

Making sense out of tragedy

Anyone who has faced trauma in his or her life can speak quite clearly about all of those feelings, because it is the living reality of any traumatic event. I would imagine that for many in Blacksburg, Va., and on the campus of Virginia Tech, many people have experienced if not all at least one of those feelings, and without a doubt before getting through the grieving process, will experience all of them.

I listened to a mother speak about her son who was fortunately not killed in the awful attack April 16, yet was shot three times before being able to be taken to a hospital. The mother spoke so eloquently that she had always wished that her son would have a defining moment in his life, something positive and a life achievement, and yet, this event is what will help define him for the rest of his life.

Following the attacks of Sept. 11, I remember having conversations with different people that we shouldn't use too much of our time asking "Why?" because we will never really know the answers to those questions. I believe it is a natural part of the process to ask such questions, yet, we have to come to the realization that we don't have the answers to all of life's burning questions. I think the more appropriate question for us to ponder is "What?" What is God calling me to do with my life in the midst of such tragedy? In what way is God calling me to change and grow in light of the experience?

Listening to so many different people after such events becomes a "blame game" where we have to find the one person that we can blame. We need someone that we could be angry with for such horrific actions. Without a doubt, there is someone to blame for these actions at Virginia Tech and it isn't necessarily the president of the school, or the young ladies that never pressed charges; it isn't even the faculty or students that thought this young man had problems, rather, it is anyone who is unwilling to take responsibility for his or her own life in asking the "What" questions

and the often poor choices that result. Isolating ourselves from our community can only lead to disaster in our lives because we need the support of those around us, even if it seems as if we are unloved by any of them.

We all know what it is like to be immersed in our own life stories and drama at times and miss what is really going on, much like the disciples after Jesus is raised from the dead. Even after he is raised they have doubts because the details of life and the poor choices they had made were all still too fresh; but eventually there is that “Aha!” moment when they finally realize and begin to become aware of just how good God is and that they can be forgiven for what they had done and find great strength within that grace. Just open up to any chapter of Acts of the Apostles and you will find that!

I would imagine that for many people from the Virginia Tech community, it will be quite some time before they can look beyond the many little details of where they were and what they were doing when tragedy arose on campus. They are no different from the rest of us. We would all be in the same position if we faced trauma firsthand. Yet, for them too, like other faithful people, there will come a time when they can detach from the situation and their hearts can begin to make sense of what has unfolded and they can begin to forgive in a way that only God can understand, where they can transcend the pain and see how much they have grown in their trust and love for God again.

There is no question in my mind that this will be a defining moment in all of their lives as they finish up this semester and move on with their lives, but there will never be “normal” again, at least as they knew it. This event will force them and us to ask questions like never before and come to a deeper realization of who they are in the way God has created them and how they, too, participate in a broken world. Yes, they are left with picking up the pieces from a disaster; but with time and patience a bud will once again blossom and life will be looked at and valued from a

much higher place, even in light of the tragedy they have endured.

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