

What Do We Say?

By Kyle Childress

What do we say after El Paso and Dayton? What do we do? Each morning I get up and check to see if we're in another war or if there's been another mass shooting. Last Sunday I got up to the news of two mass shootings. May God comfort those in grief. May God have mercy on us and who we're becoming.

Many years ago, when she was a young associate pastor and I was a younger intern, I watched Nancy Hastings Sehested cry in her sermon. After the sermon someone confronted her saying that she shouldn't be crying in the pulpit. A few weeks later in another sermon, Nancy said, "There are some things worth crying over." Indeed there are and mass shootings are at the top of the list. Unlike the line in the movie *A League of Their Own*, "There's no crying in baseball," there is crying in church. At least there should be. So what do we do? We cry, we lament, we weep with those who weep.

And we get mad. We get angry but we must be careful. There are good reasons why anger is one of the seven deadly sins and if we're not careful we end up becoming part of widespread anger and resentment, which turns to the hatred so pervasive around us. Nevertheless, just like there are some things worth crying over there are some things worth getting mad over and the two are often related: we weep and get angry about things we love. When we see persons' lives, especially children's, taken and destroyed in mass shootings, we cry but we also are angry that it happens, and we feel helpless to do anything. Worse, we are angry that those officials in power refuse to do anything.

So we organize. We hold vigils, we march, we demonstrate, and we vote and register others, so they'll vote. We organize all of our shut-ins, buy them stacks of postcards and stamps, and encourage them to write to our elected officials every single day – every day – over their refusal, their fear, and their entrapment to the power of guns and the gun lobby. Every day. And every day we pray over those postcards and every day we pray for the public officials to do the right thing. Bill Moyers remembers overhearing President Lyndon Johnson talking on the phone with Dr. Martin Luther King and Johnson trying to talk King out of marching from Selma to Montgomery because Johnson feared it would alienate Southern moderates. But LBJ listened to King and after a while said, "Dr. King you've convinced me. You go out there and make it possible for me to do the right thing." Every day we pray and act in ways that help change public opinion, so it is more possible for elected officials to do the right thing. Did I say every day?

Praying every single day is part and parcel of the main thing we do. We immerse ourselves in the God we know in Jesus Christ. This is not simply a public policy debate. Guns and mass shootings are about idolatry and the power of death. William Stringfellow said that only as we immerse ourselves in God, the God of the resurrected life, can we hope to resist the power of death. This is also why I rarely get into discussions about the Second Amendment, but I talk a lot about the second commandment. And Jesus.

What do we say and do? We weep, we get mad, we organize, and most importantly we immerse ourselves in Christ Jesus. Every day.

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