

The Morning of the Third Day
From: Bishop Mauney

Jan Tobias, LFS's Coordinator for Disaster Response, and I watched and listened yesterday at Luther Memorial, our Campus Ministry center, and the campus of Virginia Tech.

We listened to and watched Pastor Bill King, one of our campus pastors at Tech, preach during the convocation. I would think he was asked to speak on behalf of the Christian presence on the campus because of his long, faithful ministry among staff, faculty, and students at Tech and his knowing the heartbeat of the campus. He preached without the jargon to many asking "is there any word from the Lord?"

We listened to Pastor Gary Schroeder, the senior pastor at Luther Memorial, speak to his many interviews and to the one he has had with CBS. In the midst of his compassionate and dedicated ministry among his hurting congregation, he has also been called upon to become an interpreter of the faith to the world.

We watched Pastor Joanna Stallings, the second of our campus pastors at Tech, crossing the campus with students stopping to talk and embrace her. I listened to parents from Maryland calling her by name and coming to hug her and thank her for her ministry with their son, especially as they had come to pick him up. In just a few minutes, I was seeing the results of her years of ministry on the campus.

We listened to Pastor John Wertz at St. Michael speak to his being at the local school today to help children, faculty, and parents deal with this tragedy. Parents and single parents were killed in the shootings, too.

We watched these pastors among our Lutheran students and on the campus, talking with them, eating with them. We listened and watched as they led worship. These pastors are being approached by newspapers and magazines and journals from around the world even as they intentionally move among those whom they serve, walking with them.

We listened to the students. It is amazing to hear how the relationships within even a large university cause rings of associations to overlap; all are connected somehow. Close friends, roommates with some of those killed.

We listened and watched as they cared for one another, making plans for the care of one another. They are people of great talent and intelligence founded upon faith.

Professors spoke about their students and about their colleagues and about their families.

In listening, you could hear about Lutherans on the initial SWAT team, in the sheriff's department, as dispatcher, as nurse within the hospitals, as professors and staff with oversight, as teachers in local schools, all of them involved and all in need of Christian community and walking together like a road to Emmaus.

All of these ambassadors of Christ being a light to the world, shining where they are in our Lord's Name.

Bishop Mark Hanson called on Monday evening to listen and to express the concern, prayers, and love of the Church for all those impacted by the day. I am always amazed at how quickly he calls to those in distress. Our pastors in Blacksburg are discovering how vast and wide the Church is through the huge number of emails and phone calls.

Pastor David Delaney, our Synodical Director for Youth and Young Adults, worshipped among the students at Luther Memorial, and then we walked over to the candlelight vigil among the thousands, each holding on to the light of a candle, like a tenebrae's final light. We listened to thousands hum Amazing Grace and then to thousands begin to rebuild the community and spirit of the campus raising their light and voices in cheers. It was a huge community without a public Word to speak, relying on a love of one another in a campus unity. I thought of John 3:16's Godly intent upon such a gathering. It also reminded me of Dylan Thomas's words about raging against the dying of the light.

Walking to my car, I listened to two students who just happened to walk beside me. One of them spoke to his fiancée being with the family of one of the victims. He said he was going to have to do a lot of listening to her in the days to come.

In our synod's reading through the Bible this year, I noticed again Job 2:11-13:

“When Job’s three friends heard about all the troubles that had come upon Job, they set out from their homes and met together to sympathize with him and comfort him. When they saw him from a distance, they could hardly recognize him; they began to weep aloud, and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads. Then they sat on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights. No one said a word to him, because they saw how great his suffering was.”

They listened and they watched for seven days.

Parents and friends and pastors across this commonwealth and country are doing the same.

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