Dear Lexie,

"Are We There Yet?"

If you are like me, then you have probably heard a great deal of late regarding the George Zimmerman trial. It seems as though just about every major news outlet, whether it be print or electronic media, has had something to say on the trial itself, and especially on the recent acquittal of Mr. Zimmerman, when the jury rendered its "not guilty" verdict.

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How Deep is Your Reconciliation?

A different view on the Zimmerman trial

Permit me to interrupt the chatter of the TV and radio pundits about the Trayvon Martin/George
This Sabbath:
July 20, 2013

Speaker:
Pr. Gerry Lopez,
“Stand Strong”

Special Musical Guests:
VBS Praise Team
Raissa Jei Labrador & Christian Dalida, Vocalists

The Mystery of Iniquity
Exploring tragedy with Barry Casey

Perhaps the one thing, besides shock and grief, that unites us in the face of an unspeakable tragedy like the shooting of schoolchildren in Newtown, Connecticut, is that we search for a reason: Why?

Homecoming 2013
We've only just begun

One of the highlights of summer at Sligo Seventh-Day Adventist Church is our homecoming celebration. Join us this year for "We've only just begun" ...

Hope For Today
Get involved

We have 20+ groups in the Washington Metropolitan area that are ready to move forward! However, we still need a lot of help, especially with discussion leaders and assistant leaders. The areas that have most need include Columbia, Laurel, Adelphi/Hyattsville, DC, and Virginia.
Hope Amist Chaos Q&A

Part 2

Youth and young adults, we've answered some more of your questions! Read on>>

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Are We There Yet?

Melinda

The Mystery of Iniquity DAT Feature: We Have This Hope!!

If you are like me, then you have probably heard a great deal of late regarding the George Zimmerman trial. It seems as though just about every major news outlet, whether it be print or electronic media, has had something to say on the trial itself, and especially on the recent acquittal of Mr. Zimmerman, when the jury rendered it’s not guilty verdict. Even those who are a part of social media outlets, such as Facebook, have jumped on the bandwagon to voice their opinions as to what they believe really took place that fateful night between Zimmerman and Trayvon Martin. No longer do we live in a culture where we are confined to hear commentary from only “professional” journalists, but due to mediums such as FB and twitter, we all have been given a platform to have our voices heard, and I might add, what a powerful platform it is!

As I listened to the verdict that was rendered this past weekend, and as I continue to listen to the many pundits share their views, I can’t help but think that as it relates to race in this country, we still have a long way to go. When you hear all the comments that have been made throughout this trial, the topic of race has been dragged screaming back front and center to our nation’s discussion. Since the election of our country’s first Black president, there has been talk of a post-racial society, where the discussions around the issues of race and racism are no longer relevant. Well, the Zimmerman trial has awakened us all to the stark and painful reality, that when it comes to the discussion of a post-racial America, we simply are not there yet. For some reason the words of Rodney King, “Can’t we just all get along,” continue to ring in our ears.

As I continue to reflect on the issue of race that seems to be dominating the discussion of this case, I can’t help but wonder what role the church should play. When we talk about the challenges of race that we face in this country, I wish I could just stop and say to America, “But have you taken a look at the church?” But before I’m able to open my mouth to speak, I hear a still small voice inside of me, “But are we there yet?” In other words, have the church reached our own version of a post-racial society? And what I don’t mean by that is when I hear some well-meaning Christians say that God doesn’t see color so neither should we. In my opinion, that argument has always been a weak one at best. Of course God sees color. He’s the creator of the color that we see here at Sligo each week. In my opinion the answer to the race issue is not “ignoring” color, but it’s recognizing that every race contains within it a spark of the image of God and should be treated as such. And if there is any group in our culture that should be able to shout this message from the mountain top, shouldn’t it be the church. Shouldn’t we be the ones that should be able to turn to the culture and say, “Hey, but look at us.” But sadly, we too are not there yet. I pray that one day we will be, because if we can’t see it become a reality in the church, then where will we see it?

- by Pr. Charles A. Tapp

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So how deep is your reconciling attitude?

Melinda

Are We There Yet? DAT Feature: We Have This Hope!!

Permit me to interrupt the chatter of the TV and radio pundits, and the tsunami tweets and posts about the Trayvon Martin/George Zimmerman story to consider the personal implication of this tragedy. Consider for a moment that both families are members of the Sligo church family. How would you approach these families and administer reconciliation?

Before you dismiss this thought exercise and resort to the prevalent primal reaction, consider that one of the gifts God gave the children of Israel was city of refuge, a space where tragic actions can be adjudicated without the natural rush to judgment. Even after such judgment is rendered, what happens when law and justice do not converge? What happens when the verdict compounds the pain for the Martin family, and releases the Zimmerman family to a life of always guarded existence? Does our faith provide a toolkit to navigate such challenging circumstances?

One of the golden strands of the Christian family is that our faith is practiced in community. It is more than intellectual ascent to a set of facts argued for or sung about each Sabbath, but a set of principles given animation through our lives each and every day regardless of the circumstances. This strand is golden, may I dare say, platinum, as it is given preference over all differences such as race, class, age, and gender.

Paul in Galatians 3:28 and Ephesians 3:9 – 10 hammers this idea home and even called the apostle Peter on the carpet when he failed to practice this principle. Paul knew that a community of faith that was composed of a diverse set of folks practicing outrageous kindness would be difference makers to an on-looking, tribal world.

Paul was also known as the apostle of grace. Paul, who in a former life was Saul the persecutor of the brethren, went through the baptism of grace. Paul personally knew that God loved him not because he deserved it but because it is an expression of God’s transformative love.

Paul knew that in a world of un-grace and disgrace, a community of folks practicing God’s grace could cleanse us of the deadly poison of earthy divisions and flawed humanity, and provide the needed healing balm of reconciliation.

When the church does not model a community of grace infestation, we offer no needed contrasting model to the world and our growth is stunted!

In this present emotionally charged atmosphere it’s easy for our moral sensibilities to be stoked by the prevailing reactionary spirit. It will however take the Holy Spirit abidance to take us beyond our fear or woundedness. The “foolishness” of the cross calls us to the second mile, a place of emotional courage beyond the crowd to engage in the ministry of reconciliation.

We are a called community to live out a faith that is in striking contrast to an on-looking world. May the reconciling attitude we practice as a Christian community provide a divided, tribal world with the flesh and blood model so desperately needed.

– By Chris Daley
The Mystery of Iniquity

Barry Casey

Hope Amidst Chaos: Q&A DAT Feature: We Have This Hope!!

Recognizing reality and demanding to change it are fundamentally different activities. Both wisdom and virtue depend on keeping them separate, but all our hopes are directed to joining them.” — Susan Neiman, Evil in Modern Thought, 60-61.

In a relativistic world a murder mystery in the hands of a master writer can be a sword, rightly dividing hypocrisy from truth. The mystery writer is also a problem-solver and a moral arbiter; the pleasure for the reader is in the careful twining of many threads to make a coat of justice.

James Lee Burke, author of 30 novels and two collections of short stories, is a master of the genre—indeed, he was named a Grandmaster by the Mystery Writers of America in 2009 and has twice won their Crime Novel of the year.

Dave Robicheaux, former cop for the New Orleans Police Department, a dry alcoholic, and a police detective in Iberia Parish, is one of Burke’s most compelling literary creations. Robicheaux, a Vietnam War vet and a life-long resident of coastal Louisiana, has no qualms about calling out the evil ones in our midst.

In Robicheaux’s cultural hierarchy the small-time hoods and grifters make up the lowest level. They are the bottom-feeders, those desperate enough to attach themselves to powerful and twisted people whose need for distance and deniability make them almost invulnerable. Robicheaux is not without sympathy for these figures whose lives are steeped in violence and despair. It’s a measure of Burke’s vision and compassion that he gives them a solid dignity in the midst of every trigger pulled or fist cocked. As for the rich, morally bent, and self-righteous, Robicheaux finds them, binds them to the case, and pulls the threads together.

Reading Burke at his best is like swallowing nails dipped in chocolate. On the one hand, he’s a word-painter who can put you in a late-summer electrical storm along the bayou in a flash. In the next moment, violence erupts as inevitably as lightening. Robicheaux believes in evil because he has seen it in the eyes of the wealthiest, the most powerful, and often, the most revered in his society. What truly distinguishes these people from their small-time counterparts is the level of self-deception they are capable of maintaining. While they believe themselves to be virtuous, natural-born citizens of the elite, educated, and genteel, their feral nature is only a few insults from the surface. In those moments Burke’s prose reveals the skull beneath the skin. It’s like walking in a thoughtful daze through a gallery of impressionist paintings and rounding a corner to find George Bellow’s paintings of bare-knuckled and bloodied fighters surrounded by dissolute ghouls.

But Robicheaux—and Burke—live in a universe that is tragically evil, that is, those who are marked as evil may have chosen their actions, but were acting on compulsions beyond their control. Through a long apprenticeship in deceit and denial, they now look back in anger to see how far from their innocence they have come. There was no moment in which they stepped across a threshold into evil, but they are undeniably in that far country now.

Perhaps the one thing, besides shock and grief, that unites us in the face of an unspeakable tragedy like the shooting of schoolchildren in Newtown, Connecticut, is that we search for a reason Why? We look for trace elements of aggression in the killer’s childhood, we mine the memories of his neighbors, we sift the impressions of doctors, teachers, relatives—anyone who might be able to put the mark of Cain on his forehead with some degree of certainty. Psychologists and pundits stack up the similarities in the profiles of mass murderers and we all look for patterns. This is natural and even noteworthy, futile though it is for determining cause. But if society does not care enough to search for answers in the face of such tragedies, then we are truly at a moral tipping point. Outrage is a sign of conscience: the lack of it may be the first symptom of moral paralysis.

The moral philosophers of the Enlightenment separated natural evil from moral evil. Tsunamis, wildfires, hurricanes, avalanches had all been thought to issue from the hand of God as punishment for sin. But Rousseau took the evil out of natural evil by thinking of them as simply nature following the laws of God. What mattered more was the ‘evil that men do,’ and especially so since we are beings endowed with reason. Why do we do evil then? It makes no sense from a rational standpoint, so we have to seek an explanation elsewhere. Broadly speaking, Rousseau located the cause of evil in the subversion of the individual by society. Kant saw moral evil arising from our denial of our autonomy and our moral duty.

Rousseau thought the key to moral improvement was education. He spent much of his time trying to work out a social contract between the individual and society. Most problems, he thought, could be negotiated by reasonable people working together. One result of this was the decreasing role of God in human affairs. In her rewriting of the history of philosophy in Evil in Modern Thought, Susan Neiman says, “The more responsibility for evil accrues to the human, the less belongs to the
This resistance of nature that we see and experience, says Neiman, is not the work of angry gods “but simply part of the arbitrary stuff of the universe.” They are part of living with limits. Finitude isn’t a punishment, it’s simply part of our structural framework. As Neiman so succinctly puts it: “We have purposes; the world does not.”

So, the problem of evil became irresolvable. The way Kant figured it the problem of evil was that of us being dissatisfied with the difference between the way things are and the way they should be. The first is the realm of nature, the second of reason. “Happiness depends on events in the natural world,” comments Neiman, and virtue depends on us exercising our reason. We can’t control much in nature—and that includes our happiness—but we may have more control in the realm of virtue driven by reason. “The one [reason] is a matter of what ought to be; the other [nature] is a matter of what is.” For Kant, what was most important was distinguishing between the two. Says, Nieman, “Recognizing reality and demanding to change it are fundamentally different activities. Both wisdom and virtue depend on keeping them separate, but all our hopes are directed to joining them.”

Or as the Rolling Stones said: “You can’t always get what you want, but if you try sometimes, you get what you need.”

Kant would agree. The gap between the is—the way things are—and the ought—the way things should be will never be entirely bridged. But we’ve got to try: our dignity as humans and our hopes for this world demand it.

Such tragedies as the Newtown shooting, the Aurora killings, the Columbine massacre, demand a rational explanation. We struggle to find one, and if we can’t find a common pattern or a series of movements we despair because above all else we want to live in a rational universe. We shudder to think—and we dare not say—that there may not be a rational explanation for these people running amok. If that is true then we are faced with the fact that without a clear cause these events cannot be predicted nor can they be prevented. And the tragic result of that is a fortress mentality and officially sponsored societal paranoia.

We may find a cause someday that will explain—as fully and as clearly as possible—why these killings occur. We should continue to gather evidence, try out theories, hope to understand. But we must also realize, as Kant so brilliantly works it out and as most scriptures testify, that we humans are limited, finite, even broken and fractured. This is not a cause for despair, said Kant, but rather simply the way things are. We can do better and we should try to, even while realizing that all our efforts will fall short of perfection.

And the worth of our striving can be measured by the degree to which we act with compassion toward those who are suffering and with humility and wisdom toward those who bring the suffering.

Barry L. Casey, a long-time Sligo member and a co-leader of the Believers and Doubters Sabbath School class, teaches philosophy and communications at Stevenson University, Trinity University DC, and Washington Adventist University.
Homecoming 2013

By On July 8, 2013 · In

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          and combined Sligo Choirs
10:00 am  The Church at Study
          Sabbath School
          with Dr. Gaspar Colon
1:30 pm  International Luncheon
          Sligo School
7:00 pm  Evening Concert
          with Wintley Phipps

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Hope Amidst Q&A, Part 2

Melinda

So how deep is your reconciling attitude? DAT Feature: We Have This Hope!!

Youth and young adults, we’ve answered a few more of your questions this week! Be sure to come out this weekend for Week 3 of our series, “Hope Amidst Chaos.” This weekend’s messages are entitled “The Code” and “Ever After.”

Q: How do you know when you’ve truly given up a struggle to God, and are not trying to face it just on your own?

I love this question. Many Christians, when in a vulnerable state and confronted with the ugliness of their sin, think, “I gotta clean up my act before I go to God, before I go to church.” And they try to overcome it on their own. But the church is a hospital for sinners, and Jesus Christ is the miracle healer on duty!

I think some of the greatest wisdom on overcoming struggles is found in the writings of Paul. Romans 6 puts it so aptly — that through Christ, we are freed from the sin and the struggle that has enslaved our lives, and are now alive in Christ. Before, we were letting sin use us an instrument of wickedness; now we are offering every part of ourselves to Him as an instrument of righteousness, and reaping holiness.

Christ promises us that when He is the center of our lives, we are no longer chained by our struggles, no longer fighting alone. It’s as simple as that.

“But sometimes I don’t feel like I’ve given it up to God.” Ellen White warns us about basing our faith on emotions. Satan will use feelings of discouragement to shake your relationship with God — and you’re not alone in this! Even the most faithful felt discouraged, and even angry with God at times. But “nothing can separate us from the love of God,” not even our conflicting emotions. The Word of God and the promises it contains should be the foundation of our faith. Fix your focus on His glory, through constant prayer, devotion, and let the transformative power of the Holy Spirit help you overcome — because that is what is written, and that is what He has promised.

More on Job

We answered many questions on Job in last week’s blog and message as well.

Q: People are not replaceable, did Job’s family know what was coming?

Job nor his family knew what was going to happen. (Job 2:1-10) No one knows the day or the hour that they will die, which is why we should always be prepared.

Q: How are they just replaceable or disposable? How does it make it better just because he was given more children? Seriously?

People are not disposable or replaceable. God wants the best for us. In Job Chapter 1, it is pointed out that God has blessed Job and if God did not intervene in his life, Job would curse God. So God tells Satan he can do what he wants with Job’s possessions. It is Satan, not God, that takes away Job’s loved ones. Everyone who has lost someone knows that tragedies happen and you lose people in your life. You miss them, but you don’t stop living and loving because you have lost someone. The same is true of Job. He kept on living and God brought new people into his life for him to love, not to replace those that were lost, but so that he would be happy again. It cannot be stressed enough; God gives life and without him there is no life.

Answered by Marcus Robinson, Young Adult Leader & Melinda Pandiangan, Youth Leader