

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 6/20/2022

Dear Friends in Christ,

ONE AT ONE – *Every day this week beginning on Tuesday, June 21 you are encouraged to pray for one minute at one o'clock. This week, pray for the unhoused and ask God to care for those who are in need of shelter and safety. Bless those who work to create affordable housing for those who have none. Ask the Spirit to guide us in contributing to programs that can assist all who are in need.*

There is a saying that I sometimes hear when shootings like the one in Uvalde occur. I think it comes from a struggle to make some kind of sense out of what is really a senseless act. The expression that is spoken by some is this: “It must have been God’s will.” Perhaps the meaning is that God caused this tragic event to happen. Or it simply suggests that God did nothing to intervene, making it God’s will that it happened. I think both of these suggestions are incorrect.

The Bible is clear that we were created with free will. God allows us to choose what decisions we will make. This is evident going all the way back to the Garden of Eden where God tells Adam and Eve that they may eat of any tree in the Garden except for the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Indeed, it was not God’s will that they eat from it, though God certainly knew that they would. It was their choice to stray from the course that God had set for them and choose to go their own way. If God had made the shooting in Uvalde happen, it raises a number of questions. Was it God’s will that the shooter do this thing? Was it God’s will that nineteen children and two teachers die? Or was it the entire event that was God’s will?

The problem with suggesting that it was God’s will is that it makes us puppets, at least in part. It is to say that we can only do what God intends for us to do. This is different from God knowing what choices we will make. It is God making the decisions and we, just pawns in God’s plan, do what God has made us do. Again, this contradicts Bible message that we were created with free will. Someone who takes a gun to kill innocent children may have been controlled by some form of mental illness—what in biblical times they would call a demon—but this is not the same as being controlled by God. Yet evil actions like this one the whole are, nonetheless, the result of the choices we make.

I’ve also heard people ask, “Why didn’t God do something to stop this?” This, again, moves into the realm of free choice. If God supernaturally intervenes, free will has been eliminated, at least with regard to the act which God has prevented or made to happen a specific way. But we also need to recognize that God does not turn a blind eye to evil in the world. God is not without care and concern. So, God has acted by calling us to be the agents of change. God has given us Christian values and free will to work to enact the kinds of alterations and transformations of our society that will reduce and perhaps even eliminate such acts of violence. Through our care of others, we can provide the support that might prevent someone from going so far. Through our voting and our advocacy, we can challenge our legislators to bring about the kinds of changes that might help to protect the innocent and vulnerable. And there is much more.

Blaming God vacates us from personal responsibility, even when we live hundreds of miles away from a violent event. God did create us with free will. We can throw up our hands in helplessness or defeat. Or we can intentionally look for ways to work for the kind of change that will make our world more what God intended. We can seek the answers that help those who need special attention and we can

Speak out for the kinds of systems that we believe God would want. God has blessed us with the call to act for the good of others in our society. God has given you free choice. How will you use it?

In Christ's love,
Pastor Jeffrey