

The Road Less Traveled – May 26, 2017

Another week. Another senseless act of violence. Another tragic loss of life.

That's what it seems like, doesn't it? That was the first thing I thought when I heard the news this week about the heartbreaking attack at a concert in Manchester, England. Thousands of fans – many of them teen-agers and younger children – were beginning to make their way out of the Manchester Arena following an Ariana Grande concert when a suicide bomber detonated an improvised explosive device in the foyer. At least 22 people were killed and at least 64 were injured. An 8-year-old girl is among the fatalities.

I wanted to be outraged when I heard the news, but in truth my reaction was something short of that. It was closer to sadness, frustration and an overwhelming feeling of helplessness. I think because these types of attacks, this type of senseless violence, happens so often now that we are becoming partially immune to it. It's a defense mechanism, really. It's emotionally draining to stay outraged so often. So we hear it. We feel terrible. And on some level, we just wait for the next incident.

But mostly what we feel, I think, is helpless. The violence in our world feels like it is spinning out of control. No longer are attacks like this confined to places half a world away. The Manchester attack could have happened anywhere. The Manchester Arena could have easily been the American Airlines Center. As the father of a 15-year-old daughter, that reality hits hard. And as a father, I feel the need to do something to protect her. Keeping her locked in the house is an attractive idea, but I know it won't work. So what do I do? What can any of us do? That's the question. Because to do nothing is to live with fear and be left feeling like a perpetual victim.

What to do?

If you're like me, you saw no shortage of calls to prayer on social media this week. Pray for the victims of the bombing. Pray for the emergency responders and the medical professionals who were tending to them. Pray for peace. And if you're like me, somewhere in your mind you breathed a heavy sigh. Because there are times when the call to prayer frustrates me. As Christians we talk a lot about changing the world, about being builders of God's Kingdom. And yet when push comes to shove, when the real crises hit, we retreat into prayer. And on some level, I find myself questioning sometimes, is that the best we've got? Is that really all we can do? Where is the power of the Holy Spirit that we are so fond of talking about?

And the short answer is, yes. That is the best we can do. Oh there are lots of things we can do to help. There are good causes to which we can donate, organizations working for change that we can support. But the first and best thing we can do as followers of Jesus is to pray. But I think the key is how we pray, what we pray for and how willing we are to allow that prayer to direct our actions. What I mean is this. Simply praying for comfort for

the families, healing for those injured and justice for any involved in the attack, that's fine. If we pray for God to end the violence that plagues our world, that's important. But if our prayer ends there, then we will be left feeling like we haven't done anything. If we're going to pray – if we say we *believe* in the power of prayer – then let's pray like we do.

So here is my prayer: *Lord, I am appalled by the violence that mars your creation. I am broken by the hatred that spawns such senseless acts of terror. I am grieved by the loss of innocent lives at the hands of those who would blaspheme You by suggesting that their actions are driven by faith. But, Lord, I don't want to just feel. I want to do. I want to be an instrument of change. I want to be part of your healing work that I know can show the world the holy in the midst of the tragic. And so where I am guilty of the anger and bigotry that spawns evil, help me to excise it from my heart. When there are slivers of hatred and bigotry right here in my community, help me be honest enough to see them for what they are, and then help me to be bold enough to stand against them. Help me to see – and to teach my children – that seemingly random acts of violence are never random, but rather well-planned, deliberate acts born in the cesspool of hatred, fueled by a belief that those who do not believe as I do are somehow less than me. Help me, in every moment of the day, be an instrument of Your peace. Help me to live in such a way that others will see You and see clearly that love can surely conquer all. In my little corner of the world, Lord, let them see You in me. Amen.*

Of course, I know I won't change the world. Mine is one tiny life. But around the world there are somewhere between 2 and 3 billion people who are followers of Jesus. What if we all prayed, and what if we all acted? That's how the world changes. That's how love wins.

Aledo is just a tiny speck in a big world. But why can't it start here? Why can't it start with us?

See you Sunday.