

The Rev. Stephanie E Parker 2014

### Hyper-Nike!

It has been devastating to hear about the recent numbers of aviation disasters and all of the heartbreak, sadness and even maddening frustration with the horrible situation of the plane shot down over the Ukraine and the battle over the crash site.

In the flood of interviews and reports that have followed each disaster I am hearing some common phrases that are always difficult for me to hear because of what they reveal about how people commonly experience God in these moments.

There are at least three understandings of God that I see revealed after any tragedy, but these have been clustered in these multiple airline events.

Now please understand I have every compassion for the people in these interviews---my challenge is not their very understandable pain and attempts to make sense of the senseless---my difficulty lies in the sadness that if this is where they find God in these horrors---then the wonderful consolation that "All things work together for the good of those who love Christ" and "that nothing can separate us from the love of God" might never be known by them.

In one news cycle there were interviews with people who were supposed to be on the Malaysia Air flight, but for one reason or another did not make the flight. Almost to a person I heard a version of this:

God, or angels, or "some force in the universe" must have spared us or been watching over us. Or God must have spared me for some greater purpose."

The sadness in this statement is that, if it's true, this means that God did NOT desire to spare all of the others who perished, or that only these people out of all the others were picked for some special purpose. I hear this line of thinking in natural disasters too----"God spared us." So then did God smite the people who were not spared?

This kind of thinking about God also places a terrible burden on those who now believe they are spared for a greater purpose---can you imagine living your life under that much pressure?

And the other heartbreaking refrain is “It must be God’s will, everything happens for a reason this must have been in God’s plan.”

Do we believe that God is the cause of plane crashes, famine, earthquakes, hurricanes, typhoons, terrorist attacks as well as the horrible suffering that follows such devastations?

We say no, but when our backs are to the wall and devastation hits our own lives we want to hope, in the midst of our despair that there is some reason for our pain---and what greater reason can we make than “it was God’s will?”

And this brings us to the flip side of this belief: For every person who utters “Everything happens for a reason—it must have been God’s will” there will be those who respond by saying, “If there is a God why is all of this terrible suffering happening?” “If blowing planes out of the sky for some greater purpose is how God operates I want no part of it!”

If we believe that God is behind the worlds suffering, either by God’s own acts or by failing to act, how can we ever open ourselves to receive the love that God in Christ is aching to pour out into our broken heartedness?

This is the question that sends chills up my spine when I hear the question, “If there is a loving God, then why do people suffer?”

It stills me into great silence because I know that people only ask that question out of great pain—out of great pain, but out of an even deeper longing. This very loaded question is driven by a longing to know God’s love in a way that will calm the fearful feelings of a lifetime.

The world can be a very large and scary place. It can be very hard to feel safe in such a world. And if God cannot keep us safe and protect us from the ways life can hurt us then who can?

We humans perpetrate despicable acts upon each other all of the time---God is not a puppet-master and we must grapple with the truth that because this is not so, we have been given this great and terrible freedom. Free will means that we can choose between giving life or dealing death in every moment as we move through our daily lives. As individuals we have this power at work, in our homes, in the crowded parking lot of a grocery store or simply walking down the street. We can create good in any moment or we can create anger and isolation for ourselves or another—the choice is always ours.

And when we see hatred, greed and evil crystalized into a corporate form we get everything from the economic crisis of the last several years to a passenger plane being shot out of the sky by a missile.

What God does do is give us every chance to choose love---it is God’s primary commandment and Jesus’ singular teaching. And when we choose this Love *all things truly do work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to God’s purpose.*”

If we blame God for the depravity of human deeds we are unable to receive the outpouring of healing and love that God offers us---in this mode we reject God as the problem instead of trusting in God's love for a solution.

I shudder to think on how much God is longing to be with us always in our fear and pain; how pitched is God's desire to teach us to love one another the way God loves us in such times?

You see this is the totality of God's will: that we should love one another as God loves us and that we should love our neighbor as ourselves.

God does have a grand plan for all of humanity and this is it; that we should love the Lord our God with all of hearts, minds, souls and bodies, and out of this love we should make the world the place that God designed it to be; a world free from the violence we do to the planet and to one another.

God's will is to give us this astounding power right at our finger-tips. The power to choose life, the power to stand with those who grieve an inconsolable loss and the power to deny war and violence in ourselves or others.

God will ultimately have this world and we will ultimately know what it means to fully know God.

And in the meantime, while God still holds out hope for us and we still hold out hope for one another, there is this promise:

"In all things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. This is a very important phrase—Paul did not choose it lightly—and it holds the key to unlocking our hope and releasing our deepest fears.

I'm going to offer a little of the Greek translation to help you remember this truth—make it a mantra—I do this because this is a fun phrase I think we can all remember---In Greek Paul says, In all things we are "hyper-nike" through him who loved us." "More than conquerors" in the Greek gives us the phrase "hyper-nike" Who in a moment of despair cannot remember that through God we are hyper-nike."

Being hyper-nike" is no trite phrase. Paul knows of which he speaks, he has both dealt death in God's name and then given his life to bring God's love to others. He has made his choice.

This is the same choice the families of some murder victim's make---they choose forgiveness and instead of a life locked in the violence that took their loved one, they grieve always, but become a source of hope for others.

This is the same choice each of us make when life deals us a horrible blow---are we going to remain victims or claim the truth that God gives us the power to be hyper-nike—more than conquerors--- we can *choose* be survivors—out of our mistakes or our losses we can become life-givers! We can defeat any life-defeating threat if we keep our eyes on God's love in all things.

Paul knows this and that is why we can trust his promise that he is convinced that neither death nor life, nor rulers, nor angels, not things present, nor things to come, nor powers, not height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

This truth cannot save us from tragedy, grief or pain, but it does show us the way through those times when the unreasonable acts of this world finds us. Violence, pain, or tragedy is never God’s will. Live your lives firm in the hope that in all things we are hyper-nike! Amen.