

Days of Concern - Prayers of Gratitude

**Bishop Jon Anderson*

Because I was away at the Bishop's Academy (our annual continuing education event), I had more time than normal to watch TV as the sad news came out of Tucson about the shooting of so many people and Rep. Gabrielle Giffords. It was shocking and made me flash back to other events of violence in my history.

As someone who has had two neighbors within a mile of my home killed, who has witnessed the devastated family, congregation and community in the aftermath of the killing of a policeman and witnessed the consequences of other forms of brutal violence I want to remember the Fifth Commandment today. "You Shall Not Kill." Luther explained this commandment in his Small Catechism, "We are to fear and love God so that we do not endanger nor harm the lives of our neighbors, but instead help and support them in all of life's needs."

You and I do not have the right to take the life of another person as private citizens. You may want to read Luther's Large Catechism as well. Here is a taste, "We must not kill, either by hand or heart, or word, by signs, or gestures, or by aiding and abetting. (Tappert p. 389)" Another part I would share, "this commandment is violated not only when a person actually does evil, but also when he fails to do good to his neighbor, or, though he has the opportunity, fails to prevent, protect and save him(sic.) from suffering bodily harm or injury. If you send a person away naked when you could clothe him, you have let him freeze to death. If you see anyone suffer hunger and do not feed him, you have let him starve. (Ibid. – 391).

Luther's Large Catechism put all my self-righteousness to death in a hurry. I am glad I read it. I will share it with my children today. It also was a reminder of God's deep and wide vocations that I often forget in the busy-ness of my do-lists.

On TV many people were caught up in a blame game about this event. It is worth making sense of how such a thing could happen, but as I watched instead I found myself thinking about how grateful I am for all the people who work in situations like this to bring light, healing and hope. I give thanks to God for our community's' first responders, ambulance drivers and police officers. They do crucial and life giving work. I also give thanks for those who serve in government in our cities, townships, counties, states and country. I remember and give thanks to God for judges, people who serve on juries and in our legal system. I am also thankful for the people who care for those who are mentally ill. I am thankful for the friends, family members, counselors, psychiatrists and doctors who care for those who struggle with this form of broken-ness. I give thanks to God for all the ways God uses people to prevent such events from unfolding day after day.

I trust that our God, who twisted the violence of a cross into a way of redemption, will also find ways to twist these sad events to serve God's will in the days to come.