
It's Thanksgiving – and Paris was Massacred

An article from the *Cathedral Times* by Dean Sam Candler

I was horrified, devastated, by the massacre in Paris on November 13, 2015. The details of that tragedy were almost too gruesome to hear about. I share in the sorrow of so many good citizens – in France and around the world. I want to cry out that the world has far, far, far more good and righteous citizens than it has vicious and evil ones.

However, as I reflect upon that awful event, I have found myself thankful for something. Here in the United States of America, we approach the Thanksgiving holiday; and it is often our practice to prepare for that day by wondering what it is we are thankful for. So, here is what I am thankful for this year.

I am thankful for faithful preachers. In particular, I am thankful for the good and faithful preachers who preached on Sunday, November 15, 2015, less than two days after the Paris horror. Most of them completely revised what they were going to say that day. Some of them didn't know what they would say until they stood in the pulpit on that Sunday morning.

And they weren't all Christian preachers. I am thankful for the Muslim imams, and Jewish rabbis, and all sorts of other religious leaders who rose to speak on Saturday and Sunday to their shocked and sad parishioners.

I am thankful for the preachers who are called to speak to us week after week. Some of their sermons get passed around on the Internet, or tweeted about, or mentioned in some random media piece. But most of their sermons do not. Most of the good preachers of the world are remembered only locally. They will never be made famous by headlines. The world is filled, FILLED, with great preachers who are known mostly by their local and ordinary and faithful listeners.

And it is precisely in those local and faithful places that the preachers make a difference. Faithful preachers who rise early on Saturday morning to revise their sermons make a difference. Faithful preachers who try to find God's grace, and God's gospel, in the midst of sadness and sorrow make a difference. Faithful preachers who cry with their parishioners about injustice and horror make a difference. Faithful preachers who listen to their parishioners all week so that they, the preachers, can assemble some message of relevance in their context – they make a difference.

The world needs something different from what we saw on our television screens this past Friday evening and Saturday, images of violence and evil. In the midst of covert violence and networked terror, the world needs places that gather people of good will and faith and hope. Those places are called churches, and mosques, and synagogues, and all sorts of other names. Most of them, the fantastic overwhelming majority of them, are places where we learn about goodness and love and hope. God wants to defeat violence and terror in the world, and God uses local communities of faith to do that, generation after generation.

I am thankful for the ordinary preacher who gathers the courage and spirit to speak to a wounded congregation every week. I don't know her name in the church down the road. I don't know his name in the parish across the country. But I know that those preachers are working, working hard and faithfully to proclaim God's goodness and love in a world that is often wounded and pained.

So, this Thanksgiving; I give thanks for faithful preachers. Even the bad ones, who stumble and screw up and get the particulars wrong. Their spirit is usually right. They are trying to show us that God is ultimately good. Local congregations are the places where we learn this message the most often, and the most routinely. Churches and synagogues and mosques

are where God gathers people who are sorrowed and pained, for just that reason; we need to hear messages of hope and healing.

Across the world, in the days after the Paris massacre, faithful preachers rose to speak good against evil. They rose to speak love against terror. They actually do something like that every week, whether we pay attention to them or not. This Thanksgiving, I am thankful for them.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sam Candler". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

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