, 2019 at 3:09pm with my commentary/response in bold is right below. // My formal reply to this email on January 9, 2019 756pm is in bold below his message.

Jeff,

I'm writing to withdraw my invitation for you and your group to meet with me, Brendan Miniter and the editorial board. Your Facebook post last night -- the day we went through the wrenching ordeal of laying off 24

newsroom colleagues -- saying that you are "going to pray for the demise of the Morning News" lacked basic decency and let me know you are no longer interested in constructive dialogue with us.

I always pray for the death of injustice so that justice might arise in its place. I simply don't believe in death without resurrection. The injustice at the Morning News must die. Unfortunately, I don't think the Morning News can survive apart from the injustice that it perpetuates.

After he fires at least 43 people, Wilson has the nerve to attach the phrase "basic decency" to my post on Facebook?

They were never interested in "constructive dialogue." They were interested in their dialogue...which is why they sent us instructions on their decorum before the

meeting ever happened. Power imbalances always inhibit constructive dialogue.

I guess they thought they could use this meeting to silence me for a little while? Not going to happen.

When we talked by phone a couple of weeks ago -- a call I initiated -- you shared helpful perspectives about our editorial recommendation in the District 4 Council race. I appreciated that conversation and the lengthy talk Dominique Alexander and I had in my office on Dec. 31.

This man wants superlatives for calling me?

As I told you both, I believe The Dallas Morning News can always be better. But I have no time for people who hope for the failure of an institution that,

whatever its flaws, has made Dallas a better place for 134 years, and whose journalists I am proud to lead.

This was by far the worst line of the entire email, "...made Dallas a better place for 134 years." After being founded by a Confederate Colonel named AH Belo, the Dallas Morning News became many things, including...a piece of propaganda for the roots of white nationalism...a promoter of all sorts of human rights abuses...a protector of segregation...the chief proponent of white interests...the unwavering defender of the police...an accomplice in the deaths of countless LBGT persons...the enemy of the impoverished. Book after book and article after article has been written about the many sins of the Morning News. So... MADE IT A BETTER PLACE FOR WHO?

I am informing you in writing because I watched your Dec. 19 protest of The Dallas Morning News on Facebook Live and learned from your misrepresentation of our phone calls that I can't have a conversation with you and expect it to be faithfully repeated.

I apologize that you expected me to keep your secrets.

Sincerely,

Mike Wilson
Editor

Sincerely,

Jeff Hood

Activist

My response to his message at January 9, 2019 7:56pm.

Mike,

I did nothing but stand with the people that you have consistently done violence to. Make no mistake, you will not be able to fire enough people to solve the problems you face. You are leading an institution that has been a bastion of white supremacy for 134 years. Whether you realize it or not, the ghost of your founder...Confederate Colonel AH Belo...still haunts you. If you manage to withstand the flurry of recent calls for your resignation, stop all the bullshit that created all of these problems in the first place.

Jeff

January 11, 2019

Inerrantists are Genocidists

Depression lurks like a roaring lion....seeking whom it may devour. My medicine ran out at the beginning of the week. It would be a few days before I'd have the money to refill it. I was vulnerable. Then, the phone started ringing. Four deaths. I knew them all...some more than others...but...I knew them all. It wasn't long before I couldn't breath. It wasn't long before thoughts of suicide returned. It wasn't long...

In the midst of it all, an old friend called. When I told him what was going on, he encouraged me to cling to the inerrancy of scripture. I don't know that I've ever received more fucked up advice. I'm supposed to find hope in this...

CLEAR:

Deuteronomy 7:1-2
King James Version (KJV)

When the Lord thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, and hath cast out many nations before thee, the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than thou; And when the Lord thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them...

CLEARER:

Deuteronomy 7:1-2

New International Version (NIV)

When the Lord your God brings you into the land you are entering to possessand drives out before you many nations—the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites,Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites, seven nations larger and stronger than you— 2 and when the Lord your God has delivered them over to you and you have defeated them, then you must destroy them totally.[a] Make no treaty with them, and show them no mercy.

CLEAREST:

Deuteronomy 7:1-2
The Message (MSG)

When God, your God, brings you into the country that you are about to enter and take over, he will clear out the superpowers that were there before you: the Hittite, the Girgashite, the Amorite, the Canaanite, the Perizzite,

the Hivite, and the Jebusite. Those seven nations are all bigger and stronger than you are. God, your God, will turn them over to you and you will conquer them. You must completely destroy them, offering them up as a holy destruction to God. Don’t make a treaty with them. Don’t let them off in any way.

The only thing that is found in inerrancy is a God of genocide. How could anyone find hope in that bullshit? Damn, maybe this old friend was trying to send me over the edge. I don't know. I just know that it didn't work.

Love is the only thing that's ever saved me.

+I'm doing better.

Amen.

January 19, 2019

The South Dallas Gospel: God Cut Loose

Incarnation is about God's presence. Throughout time and space, God is present in particular contextual moments. In the midst of near constant police oppression, God is present in the struggles of the people of South Dallas. This is what the presence of a street activist God might look like.

God is the beginning. Love flows from God and nothing will ever interrupt it. God is real as fuck.

People be walking around like zombies...scared of the police. God ain't about that shit. Love is what God is about.

Don't let them get close or you will become a zombie too. Imprisoned by the police. Stay woke children! Stay woke!

God got some new skin. With every step, God just set it off. God was free.

Everywhere, God screamed, "We doin' this shit folks! Rise up! Fuck the law...this is about love...if you ain't down...then get the fuck out of the way."

"Wake up!"

"I'm here."

"This is it!"

"Fuck the police!"

"Where you from?"

"South Dallas."

"Can anything good come from that shithole?"

"God."

Shots rang out. Bullets riddled the air. The young brother dropped on the pavement. God was right there.

Rage. Rage. Rage.

"Only fuckin' cowards stay silent in times like this."

"Move your asses!"

Bang! The doors flew open. Everybody froze. Nobody had ever confronted the police like this. When they started reaching for their guns, God grabbed them out of their hands. "You going to shoot me too!" "Not tonight!" Pandemonium set in. Climbing on top of a desk, God screamed, "Fuck your justice! I am love!" God kicked their asses out of their own station. In the streets, the people cheered. The zombies had been set free.

"Maybe those motherfuckers think twice before they shoot somebody else."

While such an interpretation might sound harsh/even violent to some, it illustrates the rage of South Dallas and many other urban areas. We would do well to listen to a God that is crying out in the streets for justice. For in listening and seeking to understand, liberation can find us all.

Amen.

February 16, 2019

ACCOMPLICE TO MURDER // Detective Dale Richardson
Dallas PD #6361

*On March 11, 2018, a dancer named Shniquia Simington was murdered (per the Dallas Police Department report) outside of King's Cabaret nightclub by a security guard named Dan Taylor. After a verbal altercation in the club, Taylor was tasked with escorting Simington and her party to their car. Before they could get out of the parking lot and with little warning, Taylor fired the lethal shot. The two had known each other for some time. Lethal force was never directed at Taylor. Regardless, he fired anyways. The shot

shattered a window that was already rolled up. The trajectory of the bullet was a kill shot. This appears to be no random crime. Unfortunately, the police merely detained Taylor and released him later that night. Due to serious negligence, the criminal investigation is still ongoing. The original detective / Dale Richardson (has been removed from the case).

Dr. Hood,

A security guard murdered my 27-year-old daughter (Shniqua Simington) while she was sitting in the backseat of a car outside of a club. The incident happened on March 11, 2018 around 2am. Nothing has been done about my daughter's case. The Detective on the case (Dale Richardson #6361) has done absolutely nothing on the case and basically encourages me not to

call again every time I call. I have repeatedly been treated like shit. I am reaching out to you for help. The killer (Dan Taylor) is still out there living his life...that's right...he killed my daughter and has never been arrested. Nobody is paying attention to the injustices that surround this case. Please help me. My daughter was shot and killed for absolutely no reason. I am desperate. Please.

Donnita Russell

God seemed to meet me in every syllable. I knew that I was being called. Salvation could only come through "Justice for Shniqua." In my reply, I assured Donitta that I was ready to take this journey with her...and journeyed we have.

Though we've pushed and pushed and pushed, the police have consistently had little to do with us. Detective Dale Richardson repeatedly put us off. To put

it mildly, Detective Richardson was a wall of incompetence and prejudicial action from the very beginning. Dan Taylor was not arrested the night of the murder...by some accounts Detective Richardson was not even there...and even a year later...Taylor is still a free man. In the midst of it all, Detective Richardson has proven himself to be one of the best friends that Dan Taylor has ever had.

We refused to let Detective Richardson's inaction deter us. The King's Cabaret endangered Shinquia Simington's life through multiple acts of negligence. Dan Taylor was not licensed to carry a gun that night. There were no rules of engagement on how to deal with unruly patrons. The club was constantly serving alcohol after hours. The place was a dangerous corrupt establishment of injustice from its' very inception. We were determined to shut it down...and after multiple months of protest...we did. The King's Cabaret is no

more. As Detective Richardson set on his ass, we made the streets safer ourselves.

With a thirst for justice that Detective Richardson has never had, the new District Attorney's office has moved swiftly on the case and is preparing to send it to the Grand Jury. Unfortunately, they have to wait on work to get done that Detective Richardson failed to do. The accomplice strikes again.

This past week, I got a surprising phone call. Donitta called me and said that Dallas Police Chief U. Renee Hall wanted to meet with us. Not knowing what to expect and fearing the worst, we approached the meeting with great caution. After we sat down, Chief Hall repeatedly apologized for over an hour for the way that the investigation had been handled. We all felt comforted and relieved to know that the Chief cared. We all joined hands and prayed together at the end of the meeting.

From what I was able to gather, the problems with this Detective were ones that she inherited.

After the meeting, I figured out that Detective Richardson had indeed been disciplined for his actions and inactions.

As I was pondering what to do next, I encountered a prominent public official at a party over the weekend who described the Simington case as, "a grave miscarriage of justice."

Immediately, I knew what we had to do.

For whatever reason, Detective Dale Richardson botched this investigation.

I will never know what was in his heart.

However, an accomplice helps someone commit and/or cover up a crime.

Intentionally or unintentionally, it appears that Detective Richardson did everything he could to make sure that Taylor would never be convicted in the murder of Shniquia Simington.

Make no mistake...Detective Richardson has made himself an ACCOMPLICE TO MURDER.

As a result...

Detective Dale Richardson SHOULD BE FIRED.

No other family should have to go through what this family has.

We pray that God will make it so.

Amen.

February 21, 2019

Jussie Smollett & The Consequences of Identity Politics

"Who in the fuck would make something like this up?" Jussie Smollett was so adamant in his February 12 interview on Good Morning America. If one only saw the interview with Robin Roberts a few weeks later, they would have no doubt that Smollett was brutally attacked on January 29. Unfortunately, there is a plethora of evidence beyond the interview that Smollett did indeed orchestrate an attack on himself. In fact, it is Smollett's own text messages that are the smoking gun. Do this. Buy this. Go here. Meet there. There is only one question left... Why?

"I'm an advocate!" These words from the interview also struck me. Throughout my career in the work of activism and advocacy, I have repeatedly heard people declare themselves advocates. Unfortunately, it seems like those who do the most declaring have the least evidence to back up their claims. In this situation, Smollett seems to want to be an advocate more than he wants to do the work. There is no fast track to being an advocate. There is only the path of most resistance...being who you are...no matter the consequences.

Over the coming days, the greatest temptation will be to get wrapped up in the drama of it all. Such a distraction offers no benefit. We are in desperate need of deep reflection. We must see Smollett as a victim...a victim of us.

We are made in the image of God. We fall victim to the temptations/demands of our identity culture when we

think otherwise. God doesn't make mistakes. Jussie Smollett is enough...and so are we.

Amen.

February 26, 2019

On The Fragility of Liberal United Methodists

Black folk just kept coming. The effectiveness of the ministry of Richard Allen and Absalom Jones could not be denied. St. George's Methodist Church in Philadelphia thought they were getting some complaint black folk and quickly found otherwise. White folks started complaining and pushing back. Amongst a whole host of other things, seating became a huge issue. One morning a group of black folk sat in some new seats reserved for white folk and started to kneel in prayer. When a white trustee saw what was going on, he grabbed Jones and

violently demanded that they move. When Jones pleaded for the group to be allowed to finish their prayers, the trustee threatened to call the authorities. The group walked out and never turned back.

While Jones ultimately became an Episcopal priest, Richard Allen led the rest of the group to create Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church...which became the founding church of the AME denomination...which over two centuries later has over 2 million members. I ain't heard no stories of any tears when the black folk left St. George's Methodist. I ain't heard no stories of any concessions made to try to stay at St. George's Methodist. I ain't heard no stories of anyone turning back toward St. George's Methodist.

Centuries later, St. George's Methodist is now St. George's United Methodist.

Which brings me to our present moment.

This past week, I watched as United Methodists voted to exclude LGBTQ persons from their denomination. Centuries prior, they had done the same thing to Richard Allen and Absalom Jones. The only difference was the reaction.

Repeatedly, I watch Liberal United Methodists break down in total devastation. It was almost as if everybody thought that the homophobes weren't going to declare they weren't going to be homophobes anymore. I guess there was a thought that the homophobes could be converted through hope. Online, I saw people posting pictures and statements of defiance. Where in the hell were all these folks over the last couple of decades? Repeatedly, I have seen people that I love claim to be supporting LGBTQ people...when in reality they are just supporting their institutions and their finances. It is hard for me to believe that this is about LGBTQ persons anymore. I think this is more about the fear of having to

walk away. I think the tears are about the fragility of Liberal United Methodists.

To all those who want to do more than mourn and try to convince everybody they've done their part...

Richard Allen and Absalom Jones can show you the way to Jesus.

Amen.

March 24, 2019

Navigating Hall County: Racism on the Roadway

After a recent visit to North Georgia, I wrote this short editorial to the Gainesville Times to respond to the many racist street signs I came across. They didn't publish it. Imagine that...

Navigating Hall County

The nightmare continues...

Vacations can be so exhausting. Our tires just couldn't turn fast enough. We were so tired. If the Dallas to Atlanta flight wasn't enough, the drive to Hall County was enough to push us over the edge. Not too long after we got to the county line, our navigation system became the keeper of white supremacy. Sign after sign began to warn us that the past is not past in these parts. For out of the naming and keeping of things, the heart of the community speaks. By the time I arrived at "Jim Crow Rd.," I was left with little doubt of where I was.

While you might claim booming development, growth and progress...I am here to tell you that the signs tell a different story. The signs tell stories of slavery, lynching, segregation and brutal intolerance. God tells

us that we shall be judged based on our love for our neighbors. There is nothing loving about maintaining signs that mock the pain of others. There is nothing loving about signs that continue the violence of racism. There is nothing loving about these street signs.

So, why keep up the hate?

Hall County can be saved from the past.

Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood
Theologian
Denton, Texas

*I was bombarded with different explanations for these road signs. Regardless of their origin, they are racist now and should be removed immediately.

have already shown you the way to Jesus.

Jesus

May 7, 2019

Nacogdoches, Texas Pool Brutality / Cop Assaults Young Black Woman

On April 10th, Nacogdoches, Texas Police Officer Josh Anders assaulted multiple women in a parking lot. The video of the incident confirms that these were the actions of a piece of shit cop determined to live out his racism ideals. Following the incident, Officer Anders charged one of the women with resisting arrest. These are my words to tonight's rally in support of these young women.

To the church gathered on this holy night...

Three years ago, I stood before a rally of thousands of people and firmly declared, "God damn white America!" Hours later, 5 Dallas police officers were killed right before my eyes. Since then, people have consistently asked whether I regret what I said. These people want a specific answer. They want me to grovel on my knees in repentance. Though I undoubtedly regret the loss of life, I don't regret telling the truth. Honestly, if there is anything I regret it is that I didn't say it loud enough for the white people of Nacogdoches to hear me. Maybe such language could have stopped this atrocity. I don't know. I simply know that this community needs an exorcism. There are demons in your midst. I can see them on that videotape. There is evil in their eyes. Oh God, grant us an exorcism tonight. Traditional churches aint going to help...hell, they're complicit. Indeed, such spaces are

often full of demons. Tonight, when you look around...know that you are surrounded by the people of God...you are the church...you are the exorcists...you are the only hope this community has. Rise up. Don't delay. FOR Our God is marching on.

...and one more thing...

"God damn white America.

Amen.

Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood
Public Theologian
Denton, Texas
May 7, 2019

May 15, 2019

Logic is Dead / So is Pamela Turner

To the people:

I don't know anything about the Baytown, Texas Police Department. However, I can see the facts on the video...and I do know cases of police brutality. Right outside the The Brixton apartment complex, a veteran Baytown police officer named Juan Delacruz attempted to apprehend a woman by the name of Pamela Turner. This was not their first encounter. Delacruz was well aware of multiple outstanding warrants for Turner. Upon contact, Turner began to struggle. Delacruz responded by using his Taser. In the midst of the struggle, she somehow grabbed the Taser and fired it Delacruz. Immediately, Delacruz responded with lethal force. In the aftermath of the incident, it has

become apparent that Turner struggled with serious mental illness.

While any loss of life is tragic, this situation is particularly tragic...because it didn't have to happen. Mental illness should not be a fatal diagnosis. If Delacruz had exercised any logic/knowledge of mental illness, Turner would still be alive. Unfortunately, he didn't and Turner is dead because of it. With this said, all of the language from the attorneys and activists who call every violent situation a racial hate crime serves to erase the primary issue of mental illness. I am not interested in erasure. Turner needed help...not primarily because she was black...but because her mind wasn't right. Sometimes race is a secondary factor to another type of injustice. While Delacruz should be punished for his lack of logic/knowledge of mental illness, I believe that some of the attorneys and activists involved in this case should be too. It is as if when some of them jumped in their cars to race down to

Baytown...they left logic behind. Unfortunately, the cause of Pamela Turner got left behind too.

Sincerely.

Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood
Public Theologian

August 6, 2019

The Dallas Movement is Dead

The Movement.

The energy. The sounds. The passion. The unity.

That was then...this is now.

CARL GOVAN

(In Prison)

October 2017

...prosecutors say Govan and his associates pulled off one of the largest known home scams in Dallas County in recent years, ripping off homeowners and buyers on as many as 46 properties. The alleged scammers took at least $320,000 from victims and were about to close on another $223,500 worth of deals when police intervened in 2016, according to a Dallas Morning News review of deed records and court documents.

-Naomi Martin, DMN

https://www.dallasnews.com/news/dallas/2017/10/06/dozens-southern-dallas-swindled-homes-governments-nose

DOMINIQUE ALEXANDER

(Under Investigation & Indictment)

April 17, 2019

Dallas police are investigating a domestic violence allegation against activist Dominique Alexander who leads the Next Generation Action Network.

WFAA first reported the incident Wednesday morning after multiple sources confirmed his girlfriend showed up at the Northwest Patrol Division with injuries and filed a complaint.

...

Alexander was convicted of shaking a 2-year-old baby in 2011. He was sentenced to five years but released on probation shortly after his sentencing.

Alexander has also been convicted of theft, making a false report and evading arrest. He's also currently under indictment in Denton County for felony theft.

-Rebecca Lopez, WFAA

https://www.wfaa.com/article/news/local/activist-dominique-alexander-under-investigation-for-domestic-violence/287-510d25c2-f6f4-4dee-8da5-76e88c61bfac

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SURVIVORS IN MOVEMENT

Over the past few years...

(Some in Jail)

"He rapped me."

"He kicked me down the steps."

"I was in the hospital for days."

"The shelter wasn't too bad."

"Nobody would let me call the police."

VARIOUS LEADERS

In recent months...

"I ain't messing with no fucking Transgenders..."

"It's the man's business..."

"Some people deserve to be hit."

"I'm going to get mine..."

"I got them protestors eating out of the palm of my damn hand."

"I don't give a shit about nobody really."

... and just recently

KEISHA NIXON-POPE

(In Jail)

August 5, 2019

Keisha Nixon (-Pope), 47, is being held in the Dallas County jail on a charge of aggravated assault. Her bail is set at $50,000.

...

He told police that he and his wife were arguing in their master bedroom and that she shot him with a gun he had never seen before. He said she shot him in the stomach and he fell to the floor, the warrant said.

“The victim then stated he heard his wife state to him, ‘You’re going to die right here,’ and removed his wallet and cell phone from him,” the warrant said.

He told investigators his stepson then came into the room with a black tool bag and began hitting him in the back and the back of the head. He told police he laid on

the floor for a long time before he got enough strength to try to flee.

The victim told police he knew he had to get out of the house to avoid being killed so he ran toward the balcony and that as he did so, he heard his stepson yell, the warrant said.

“Mama, don’t let him get away,” Cleveland Nixon said he heard his stepson yell.

Cleveland Nixon told investigators he heard more shots being fired as he jumped about 30 feet to the patio below.

- Tanya Eiserer, WFAA

https://www.wfaa.com/article/news/crime/youre-going-to-die-right-here-woman-told-estranged-husband-after-

shooting-him/287-b38a173b-3d24-44cb-b102-1b2d4301b9d7

* In the case of Keisha, there have been previous allegations of abuse. Regardless, this case speaks to the level of violence that has constantly surrounded all of us. Something tragic happens every week.

ACTUALLY, THERE ARE TOO MANY CASES TO LIST THEM ALL.

The Dallas Movement has followed the path of its' leader...arrests and violence have become the norm.

This ain't about the cops...this is about us.

We have fought injustice on the outside and failed to fight injustice on the inside.

We have destroyed what we have fought so hard for...by following the lead of criminals and not the stirrings of God in our souls.

We are dead...

...but I don't believe in death without resurrection.

May our reckoning also be our rising.

Amen.

August 16, 2019

God Damn Your Pledge of Allegiance

Every year...I go through this. Every year...there is a need for numerous emails. Every year...the questions seem to probe deeper. Every year...I have to threaten

legal action to get it to stop. Every year...I fight for the religious liberty of our family.

Texas schools only seem to recognize the religious liberty of one group...those who have US flags hanging in the sanctuary of their churches...those who believe that the US military is a divine instrument of God...those who truly think that God blesses our actions...those who believe that civil religion is the only true religion...the Jesus patriots. God don't go for that bullshit.

I didn't mean to sound so stern. I actually like the principal...but our public schools only seem to know one language...force. I guess you have to give them what they give you. I think Jesus would do the same.

Greetings. Thank you so much for your continuous love for our children. As a matter of conscience, we are writing to instruct you to put our children in the

hallway during the national and state pledges and/or anthems. This is a reasonable accommodation to protect the civil liberties of our children/family. As followers of Jesus, we are dedicated to resisting the evils and injustices perpetuated by our government...and teaching our children to do the same. Due to our collective inability to figure this matter out in the past, this is no longer a request. We want this matter to be handled during the pledges/anthems on the first day of school. We trust that you will do right by our family.

School started two days ago. I want the school to know that we're serious. So, I decided to walk around the school to make sure that each of the kids were out in the hallway. Thankfully, they were. After some pushing, the school seems to be taking our faith seriously.

This morning, I saw a guy watching me as I ignored the national anthem and checked on our kids. When I was

walking out, he approached me and asked, "Why don't you respect our country?" Taken aback, I replied, "Because I'm a follower of Jesus." That set him off even more...."Don't you believe that saying the pledge is a way of following God?" Without hesitation, I replied, "God damn your pledge of allegiance." I wasn't listening to any more of that bullshit. He was still trying to talk as I jumped in our minivan and drove off. It felt good to get the hell out of there.

Amen.

August 19, 2019

Questions: The Dwelling Place of God

How do you write when you have nothing to say?

How do you write when you have nothing to say?

How do you write when you have nothing to say?

A mom puts her son to sleep. At the door, she stops. Through the darkness, she watches his chest rise up and down. Sitting down to rest for a moment, she dreams of tomorrow and the tomorrow after that. Sleep comes quickly. Morning brings a terrible feeling. Rushing in to check on her son/sun, she realizes that his chest is stagnant. The little boy never woke up.

Why?

With not a second to spare, the waiter arrives at work. He recognizes the customers at his first table. They're always assholes. After they provide the most complicated order imaginable...they demand it fast. The kitchen is running slow and nothing is going to move

fast today. After multiple apologies, anger has turned to rage. In the midst of it all, the waiter still goes back to the table and seeks to apologize one more time. Before he could even get a word out of his mouth, one of the customers stood up and shot him dead.

Why?

He had all of his life before him. Prior days had been busy. Exhaustion was setting in. That night, he just wanted to chill our and have some fun. The entire night went well...until it didn't. He was just standing there in his front yard. For reasons unknown, a car drove up...with a gun hanging out the window. Shots started flying. Before the smoke cleared, he was dead.

Why?

Seeking adventure, a man goes on a hike and never returns.

Why?

A pregnant woman races to the hospital. Before she is finished giving birth...she dies.

Why?

I don't know the answers...I just know that God is in the questions.

I don't know the answers...I just know that God is in the questions.

I don't know the answers...I just know that God is in the questions.

Amen.

August 23, 2019

Porn In the Library

Last night, I watched the documentary A Gray State. The film follows the life of conspiracy theorist and filmmaker David Crowley. From the beginning, it is apparent that David is obsessed with documenting his entire existence while creating his film, Gray State. Without giving away too much of the documentary, the film grows darker and darker and darker by the second. Violence seems to engulf his entire world. Ultimately, David kills his wife Komel and their daughter Raniya (though other conspiracy theorists argue otherwise). To say that I was depressed when the credits rolled is an understatement. I've been stuck on the tragedy of it all ever since the credits rolled. Meaningful films often come crashing into my life and I can't shake them. This documentary left me thinking about what I could have

done to help David and his family. I have felt the guilt/pain of a tragedy that I had nothing to do with.

I wonder if God thinks similarly.

Whenever I get to these points, I am desperate to hear the word of God. I turn to John 14. In a world of relativism, I have occasionally found myself equivocating on the definitive nature of these passages...but when I need to hear from God...I'm not interested in relativism.

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.”

Thomas said to him, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?”

Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

-John 14:1-6 NIV

Tears flow. The whispers of Jesus let me know that things are going to be ok. I'm surprised to be having such a reaction in the library.

Then, I look up. Two tables over...some guy is looking at porn.

What the fuck?

Amen.

August 24, 2019

The Body: Words for the Movement

*Delivered at Justice for All! : In Memory of Carlos High Sr. in Grand Prairie, Texas on August 24, 2019

This morning a body was found floating in the Trinity River. Let me repeat myself... This morning a body was found floating in the Trinity River. Did anybody care about that body? Did anybody take the time to search for that body?

The body matters.

We cannot change who we are. We cannot change our communities. We cannot change our world. We cannot change anything without the body.

I am a follower of Jesus. I feel like we get a lot of talk about heaven and what not...but I'm trying to bring a little heaven down here. In the midst of tremendous injustice, Jesus placed his body into the conversation.

What are we to do at this difficult hour? What do we do when the system constantly holds us down? What do we do?

We give our bodies.

Our bodies can break the cogs of the machine.

We can shut it down.

Talk is cheap.

Our times demand our bodies.

What are we going to do with the body?

We are called to love our neighbors as we love our self. The conversation begins with loving your self. You can't give your body until you realize that you have a body. Our system breaks us down first...and that is how they keep us from loving our neighbors. Love somebody by loving your body and you can help make everybody somebody.

The revolution starts today!

You've got to...

Pick the body up!

Pick the body up!

Pick the body up!

Pick the damn body up!

Injustice cannot last forever.

No more!

No more!

No more!

The body can destroy it all.

Honestly.

Our only hope is the body.

Go.

Amen.

August 26, 2019

On Metaphysics.

God has created us in the image of God.

What happens after certainty? Reality dissipates and something more still seems to be out there. Metaphysics deals with what's next. The subject begins with the idea that we are unbelievably more capable than we can ever know. We are life beyond life. Metaphysics is about daring to go beyond what we can prove. Always believing that there is something more. Knowing that we can change our own reality by reaching further and faster.

Philosophers have long claimed a monopoly on metaphysical thought. Seeking to answer fundamental questions, the philosopher often missed the fundamental nature of simply being. For philosophy, it seems that something got stuck in answers that failed to understand mysterious nature of sitting with the question. Into such a void, evolved modern metaphysical thought. Ruminating in the questions, the modern metaphysical thinker journeys through introspection to a place of answers beyond answers...the self beyond the self. There is tremendous life to be found here. The mind becomes a vehicle...a means of transport for the soul. In embracing what could be, one is able to go beyond what is.

The metaphysician believes in the divine within. The supernatural becomes possible through a right belief and practice of the natural. Modernity has not changed

the possibilities. Perhaps, it has increased our skepticism. But, skepticism has never hindered the work of God. Divinity within creates an explosion of possibilities without. In the midst of it all, the age-old questions remain. Who am I? What am I? Where have I been? Where am I going? There is beauty in pondering the countless answers to these questions. The brilliance of the possibilities illuminate our future. In such illumination, we find who we are. Metaphysics is about that space...and the divinity that lies within.

God has created us in the image of God.

Amen.

August 29, 2019

Councilman Kleinman Must Be Censured for "Fuck You" Gesture (w/pic)

Mayor & Council

Dallas City Hall
1500 Marilla St.
Dallas, Texas 75201

Mayor: Eric Johnson
Mayor Pro Tem/District 2: Adam Medrano
Deputy Mayor Pro Tem/District 10: B. Adam McGough
District 1: Chad West
District 3: Casey Thomas II
District 4: Carolyn King Arnold
District 5: Jaime Resendez

District 6: Omar Narvaez

District 7: Adam Bazaldua

District 8: Tennell Atkins

District 9: Paula Blackmon

District 11: Lee Kleinman

District 12: Cara Mendelsohn

District 13: Jennifer Staubach Gates

District 14: David Blewett

Greetings. I write to you with a grave concern about a recent council meeting.

On August 28, 2019, longtime Dallas activist Marvin Crenshaw arose to address the City Council. The topic was the pro-Palestinian Boycott Divestment Sanctions (BDS) Movement. While the topic obviously stirred emotions, the actions of Councilman Lee Kleinman went beyond fierce disagreement. At the beginning of Crenshaw's time, Kleinman interrupts him and asks the

Mayor to silence his remarks. When that doesn't work, Kleinman turns his back to Crenshaw. It seems that the longer Crenshaw speaks the more enraged that Kleinman becomes. After Crenshaw loudly proclaims his support for BDS, Kleinman lifts up his middle finger toward Crenshaw and the gathered. Surely, it is inappropriate for a City Council member to treat anybody with such disrespect...no matter what the topic is.

"Fuck you."

Let the gesture sink in.

Imagine if it had been directed at you.

Inaction normalizes such actions.

Which is why...I believe it is imperative to CENSURE Councilman Kleinman as a statement that such

actions/disrespect will not be tolerated.

Surely, we can do better than this.

Pictures and video are attached.

Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood
Theologian & Activist

July 7 Protest Organizer & Survivor

D.Min. Brite Divinity School, Texas Christian University
Th.M. Emory University
M.Div. The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary
M.S. Creighton University
M.A. University of Alabama

*Press Release:

Dallas Councilman Lee Kleinman to Activists: "Fuck Off."

Dallas City Hall // Flag Room
11am TODAY (August 29, 2019)
1500 Marilla St.
Dallas, TX 75201

Just yesterday, longtime Dallas activist Marvin Crenshaw arose to address the City Council. The topic was the pro-Palestinian Boycott Divestment Sanctions (BDS) Movement. Immediately, Lee Kleinman interrupts Crenshaw and tries to get the Mayor to silence him. When that doesn't work, Kleinman turns his back to Crenshaw. Then, Kleinman places his middle finger up in the air and stares at Crenshaw. "Fuck you."

KLEINMAN SHOULD BE CENSURED

The BDS Movement is a respected worldwide attempt to stop the oppression of Palestinians. Even if Kleinman had a difference of opinion...

NO CITIZEN SHOULD EVER BE TREATED LIKE THIS.

Dallas Councilman Lee Kleinman to Activists: "Fuck Off."

Dallas City Hall // Flag Room
11am TODAY (August 29, 2019)
1500 Marilla St.
Dallas, TX 75201

September 1, 2019
Football is Evil

In 1971, Detroit Lions wide receiver Chuck Hughes dropped dead on the field during a game against the Chicago Bears.

In September of 2017, Midwestern State University's Robert Grays broke his neck while making a tackle against Texas A&M-Kingsville. Later that day, College of Wooster senior offensive lineman Clayton Geib suffered injuries in a contest against College of Wooster that he would latter succumb to.

Struggling with various football-related neurological issues, Washington State University quarterback Tyler Hilinski shot himself in January of 2018.

Late last year, the HBO news magazine "Real Talk with Bryant Gumbel" reported that of 30 NCAA football players have died during workouts since the year 2000.

Around the same time, high school football player Dylan Thomas died as a result of a tackle in Zebulon, Georgia.

Of the brains of over a hundred deceased football players tested for CTE, an astonishing 99% showed signs of considerable neurological rot.

-https://www.mdedge.com/neurology/article/145375/alzheimers-cognition/study-details-cte-football-players

The evidence goes on and on and on.

Over the last few days, I watched parts of multiple football games. Repeatedly, I saw players helped or carted off the field due to significant injuries.

In the midst of the onslaught, I remembered a Letter to the Editor that I wrote a number of years ago.

Letter to the Editor of The Daily Mississippian
September 30, 2011

The Editor:

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 niggers." 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 former player Bennie Abram / who incurred deadly injuries while playing football) 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.

Rev. Jeff Hood

Truth cannot be denied.

Football destroys the body.

Football thrives on inequity.

Football is...

Until major changes are made...

Football is evil.

Amen.

September 10, 2019

Will the real Keisha Pope-Nixon please stand up?

This is what I was told.

...

He told police that he and his wife were arguing in their master bedroom and that she shot him with a gun he had never seen before. He said she shot him in the stomach and he fell to the floor, the warrant said.

“The victim then stated he heard his wife state to him, ‘You’re going to die right here,’ and removed his wallet and cell phone from him,” the warrant said.

He told investigators his stepson then came into the room with a black tool bag and began hitting him in the back and the back of the head. He told police he laid on the floor for a long time before he got enough strength to try to flee.

The victim told police he knew he had to get out of the house to avoid being killed so he ran toward the balcony and that as he did so, he heard his stepson yell, the warrant said.

“Mama, don’t let him get away,” Cleveland Nixon said he heard his stepson yell.

Cleveland Nixon told investigators he heard more shots being fired as he jumped about 30 feet to the patio below.

- WFAA

...

Then, it became a blockbuster...

...

Fierce screams ring out. Every second births new rage. Violence flows like water. Then the black widow enacts her revenge. The smoke of the gun flows through the air. Standing over the body, the black widow laughs and taunts him. She wants him to die. Enlisting the help of her sons, she stages the perfect crime. Then, the

wounded husband gathers the strength to make his escape. As the black widow fires the gun multiple more times, the husband jumps out the window and runs to safety. The black widow is arrested and charged to the fullest extent of the law. Justice is served.

....

I believed it all.

...

Not long thereafter, I received a phone call from a dear friend asking if I would be willing to help Keisha Nixon-Pope. Remembering what I'd already been told, I was hesitant to say the least. After further prodding, I agreed to hear her side.

...

The abuse wouldn't quit. On that day, she kept demanding that he leave over and over. He grew more and more enraged. Threatening her again and again, he comes after her as she runs up the stairs. The entire time, her sons are screaming for everything to stop. Regardless of the constant demands to leave, he just kept on coming. Knowing that she had a gun, he kept on daring her to shoot him. As the situation grows more physical, he pushes her into the bedroom. Fearing for her life...she pulls out the gun. Immediately, he lunges to grab it. She fires. Even after being hit, he repeatedly keeps on coming. Then, he goes after her sons. In he midst of the threat, she fires again. The threat was only neutralized when he jumped out the window.

...

I still didn't believe any of it.

...

Then, I was told about the video.

...

On Keisha's cell phone, I repeatedly watched the footage. There is no question that she is telling the truth. I saw it with my own eyes.

...

The fake Keisha Pope-Nixon...created by the media and the police...got shoved back into her chair.

...

The real Keisha Pope-Nixon is standing tall...and she ain't sittin' back down. She's gonna to tell her story of years and years of documented abuse. She's gonna to tell her story of the incessant financial manipulation.

She's going to tell her story of the numerous betrayals.

She's gonna to tell her story...

...

The real Keisha Pope-Nixon stands.

...

Will you stand with her?

...

Amen.

September 26, 2019

Shoot Me

Since its modern inception, I have given my life to the Dallas Movement. I didn't expect to become a leader...but I guess I am. I didn't choose this path...this path was chosen for me.

At all of the marches...the rallies...the protests...the actions, I did my best to help create healthy productive spaces to channel the rage that so often consumed us. Sometimes we were more successful than others. There has always been a contingent that wanted violence. For many years, I silently watched this phenomenon. Everybody just kept on dismissing them as crazy. I tried to ignore it...until I couldn't anymore.

I can't tell you how many times I've relived that night. I'm standing there next to the Greyhound Station. I hear the shots. I see the bodies drop. I sense the bullets spaying everywhere. In sheer terror, I turned around. I

did everything I could to get people out of there. I did everything I could. I wasn't enough. People died. I felt responsible. On some level, I sill do. I'm reliving I again.

I knew Micah Johnson. He marched with us for years. I saw him try to fight the police. I heard him dream of killing cops. Everybody just dismissed him as crazy. Of course I never knew Micah Johnson specifically...but I knew plenty of people just like him. In fact, they've been particularly active online during the Amber Guyger trial over the last few days.

"We gonna' burn his bitch down!"

"She better run."

"I already got my scope on her."

"There's gonna' be blood on the streets."

These comments are the comments of cowards...however cowards are still capable of great evil...and are often hard to stop. So, I want to speak directly to he cowards... If you feel he urge to shoot people...shoot me instead. I refuse to stand idly by as another Micah Johnson unleashes terror in this city. So, don't be a coward...shoot me. If not, be quiet and figure out how to love somebody.

Amen.

October 1, 2019

Can You Love This Woman?

"Some fucking cop just shot a dude in his own apartment!!!" Before I could even process what was happening, I got another call. "You won' believe this shit...a female cop shot an innocent brother in his own apartment...over there off Lamar...we got to get out there!" Almost without thinking, I got in my car and started driving. For the entire drive, both my mind & heart were consumed with the magnitude of it all. Tears mixed with sweat as I prayed for the survivors. I didn't know anything about them. I just knew I had to pray. The more I prayed...the angrier I got. Eventually, I had to pull over. I was shaking. "How could anyone shoot somebody down like his?" I had already cast her to hell multiple times when I heard something from beyond. "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." Honestly, I had no idea what such words even meant in this situation. I just knew that I heard something that gave me pause. Regardless, I had work to do.

"Jeff, I need you." For months, I helped lead and organize rally after rally and march after march. Every night, I stood up and demanded justice for Botham Jean as loud as I could. "This woman is evil!" "May God send her to prison for the rest of her life!" "We don't even need no trial on this one!" "What's her address?" The stronger the words got the more I realized that something wasn't right in my spirit. Late one night, my anger started to boil as I was driving home. I stopped. As I prayed, I heard it again, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." I dismissed such words as bullshit. "How can anyone love a monster?" I figured it must be the devil talking to me. Placing my foot on the gas, I sped off into the night. I didn't want any of it.

I didn't expect to be there. I didn't have a plan. I simply walked in. I don't know that I even touched dinner. I was too busy talking to the parents of Botham Jean.

When I asked about forgiveness/love for Amber Guyger, they assured me, "that is our goal."

The trial seemed to arrive slowly. The verdict came quickly. The entire process portrayed Amber Guyger to be what I have long thought she is...a monster. When the guilty verdict came down, everybody chanted and cheered. In the midst of it all, something jus wasn't right in my spirit. Then I heard it again, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."

Not long after the verdict, I was asked for a quote and I replied...

“Justice for Botham Jean will never be complete without our finding a way to love Amber Guyger. There is no other path forward.”

Can you love this woman?

Amen.

October 3, 2019

The Wounds of Christ on The Body of Daniela Calderon

The night was dark. Truthfully, it seemed darker than it should have been. Regardless, Daniela Calderon was trying to find meaning in the night. The bus seemed late...or maybe it just wasn't coming fast enough. When the attractive young man drove up and asked if she'd like a ride, she didn't hesitate. Immediately, he started flirting and pushing her toward intimacy. Daniela told him right away that she was a Trans woman. For whatever reason, he didn't get it at first. Incrementally, his anger rose. Wanting to stay safe from his ignorance, Daniela got out of the truck and sought refuge in a small store. After an extended period of time, she left the store. After a few steps, she saw the man driving toward

her. By the time she saw the gun...it was too late. Bullets entered her body from every direction. Blood flowed on the concrete for the sins of many. Looking to the sky, Daniela told God that she loved him and waited to die. The resurrection began.

So the other disciples told Thomas, “We have seen God!” But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”

A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”

Last night, I climbed the steps to her room. Daniela doesn't speak much English. It didn't matter. God has a

way of transcending all that. The more we talked, the more I was able to share with her the love of God and the spiritual nature of her wounds. Eventually, she grabbed my hand and guided it toward her wounds. In the holes, I found strength...I found boldness...I found Christ.

Thomas dared to touch.

Will you?

Amen.

October 17, 2019

No One is Safe in Fort Worth : Jerry Wayne Waller & Atatiana Jefferson

Something wasn't right. Deeply concerned about the alarm going off at the neighbor's house...the Good Samaritan raced to help. Picking up a gun for protection...the Good Samaritan ventured a few steps out of his house. Before the Good Samaritan was able to realize anything that was going on...shots rang out. The Good Samaritan collapsed on his own property. Before death could claim the Good Samaritan...the Samaritan's last thought was a prayer that everyone else was ok. Even before the blood dried on the cement...the Fort Worth Police Department was doing all that they could to blame this instance of police brutality on the victim. In many ways... they got away with it...and we have been left to suffer the consequences.

This is the story of a white man. This is the story of an old white man. This is the story of a relatively wealthy white man. This is the story of Jerry Wayne Waller.

The location of the story was a place of affluence. The location of the story was full of neighbors with means. The location of the story was Woodhaven Country Club.

This is a story that does not fit with the narratives of other stories.

Regardless...the outcome was the same...

The events of May 28, 2013 did not garner any attention. There were no major protests. There were no heated council meetings. There were no tweets from famous people. There were no calls for reform. There were no clergy press conferences. There were no television specials. There were no vigils. There was no new legislation. There was nothing. There was only the dead body of Jerry Wayne Waller.

Where were we?

In life...Jerry Wayne Waller was unable to help his neighbor...but in death he could have saved another Good Samaritan...Atatiana Jefferson...if we had only listened.

I hope that we are smarter this time around.

Because history teaches us that no one is safe in Fort Worth.

Jerry Wayne Waller and Atatiana Jefferson stand in judgment of what we do next.

Amen.

November 1, 2019

On the Innocence of Brandon Gonzales.

There were days of planning. Repeatedly, he went by The Party Venue to rehearse his entrance and his exit. Careful planning was the only way to make sure that things didn't go sloppy. The gun was easy to acquire. When the night finally came, he got all of his equipment and headed for his target. Throughout the night, he hunted Kevin Berry, Jr. He needed him to get in just the right place. When he stepped on the right spot, he opened fire. There was no way he was going to miss tonight. Blood went everywhere. Once he knew Berry was dead, he didn't care about all the others. He accomplished exactly what he set out to. In the pandemonium, he slipped away. Though many people saw him, nobody really saw him. They knew better than to talk. His plan was working perfectly. Before long, his accomplice pinned the whole thing on a man named Brandon Gonzales. In a place like Hunt County, he knew that they were going to jump on the first

person of color that they could find. Sheriff Randy Meeks had always been good for that. When he saw Gonzales on television, he knew that he had outsmarted them all. Nobody was coming for him. They already had their guy.

These words might offend your sensibilities. Honestly, that's what they're intended to do. Truth most often finds us in the midst of offense. While this is certainly not a detailed report of what happened, it is a very plausible scenario. To exist anywhere beyond plausibility at this point is to deny Brandon Gonzales a fundamental right that we are all entitled to in this country...the presumption of innocence.

Like many of you, I was horrified by the news of this shooting. The descriptions of the scene made me sick. I prayed for justice...and I prayed for justice fast. I knew that there was someone out there capable of killing again. I wondered what evil incarnate might look like.

When I saw the shooting at Berry's vigil in Dallas, I grew even more frightened. Fear can be a powerful motivator. Truthfully, I was ready to believe that anybody that Sheriff Meeks brought out was guilty. When I heard that there had been an arrest, I wanted to see what the monster looked like. When I saw Brandon Gonzales, I believed that he deserved everything that was coming to him. That is...until I didn't.

Doubt might be a more powerful motivator than fear. You can't seem to suppress it...it just gnaws at you. The more I watched Sheriff Meek's press conference...the less I believed what he was saying. Quickly, it became apparent to me that this was a small town department leading the investigation of a big time crime. Nothing was deemed connected. Everything came across as so simple. Then it got worse. No gun. No motive. No surveillance cameras. No knowledge of whether or not he had been a local college student. No idea where he had been since the shooting. Sheriff Meeks made a joke

about his reelection. To end the press conference, Sheriff Meeks declared his compassion for all people. By the end of the press conference, I began to wonder if he had any evidence at all. Then I got my hands on the arrest warrant. Shockingly, the entire case is currently based on one eyewitness. It seems that the Sheriff forgot one thing in his presentation...the truth.

Quite honestly, this is an odd place for me to be. I don't know Brandon Gonzales. I don't know Sheriff Meeks. Hell, I don't know much about Hunt County. I just know what I have seen and heard over the past few days...and that was enough for me. In his press conference, Sheriff Meeks kept calling Gonzales "the shooter." It is beyond clear that he doesn't have the evidence to be using such a phrase. I think that it is also very clear that Sheriff Meeks has done exactly what I did at the beginning of this piece...create a plausible scenario. The only difference is that he called his truth and locked an

innocent man up over it. God don't like that shit...and nor should we.

So, rise your ass up...

and let's set Brandon free.

Amen.

November 10, 2019

Vultures : On the Death of Marquis Jefferson

Atatiana Jefferson

1990 - 2019

The young woman was murdered. The officer didn't hesitate. I guess he thought he was going to be a hero. Such thoughts quickly turned to shit.

I don't know what that call was like. The phone rang. The phone wasn't supposed ring. Maybe it wasn't a call. Maybe the words came face to face. I can't imagine. Life was dead. Nothing was ever going to be the same.

Before the sun arose, the vultures had descended. Picking at the body...the attorneys knew that there was much to be taken. Money was collected before anyone knew whether or not money was needed. The generalized language of the appeals assured that the money would get where they intended it to go. The protests were about money. The vigils were about money. Everything they perpetuated was about money. Everyone else wanted justice...they just wanted money...and as much as they could get.

Growing more and more frustrated...the father held a news conference demanding for all of the foolishness to stop. The young woman was not named money. He looked ill. From his seat, you could tell that he was giving everything that he could for his daughter. The lawyers responded by assuring the family that they would do everything they could for their money. The injunction wasn't going to slow them down...they were going to get paid no matter what.

Over the next few days, the lawyers fought the father in court. There was no understanding that he was growing more and more ill. I guess they didn't care. By the time the funeral arrived, they wanted to make sure that he knew that they meant business. The father couldn't even make it through the services before he was served with legal papers. Money was more important than anything...including the father's health.

The lawyers wouldn't stop. They made him sit in court for countless hours. Regardless of the cost...they were going to cash in. Every time they saw him he looked more and more worn down. That was the plan. A dead man can't fight no more.

He fought as hard as he could. At the end of the day, it didn't matter. When his heart finally stopped, he looked up to see the lawyers holding knives drenched in blood. They knew the money was now all theirs. They'd finally cashed in. The word "justice" had done it again.

Hungry for more...the vultures flew away.

Marquis Jefferson

1961 - 2019

Amen.

November 13, 2019

Rodney Reed is Not Innocent

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.

The Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood

Source:
Sentencing Brief Filed at the United States Supreme Court
https://www.supremecourt.gov/DocketPDF/17/17-1093/45899/20180507150103836_Reed%20BIO%20FINAL.pdf

November 18, 2019

The Genocide of Native American Peoples Continues

Feathers. Moccasins. War Paint. Battle Cries. Arrows. We only had to be quiet momentarily. Once we got done with the pilgrims, we could really let it rip. On the playground, we fought like our lives depended on it and enjoyed every minute of it. I thought nothing of it. Why would I? I was having a blast. Nobody told us that it

was important to respect Native American cultures. I don't think anybody cared. Time did what my teachers couldn't. Slowly, knowledge arrived and the thrill was gone. Truth has a funny way of sobering the past. Triumphs are often revealed for what they are...evil. Injustice. Disease. War. Pain. Death. Genocide.

The kids rushed through the door. One of my young children was particularly excited about a project he was assigned at school. The more I read, the more disturbed I was. In a piece of cardboard the size of a shoebox, he was supposed to build a miniature teepee that included proper markings. Of course, the children weren't given any instruction about what any of these markings might represent. If that wasn't problematic enough, the instructions also alluded to the idea that white men brought their horses and helped the "Indians" move west. I was growing angrier by the moment. Before exploding, I called a few of my Native American friends. Repeatedly, they told me how problematic the entire

thing was...but cautioned me to use this as a time to demand further education...unless they resisted. I prepared to go to war.

The night before the assignment was due. I sat our entire family down and explained the genocide that our ancestors perpetuated against Native Americans and how inappropriate and evil it is to treat the cultures and histories of other people this way. For their age, I thought they understood pretty well...which made me wonder why an adult creator of curriculum wouldn't be able to as well. Later that night, I sent an email to the teacher explaining how problematic it was to give assignments like this with no Native American input. Then, I scheduled a meeting with the principal. Though he is a very nice guy, I was prepared for a fight.

He knew I was angry. Before I could even begin, he apologized and assured me that this would be the last time that any study of Native Americans would take

place in the school without direct consultation with Native Americans. Almost instantaneously, he promised to begin right away. I would have accepted nothing else. Cranking the car, I prayed for moments like this to be taking place all over the country...in all sectors of life. It is our job to atone for the sins of our ancestors...

The genocide of Native American peoples must end.

Amen.

November 23, 2019

Rodney Reed Letter to the Editor

Editor.

For the better part of a decade, I've given my life to the abolition of the death penalty. While I'm thankful that Rodney Reed's life has been spared, I am deeply disturbed by the dishonest narrative of his purity used to make it happen. Inconvenient truths are still truths.

AW was 12 when she was attacked and raped in her home. The subsequent rape kit pointed to Rodney Reed.

LUCY EIPPER is the mother of two of Reed's children. During their relationship, she was repeatedly beaten and raped by Reed...including at least once in front of their children.

Intellectually disabled, CAROLINE RIVAS was repeatedly manipulated and raped by Reed.

Late one night, VIVIAN HARBOTTLE was abducted and brutally raped underneath a train trestle. The subsequent rape kit pointed to Rodney Reed.

Rodney Reed tried to rape LINDA SCHLUETER. The only thing that saved her were the lights of a passing car.

While I will work endlessly to save the life of Rodney Reed, I will not lie about who he is to make that happen...the stories mentioned above are too important.

The Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood
Denton, Texas
Abolitionist

Source:

United States Supreme Court Sentencing Brief
https://www.supremecourt.gov/DocketPDF/17/17-1093/45899/20180507150103836_Reed%20BIO%20FINAL.pdf

November 27, 2019

Evolution to Revolution

I've been engaging things I did not know that I would find. Such is the nature of the random to the prescribed. There were the sounds. There were the sights. There were the... Such is the nature of the random as opposed to the prescribed. I never wanted to walk the path that was laid before me. I wanted something different. I wanted something real. Surprises birth faith and faith a future. Occasionally, I stop to remember that I exist. It's easy to forget. It's even harder to consider. Perhaps, that is where the evolution begins. Thought.

The light is there in the distance. I thought it would be easy to find. It wasn't. Eyes often deceive. I was there. Then I wasn't. Then I really wasn't. Existence started to disappear. I chased it with all that I had. I thought I was running toward the light. I thought wrong. I was

running toward a trap. I never got caught. I just got tired of running. I think that's what eventually saved me. I stopped and looked around. The lemmings kept going. They kept running. They kept shouting. They kept beating. They kept... The Gods of evil know how to use the light. I guess that's their only tool. I watched them run off of cliff after cliff. There was no one there to save them. In the distance, I stood alone. Solitude.

Confusion set in. I didn't know where to go. I didn't know how to be. I knew...but...I didn't really know. The light was somewhere. I just couldn't see it...but...I think I felt it. The fire grew closer. I felt it...but...I knew that I had to. The burn crept closer. In the final seconds, I grabbed the light. There was an explosion. Love was all that I knew. The flames of truth shot out of my spirit. I was made whole. I was blind. I never looked back. I never thought that the revolution would take me this far. Then again...perhaps this was where I'd evolved for in the first place. Destination.

Amen.

December 2, 2019

Jesus' Words for Black Friday

Matthew 19:16-24

Just then a man came up to Jesus and asked, “Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?”

“Why do you ask me about what is good?” Jesus replied. “There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, keep the commandments.”

“Which ones?” he inquired.

Jesus replied, “‘You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honor your father and mother,’ and ‘love your neighbor as yourself.’”

“All these I have kept,” the young man said. “What do I still lack?”

Jesus answered, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.

Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Truly I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of

heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."

John 2:13-22

When it was almost time for Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple courts he found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the moneychangers and overturned their tables. To those who sold doves he said, "Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a market!" His disciples remembered that it is written: "Zeal for your house will consume me."

The teachers then responded to him, “What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?”

Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.”

They replied, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?” But the temple he had spoken of was his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the words that Jesus had spoken.

Amen.

December 28, 2019

The Brutality of Hope: Thoughts on Innocence

I don't own a gun...but if I did...I know that I would have shot myself by now. I guess that's why I've never bought a gun. I've long wondered what has kept me hanging on through one period of mental destruction after another. Though medicine can keep them away for a time, I always know that they're coming back. I always know that the pain will eventually take me. Hope dies last...and that is the only theological problem.

Fucked perpetual. We were. We are. We will always be. In the midst of the suffering of our world...this is the only conclusion that makes sense. To believe anything else...is to believe foolishly.

The thoughts no longer worked. Nothing did. Something else? I didn't have time. Life was coming too quickly. Yet...still I was.

Smells change forever. Something was implanted into my nostrils. Hospitals are notorious for such darkness. I didn't belong there. I had to leave. I couldn't. I had to go. I was succumbing to the questions. Unfortunately, I couldn't shake them. Hope wouldn't let me. I had been chosen to keep them hanging on.

Something pushed me forward. Something was requiring me to go. Something repeatedly turned me around and around. The question.

That night remains. It happened under the stars. There was nowhere else to go. The elements had had their way with him long before he got to me. I was just there for the conclusion...or maybe it was the beginning. I'm still not sure. Hope still suffocates my thoughts.

Doors swung open from every direction. Blood sprayed in every direction. People just don't survive head wounds like that. Still they worked. Death crept closer

and closer. I couldn't figure out why they were still working. By the time the family arrived, they'd done all that they could do. I guess I had too. Like I'd done many times before, I walked into that waiting room and informed the devastated gathered that he was gone. Instead of giving up, they asked question after question after question. I only remember one. "Is a brain transplant a possibility?" I couldn't believe how much the gathered were willing to prolong of exponentiate their suffering in order to cling to hope. The construct brutalized them over and over that night. Hope dies last...but perhaps it should have died first that night.

Hope is illusory...a figment of the imagination of the desperate. The nature of hope is that it demands the endurance of brutality to even exist...with no guarantee of anything. It is a lie...perhaps a benevolent lie...but still a lie. One cannot hope unless there is something to hope for beyond or through what is present. The beyond or the through is brutal by every estimation. So,

why promote suffering? I'm not sure. I hope an answer exists...or I hope the brutality stops soon.

"Herod, when he realized that the scholars had tricked him, flew into a rage. He commanded the murder of every little boy two years old and under who lived in Bethlehem and its surrounding hills."

Matthew 2:16

Thousands upon thousands of children died...just so that Jesus could live?

Where is the hope in that shit?

Amen.

December 30, 2019

The Assassination of Jesus at West Freeway Church of Christ.

Nobody was really listening. Truth be told, most of the folks occupying the pews couldn't hear even if they wanted to. Regardless, the preacher is going to preach. That's what he gets paid to do. If you'd been there long enough, you knew everybody that could possibly come through the door. Even the most troubled souls had been there before. In the midst of such an environment, the church decided that guns were necessary to protect them from whatever demons they preferred to keep out. The mind has to quickly wonder what demons they might have been thinking about. Fear has a way of creating problems when they are not there. Guns are a product of our fear...not of our courage. Fearful people seem to attract fearful people.

I can't imagine Jesus carrying a gun in any circumstance. If he had, the gospel would have been lost...one cannot love their neighbor as they love themselves while placing a gun between them. Can you imagine the disciples summarily executing anyone that got in their way? The message of Jesus was never about violence...the message was about love...love always overcoming fear. God has always been found in sacrifice...even if it means our life. Jesus didn't have a security team. Jesus didn't carry a gun. Jesus recklessly loved the least of these...the shooter being a prime example...and was always prepared to die.

The hero or responding shooter keeps calling the shooter "demon" or the "evil." In the midst of sin, such dehumanizing language is always necessary. It helps one be at peace with taking the life of another. I would imagine that the shooter would use similar language if he had survived. Quite frankly, I don't believe there is

any difference between the two. They both came to church prepared to take a life.

Jesus wept.

In the end, Jesus is with the shot...not the shooter.

+++May the departed rest in the arms of love perpetual.