December 17, 2012

A STATEMENT ON THE CONNECTICUT SCHOOL SHOOTING

The death of a child is always tragic. Death is a tragedy no matter what the circumstances. And yet the level of violence and the scope of deaths this past Friday continue to be heart-wrenching, deeply disturbing, and shocking.

To preach at a child’s funeral in the face of this level of evil -- as some will have to do this week -- one must be willing to walk through various and different acts of love. To tell the truth is an act of love. One has to be a truth-teller about the violence that is rampant in the world, particularly against children. To remember the child is an act of love. One must honor and remember the child, the innocence of the child’s smile and the joy that the child brought into the world. And perhaps most importantly, one must lament as though singing a love song. For if we do not lament the loss of these innocent lives, we’re not telling the truth nor doing justice to their memory.

And to lament is to imply the very near presence of God for God is the one to whom we lament. Our cries, anguish, questions, can be voiced to a God who knows our suffering. God is not just out there somewhere, but here, near, in our flesh -- even taking the form of a little child, a vulnerable child in Bethlehem in an era of violence and the threat of violence. Jesus was born during a massacre of innocents. This week we have the convergence of two massacres, one ancient and one very present. The great irony of this Christmas season is that while we are celebrating the birth of a child we are lamenting the tragic death of children. But this Christ child, even though fragile and vulnerable, leads us forward and represents a new way of life and hope that one day there will be no more senseless shootings, no more suicides, no more violence, no more death and no more mourning.

Christmas is a time when we kneel at a baby’s bedside to hear the lessons taught to us by a child. And this is a sign, even if only a tiny sprout, that in this particular moment of lament there is still hope for our future.

In prayer, peace, and hope,

Luke A. Powery