



The President's Perspective



Am I My Brother's Keeper?

Approximately six years ago, while returning from a meeting in Virginia, I took a brief detour through the Virginia Tech campus in Blacksburg. The serenity and beauty of the campus was striking. I must confess that, while I enjoyed the beauty of the campus, my real interest was the Tech football stadium. It was incredible to see such a mammoth structure standing in the middle of the Blacksburg countryside's rolling hills. I never imagined that I'd see that same stadium filled with mourning college students, grieving over the loss of 33 of their fellow students and faculty. Yet, that was exactly what I observed this past week as I sat transfixed by the unfolding news of a single shooter who ravaged the Virginia Tech campus. As the dad of a 19 year old college student, I could, in a small way, appreciate the fear that gripped the hearts of parents who also watched the initial news flashes that reported the massacre. What I cannot appreciate is the emptiness that 31 sets of parents now feel as they realize that their son or daughter will not come home for the summer or ever. My heart and prayers go out daily for those grieving parents, siblings, students and faculty.

It was certainly predictable that new and voluminous cries for "gun control" would emerge from this past Monday's tragic events. Almost immediately, politicians and news pundits, both locally and nationally, began placing the blame for the tragedy on lax gun control laws, as if the perpetrator of this horrific crime were a gun wielded by NO human hand. My comments, here, are not meant to sound callous or insensitive. However, the one who committed this murderous act was a HUMAN BEING not a piece of machinery.

Consider the following "news headlines" that we see almost weekly in our newspapers and on television.

"SUV plows into group of pedestrians as they window shop."

"Gun discharges, killing three year old child."

"Logging truck rolls onto compact car, killing entire family."

It's as if the crime, accident or tragic event were carried out by an inanimate object (SUV, gun, truck) with a will all its own, independent of any human involvement. Tragic as this past week's event was, it was not a "gun crime", it is a PERSON crime. The massacre was committed by a very troubled young man (a person) who displayed sufficient "warnings" or signs that he might be capable of such acts.

As the story has continued to emerge, new and increasing evidence has surfaced indicating that professors and students were both aware and concerned about the mental state of the Virginia Tech senior. Yet, almost no one DID anything to try to help

him. Yes, one teacher alerted the campus police of his seeming pre-occupation with violence. Yes, two female students informed campus authorities of his seeming desire to "stalk" them. Yes, one professor "encouraged" Cho to seek some counseling for his violent tendencies. Yet, it seems that no one took any CONCRETE STEPS to help him. Contrast this with how many of us grew up. In my case, if I "acted up" at school or "at play" in the neighborhood, a caring teacher or parent would alert my parents of my actions. Doing that was considered being a good neighbor. My parents were grateful for the "heads up" and thanked the neighbor/teacher for his/her concern. I know what you are thinking. "But this young man was 23 years old. He was no child." That's true! However, we do bear some community responsibility that should drive us to DO something if we see an exhibition of destructive behavior.

In Genesis 4: 9, Cain attempts to shift blame from himself and his murderous actions by stating, "Am I my brother's keeper?" In one sense, yes, he was! The Bible is clear from a multitude of passages that we have a responsibility, not to police others, but to lovingly express concern if we see an attitude emerging or a destructive course of life developing.

"If a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one..." (Gal. 6:1)

"Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." (Gal. 6:2)

"If thy brother trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault..." (Matt. 18:15)

The point is, we have a shared responsibility to, at least, try to help our Christian brother and even our fellow citizen. That responsibility is motivated by love.

Immediately after 9-11, airline customers embraced the attitude of the Flight 93 passengers, and refused to allow any take over of an aircraft. As the heroes of Flight 93 felt an enormous responsibility to their fellow man and to their country NOT to allow their plane to be crashed into a DC landmark (taking further innocent lives), so we must sense some responsibility for the well-being of our fellow man. We do not live "in a vacuum", not are we an "island unto ourselves." Yet, that is exactly how we live. We ride a train and never speak to a fellow rider. We live in communities and never speak to our neighbors. We have bought into the idea that "it's not my responsibility." We've accepted the lie that, "we can't judge anyone or SAY anything that might offend," even if our safety is at stake. Rather than control guns, let's get a handle on and control "political correctness." Let's "control" this idea that says we dare not love another enough to speak the truth to them.

The terrible events of this past week should teach us, again, that PEOPLE commit crimes. PEOPLE are the perpetrators of horrible acts. Love for them (the love of Christ) must compel us to reach out to them with the truth of what we all are, sinners, and the reality of what Jesus can do for them. Yes, we are, indeed, our brother's keeper.

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