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Luke 3: 1-14
“The True Solution”

December 16, 2012

Monday I was in the cities on 94 driving from Minneapolis to St. Paul listening to my favorite radio station, 89.3 The Current, and this song came on. I started paying attention because this guy started speaking over the top of a bass line, ranting about television. .

T.V., it satellite links
our United States of unconsciousness
Apathetic therapeutic and extremely addictive
the methadone metronome pumping out
a 150 channels 24 hours a day
you can flip through all of them
and still there's nothing worth watching

T.V. is the reason why less than ten percent of our
Nation reads books daily
Why most people think Central America
means Kansas
Socialism means unamerican
and Apartheid is a new headache remedy

(Sing bass line) And then the chorus:

“Television, the drug of the nation, breeding ignorance and feeding radiation, ohh, television,
the drug of the nation, breeding ignorance and feeding radiation....”

This song was new to me. I know most of you follow industrial hip hop closely, but in case you don't follow industrial hip hop, this song, “Television the Drug of the Nation” was released in 1992 by a group known as the Disposable Heroes of Hiphoprosy. The group never

hit it big, but they opened for bands like U2 and Rage Against the Machine and Arrested Development.

I didn't think much about this song until Friday when I heard the news about the shooting in Connecticut. My heart sank as I heard the news, my heart continues to feel heavy, as the collective heart of our nation does. I'm shaken as a parent with a child the age of the young victims, and I can only begin to imagine the pain those grieving parents are feeling. I begin to imagine, and then I just stop, because it's too much.

But I thought about this song because Friday morning I'd read an article about the mall shooting in Oregon, and I read the article about the pastor in Rochester, MN, who thought an intruder was entering the house and fired, only to shoot his granddaughter, and she died. And I thought, "This isn't just about a quiet town in Connecticut, this is about all of us, everywhere in the United States. This is also about our culture: the entertainment that shapes us, and the shifting attitude toward guns that's truly changed our country."

So I looked up the lyrics to the middle section of the song. Here's what the Disposable Heroes of Hiphoprosy have to say:

T.V. is it the reflector or the director?
Does it imitate us or do we imitate it
Because a child watches 1500 murders before he's
twelve years old and we wonder how we've created
a Jason generation that learns to laugh
rather than abhor the horror

T.V. is the place where
armchair generals and quarterbacks can
experience first hand
the excitement of video warfare
as the theme song is sung in the background

This song was written 20 years ago, but it could have been written yesterday. Of course we'd be naïve to blame the tragedies of this week on television, or on the movies, or music, or the violent video games that children and adults play. But we'd be just as naïve to say that the

violence in our culture has nothing to do with the tragedies of this week. This is one piece of a complicated puzzle. And the Rochester tragedy reminds us that another piece of this puzzle is our changing attitude toward guns. More and more people are convinced that the only way we can possibly be safe is to have a gun by our side wherever we go. More people are turning to guns to solve their problems, whether the problem is a world that has wronged them or a world that is changing and appears increasingly dangerous. By reaching for the wrong solution, we're creating that very world that we fear. By reaching for the wrong solution, we're creating more tragedy, and heartbreak.

This week on our way to Bethlehem we encounter John the Baptist. He's crying out in the wilderness. The wilderness is that place where people are lost and wandering, where people are all mixed up. John meets us there and calls us to repentance. Repentance means to turn around and return to God. It means a complete change of mind or behavior. And repentance isn't only about our individual sins. John the Baptist isn't only asking us to repent of our individual actions that wound our lives and our relationships. John the Baptist is calling for the repentance of a people, of a nation.

The gospels are the story of the Messiah coming to save Israel and the world. So as John is at the River Jordan we're given the sense that all the people are coming to him to be baptized. And the major problems of the day are coming to John for a solution. And the solutions aren't violent ones.

The tax collectors come to John and the soldiers come to John to be baptized. These are symbols of financial corruption and violence, the big problems of Israel. The crowds come to John too, all the people, and they repent. They all completely change their mind and behavior. Then they ask, "What do we do?" John responds, "Love your neighbor. That's the solution,

love your neighbor. Share your coats, don't take more than you need, don't try to exert power over your neighbor or threaten them. Love your neighbor. That's the solution. That's the way of the one coming after me. Jesus will show you the same thing. No violence, just loving God by loving the neighbor."

It's time for our nation to repent. It's time for us to hear John the Baptist calling our big problems down to the river, calling all of us down to the river and saying, "Change your minds." It's time to change our minds about the violence that is woven into our culture, it isn't harmless. We need to confess this and resist it. It's time for us to change our minds about whether we can do anything about these tragedies. We can and we must. It's time for us to change our minds about guns, our attitudes toward them and our laws.

Personally, I think that for starters it's time for us to have a sense of urgency about limiting the availability of military-style automatic and semi-automatic weapons. My hope is that clergy across the country are talking about it this morning and saying openly, "We have to slow down the rate of these tragedies and our gun laws are part of the problem. We need to put more controls on guns. Loving our neighbor calls us to this response. And as the church we can be those people who supply steady pressure on our leaders to do something about this. We have a voice, and we have more power than we think."

John the Baptist is here to help us find our way out of the wilderness. We are clearly lost. But there's a way out. The solution is coming to us again, embodied in the Christ child. The love of God, the ultimate power in the universe will be born in weakness, vulnerable and dependent upon a mother, on others, for life. This love of God will die in weakness on a cross, refusing to face violence with violence, trusting that love will prove more powerful in the end. And it did. And it does. This love saves.

And so, we are to be people who live this way of love. When we are grieving and hurting, we hold each other close. That's the saving power of love. When we know people are lonely and hopeless, we reach out, offering tenacious love that won't go away, that won't let go. That's the saving power of love. When we are afraid, rather than arming ourselves with weapons, whether they are our words, or our actions, we look to Christ who was also afraid, but who chose to love in the face of violence. When we see that our laws and our attitudes are hurting our neighbors, we look to Christ again, to how he challenged the authorities, and we find the courage to do likewise.

As sad as I was on Friday, I was completely overwhelmed by love and care on Saturday. I experienced just a taste of the way of love and it was moving, both my moving to my heart and it was literally us moving. It's hard to move gracefully. All your stuff, that usually only you see, is out there for the world to see, hanging out of boxes and baskets. It's kind of like your underwear is showing. And you want to guard yourself, protect yourself. But this is like life isn't it? At that moment of vulnerability, you absolutely have to have help. You are dependent upon the care of others. Sometimes it's only when we are vulnerable that we are really able to be touched by love.

My family and I were surrounded by a caring community – 35 people not counting the parents who stayed home with children so their partners could spend the day with us. So many people filled our apartment it was difficult to walk around. Like ants at a picnic, people relentlessly carried our stuff away and carried our possessions into our new home. Some stayed behind and cleaned. Others unpacked boxes, put together furniture, some did some minor plumbing and repair. Everyone wanted to help. Newcomers got acquainted, people shared their

stories, and children played all day without a care in the world, just as it should be. It was loving the neighbor, it was the gift of community. It was beautiful.

This is also what we are capable of. We need each other. We are people who live this way – a way of service, love and care, a way that depends on others, and a way that is determined to push fear of the neighbor aside, choosing to love them instead. This way of love is what saves us. This way of love makes us whole. This is always the true solution we must reach for. This way is the hope for the world. A child will be born into the deepest of night and will show us this way. Even now. Especially now. Amen.