

Some Doubted

I watched a documentary LA 92 last night. I thought I had seen it, but I guess I had not. As the documentary kept slowly moving I felt my body viscerally hurting, and panic gripping me inside. It was some sort of unresolved pain.

I couldn't remember if I had told this personal antidote before, but it has returned to me lately after so many people are flooding the streets asking for equality among our African American family.

During the late 1980's one of the most notorious projects was a group of high rises in Chicago named Cabrini Green. My first year at Moody I worked with SONshine Gospel Ministries. A couple of years later I was asked if I would do a new ministry with children in that neighborhood.

I would be the storyteller, I would warm the kids up. So, we walked from building to building and gathered kids over the weeks to come and be a part of our little group. Very soon it grew to about 60 and we meet in a field surrounded by these notoriously harrowing buildings.

That day a group of kids played football near us while I told the story. Everything was going great. The weather was wonderful, the kids were receptive to the story. When I finished I moved to the side with other Moody Students.

That was when I began to feel something around us was not right. What I thought were firecrackers started going off. Then I noticed a mother and child jump behind a car. All of the boys playing football had cowered. Plus, there was a wizzing noise all around us.

We were being shot at from one of the buildings. I instinctively dropped to my knees and began covering children. That was when I was told to, “Get up!” By the leader of the group.

He instructed us as leaders to form a human line in front of the children standing. So, we stood with our back to whomever was shooting. It was one of the times in my life that I was certain that I might die.

The kids were screaming and crying. We were facing them, trying to get them to lay down. As soon as the shooting started, it stopped. I was amazed by how quickly the kids transformed from crying and afraid, back to kids. While my knees were shaking and as I looked down I could see the grass stains on my knees.

No one called the police, none of our leaders even thought about allowing us to stop our ministry. We were just sent home being told that God had protected us and we should be grateful to God.

How long did it last? It felt like forever. It was probably not long at all. Yet, that moment changed everything in my life.

I may have convinced myself that God protected me for a short time. Yet, when all the newspapers ran a story about how a 7 year old boy named Dantrell Davis was shot by a stray bullet in the same location as he and his mother walked him to school I realized luck was probably a more important word.

My already fracturing faith was then shattered. I felt like the opposite of Paul having the scales fall from his eyes to follow Jesus. I felt the scales were falling from my eyes and I thought this whole Christian enterprise was a colossal joke. I went back to my dorm room that evening, like a good man, I closed my dorm room so no one would see me cry.

The most facile way to follow Jesus Christ is to believe there will be certainty on this path, That suffering will be avoided, that every simplistic answer will be given to life's most difficult problems.

When the days of difficulty come without end that faith of certainty can seem somehow shallow, puerile, and overly pat. Those days I learned a valuable lesson about faith, it is wide eyed to the reality of our situations. It doesn't make suffering go away, it doesn't make us happy all the time. One thing I am convinced of is that these periods of doubt, struggle with the deep night of the soul, can be something that helps us when we have survived them be better humans.

Doubt is a powerful force. It is the turning point, the fork in the road of faith. We can hold to the embarrassing notion that a new world is possible through Jesus Christ's radical Spirit, or we can continue the status quo. Never challenged, never growing.

The noted religious historian Karen Armstrong has noted that in Western Christianity we are one of the few types of religious groups that believes that we will have an experience and that our spirituality will flow from that experience. She contends that most religions, and Christians throughout the world believe the opposite. It is that you practice your spirituality and then you may be fortunate to have a spiritual experience.

Through doubt I have learned that the continuous practice of my faith is enough for me. Praying every morning, doing something for someone else, attempting to love others in a variety of ways is enough. Even if I am not convinced I totally believe, practicing faith and community always bring me back.

I don't want to sugar coat the problems that I anticipate happening in our world in the near future, what I do know is that without faith they will be truly hopelessness. Faith can give us the imagination

to dream of the world as it should be, and not the mess it seems on the news. Practicing faith binds us to our neighbors in a way that citizenship and patriotism can never achieve. We will see our neighbor in need as Christ among us. If we are practicing our faith, then we will be helping the world to be a better place.

You may be gifted with a faith that contains no doubt, if that is the case celebrate. I am all too sure that many of us are not so fortunate and must keep trudging along the path of faith today. Know that even while trudging God loves you, accepts you, and wants you to be the full human intended at your creation.