

Restoration and Re-connection

Bishop Haynes reflects on the anniversary of the Virginia Beach mass shooting

Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" [Cain] said, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper? And the LORD said, "What have you done? Listen; your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground." (Genesis 4:9-10)

On May 31, 2019 Dewayne Craddock walked into a municipal building in the Princess Anne area of Virginia Beach and shot 16 people, killing 12 and wounding four others. He himself was later shot by responding police officers after a prolonged gun battle. He had earlier resigned his job and was angry and disgruntled. His shots, while seemingly random and indiscriminate, found their targets with ferocity. How can a person be so disconnected from his fellow human beings that he shoots them without even looking to see who they are?

In the days that followed this shooting, I made my way to Southern Virginia for the first time to begin the process of getting to know you and discerning whether we might be called to work together as Bishop and people. I remember hearing during this discernment retreat of the closeness of this tragedy to area Episcopal churches, some of whose Rectors were even serving on the search committee. As we gathered in retreat, we prayed for the people of Virginia Beach whose lives had been shattered. We prayed for healing and restoration. We prayed for an end to violence and hatred. I remember feeling stunned that this violence and hatred had come so close to home.

In the Genesis story of Cain and Abel, Cain kills his brother Abel because he is disgruntled. He is unhappy because Abel's offering to God has found favor with God, but Cain's offering has not found favor. Cain feels slighted. Perhaps his pride is wounded. He doesn't feel that he has gotten a fair shake. This angers him and makes him feel ashamed. And so to promote himself, he decides to kill the competition. In this state of mind, he is disconnected from his brother Abel and this permits him to take his brother's life. In every act of violence, there is this disconnection, this anger to promote one's self in order not to be ashamed.

Behind the gun of every mass shooter is a disconnected person...a person who is disconnected from his fellow human beings, a person who is disconnected from God. When God confronted Cain, He recognized that disconnection and mentioned that Cain would be a fugitive and a wanderer...someone who is always disconnected. Cain laments that this punishment is too much to bear, and God relents, places a mark of protection on Cain's forehead and ultimately gives Cain descendants through marriage. God is about restoration of disconnection.

As we remember those who died on this anniversary of the Virginia Beach mass shooting, it is right and proper to lament and express sorrow over the human disconnection that breeds violence. As Christians, we are called to join with the God who desires restoration and re-connection. We are called to seek reconciliation through our acts of kindness – to reach out perhaps to those who are disconnected. The

blood of our fellow human beings is crying out for these kinds of efforts. Let us remember those who died today; and then let us do an act of kindness and connection in memory of those who died. In so doing, perhaps we will be able to participate in bringing a fugitive and a wanderer home.

PRAYER FOR THE HUMAN FAMILY

O God, you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son: Look with compassion on the whole human family; take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts; break down the walls that separate us; unite us in bonds of love; and work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish your purposes on earth; that in your good time, all nations and races may serve you in harmony around your heavenly throne; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.