

AN HONEST REMEMBRANCE

How do we deal with terror?

What should be our response to brutality?

What about the global bullies in this world?

How should we respond to those who victimize the innocent?

Should there be outrage - which is inner rage expressed outwardly?

David knew about this inner rage over injustice.

David prayed, "I'm determined to watch steps and tongue so they won't land me in trouble. I decided to hold my tongue as long as Wicked is in the room. 'Mum's the word,' I said, and kept quiet. But the longer I kept silence the worse it got - my insides got hotter and hotter. My thoughts boiled over; I spilled my guts." (Psalm 39:1-3)

Should there be tolerance when persecution slashes through life?

David knew about that too, "Quiet down before God, be prayerful before Him.

Don't bother with those who climb the ladder, who elbow their way to the top.

Bridle your anger, trash your wrath, cool your pipes - it only makes things worse. Before long the crooks will be bankrupt; God-investors will soon own the store. Before you know it, the wicked will have had it;" (Psalm 37:7-10a)

Should fire be fought with fire?

Should violence and revenge set our agenda against injustice?

What role, if any, should hatred and prejudice play?

"Sometimes I ask God, my rock-solid God, 'Why did you let me down? Why am I walking around in tears, harassed by enemies?' They're out for the kill, these tormentors with their obscenities, taunting day after day, 'Where is this God of yours?'" (Psalm 42:9-10)

Can turning the other cheek bring justice and balance into the world?

What should the Christian response be?

We know Jesus' teaching on persecution.

Jesus prayed "I have given them Your word. And the world hates them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world." (John 17:14)

"Then you will be arrested, persecuted, and killed. You will be hated all over the world because you are my followers." (Matthew 24:9)

"If the world hates you, remember that it hated me first. The world would love you as one of its own if you belonged to it, but you are no longer part of the world. I chose you to come out of the world, so it hates you. Do you remember what I told you? 'A slave is not greater than the master.' Since they persecuted me, naturally they will persecute you. And if they had listened to me, they would listen to you. They will do all this to you because of me, for they have rejected the one who sent me." (John 15:18-21)

Does this mean we just accept terrorism, persecution, and the atrocity of war?

Should the false ideals of this world run roughshod over truth?

Does turning the other cheek mean looking the other way?

How do we respond to the ravaging beat of war drums?

Is there a moment to retaliate?

Is picking up weapons and mobilizing troops wrong?

Should we abandon our faith over the atrocities of sin?

I don't have answers to all of these questions.

I can blubber my way through with the best of the politicians.

I have a hard time forcing out the word "Rejoice" when I think of persecution.

But that is Jesus' word, not mine.

He said you are blessed when these things happen to you, and rejoice.

"You're blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That's when you discover who you really are, and your place in God's family. You're blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution. The persecution drives you even deeper into God's kingdom. Not only that - count yourselves blessed every time people put you down or throw you out or speak lies about you to discredit me. What it means is that the truth is too close for comfort and they are uncomfortable. You can be glad when that happens - give a cheer, even! - for though they don't like it, I do! And all heaven applauds. And know that you are in good company. My prophets and witnesses have always gotten into this kind of trouble." (Matthew 5:9-12 The Message)

But what about when it happens to others?

It's one thing to be persecuted personally.

But how should we respond when others are persecuted?

"You are being persecuted? - oh I needed something to rejoice about."

I read these words this week.

"Is the response of the body of Christ rooted in anguish or in concern? The two emotions may seem similar, but there is a subtle yet marked difference. Christians in the 'free world' are increasingly immersed in a culture that constantly draws our attentions and emotions from one thing to another, and anguish will be the difference that allows Christians to respond in a godly manner, rather than a worldly one. The media can be accused of pursuing sensationalist stories that play on human emotions in order to generate a temporary public response, but the reality is that our human nature is drawn to the 'big stories' until something else claims our attention and emotion and concern. Only when we actively ask God to move us from a place of concern to a place of anguish will we be able to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17) for ... members of the body of Christ who are suffering and in need of support."

Somewhat our concern needs to be transformed into anguish.

The Church cannot stand by idly or passively.

If we are the Body of Christ, anguish should determine our response.

That is what we see in Jesus!

Jesus ran to the defense of the vulnerable and powerless.

He pled the case for the victimized.

He rebuked Satan the author of hatred and persecution and death.

He stood in harm's way for all of us.

He embraced the cross in our place.

He took our place as the sacrifice for sin.

Jesus is not just concerned for you.

Jesus agonizes over you and embraced agony for you!

Hebrews describes this agonizing work of Jesus.

"Keep your eyes on Jesus, who both began and finished this race we're in. Study how He did it. Because He never lost sight of where He was headed - that exhilarating finish in and with God - He could put up with anything along the way: Cross, shame, whatever. And now He's there, in the place of honor, right alongside God. When you find yourselves flagging in your faith, go over that story again, item by item, that long litany of hostility He plowed through. That will shoot adrenaline into your souls! In this all-out match against sin, others have suffered far worse than you, to say nothing of what Jesus went through - all that bloodshed! So don't feel sorry for yourselves." (Hebrews 12:2-4 The Message)

David the Psalmist saw his share of life at its worst.

He had some pretty nasty things happen to him.

And he had some pretty nasty things to say about mean people.

His prayers are not full of pleasantries.

His prayers were full of anguish – God do something because we are dying!
Do you have the nerve to pray the way David prayed?

"Harass these hecklers, God, punch these bullies in the nose. Grab a weapon, anything at hand; stand up for me! Get ready to throw the spear, aim the javelin, at the people who are out to get me." (Psalm 35:1-3)

"Haul my betrayers off alive to hell-let them experience the horror, let them feel every desolate detail of a damned life." (Psalm 55:15)

"God smash their teeth to bits, leave them toothless tigers. Let their lives be buckets of water spilled, all that's left, a damp stain in the sand. Let them be trampled grass worn smooth by the traffic. Let them dissolve into snail slime, be a miscarried fetus that never sees sunlight. Before what they cook up is half-done, God, throw it out with the garbage!" (Psalm 58:6-9)

Where does this leave us on Remembrance Day or any other day of violence?

How do we respond?

We can settle for concern but God calls us to anguish.

Concern is a human response.

Anguish is a divine response.

Psalm 36 shows us how that happens.

I David sees People.

David begins by describing people.

The people David sees want nothing to do with God.

They hate God.

They rebel against their Creator.

But there is only one way to show their hatred for God.

They show their disdain for God by hating people.

They tear people down with their words and actions.

They make life miserable for others because they hate God.

That is their attempt to make God suffer.

They do whatever they can to destroy God's world.

They lie awake at night planning the next day's misery.

They let loose their bombs and mayhem on the streets.

And they don't care who gets hurt as long as someone does.

That is what we are up against in our world.

David has just described drug dealers.

He has just described abusers and molesters.

He has just described predators.

He has just described the pornography industry.

He has just described terrorists and crooks.

He has just described dictators and atheists.

He has just described bullies and moral midgets.

He has just described rebels against God.

We call that sin.

God has never turned a blind eye to sin.

God has always responded to sin.

II David sees God's Love.

Watching God took David way beyond concern to experience anguish.

"God's love is meteoric."

"How exquisite Your love, O God."

"Keep on loving Your friends"

David saw God's love in all its splendor, glory, and power.

God's love was all-encompassing.

His love not only saw the good that happens in the world.

God's love sees all the evil and pain.

That is good news for us.

When we are hurting, God knows it.

Those aren't the times that we struggle alone.
God is with us in the pain.
Our pain does not change God's loyalty and purposes.
If anything, our pain intensifies God's love.
That is what David saw.
He saw God's love as a safe haven.
It was like the wings of protection spread over us.
It was like an overflowing banquet table of more-than-enough.
It was like cascading light that just keeps tumbling.
In God's love David saw the light of perpetual revelation.
David saw God's love open his own eyes.
David could love as God loved.
David saw God's work of welcoming hearts.
And He saw God's corrective work.
God's love challenges and defeats sin.
Sin is no match for His love.
His love puts sin in its place.
Sin never has the upper hand or the last kick.
It is important what we remember on this day of remembrance.
Let's remember God's exquisite, meteoric, constant love.
You can love enemies with God's exquisite, meteoric, constant love!
God's love is not an emotional response.
God's love endures and remains and acts and intercedes.
God's love sees everything.
Is there someone you need to change your mind about?
Is there a burden someone is carrying who needs your help?
Is there an enemy that you would smash their teeth if you had your way?
Remember God's exquisite, meteoric, constant love.

Closing Song - Your Love, Oh Lord