

“Given Value”

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World War II was getting worse. It was a difficult moment. Winston Churchill had to gather all of his intellectuals around the table one evening, and said, “The Germans, I have heard, are about to bomb us. I need to know what we can expect and how we are going to respond.”

One person around the table said, “In London alone we can expect 35,000 casualties per day.” That was what they anticipated. It ended up not being that many during the time that the Germans bombed London, but they didn’t know that then at the time.

Another person raised his hand and said, “We have another problem. Where are we going to put the people so we don’t have panic? We are going to have several issues about what we do with survivors. How are we going to set up the hospitals? What are we going to do each night when we get pounded with bombs again?”

They went on with their planning. They were sure that each case scenario was going to be worse than the one before. But an amazing thing happened. It wasn’t as bad as they thought. What I mean by that is not that the Germans didn’t bomb London heavily, it is that Churchill, and his group around the table, believed that there would be anarchy amidst that much stress and pain - amidst all of that fear and trial and tribulation; that their own people would crumble under the weight of the bombings. [They thought]The economy would totally break down and people would fight against one another. In fact [their discussion] it got so bad that they were not even sure they were going to build shelters in the whole east part of London. They were sure when the people got down to the shelters they would call them their home, and fight for them, and never leave. They were sure others would start talking about how bad the government was to allow the Germans bomb them, and there would be rash outbreaks of Communism everywhere.

The implication of what was going to happen was devastating. But, remarkably, and with great shock, the bombs came and people died - it was horrifying. In fact, there was one food plant where people were staying when the bombs came down and hundreds died; [those people were] dragged out - covered in marmalade - because that is what they were making that day.

Several hundred others died when a hat factory blew up, by the bombings, and the dead were brought out covered with sewing needles that had punctured them like acupuncture.

Another shelter was bombed in London so badly it broke a water line and they didn’t die from the impact of the bomb, they all drowned because they couldn’t get out before the water had filled the shelter.

The stories of the hundreds - literally thousands - who died in the bombings, who experienced often times more suffering in the hands of war than the soldiers they sent over to fight the Nazis.

They [England] did not fall into anarchy. The strangest thing happened. They [the people] rallied. They would go down into the shelters in the evening when they knew the bombs were coming, or, whenever the sirens went off; but when the bombing subsided, they got out of the shelter and went to work in the mornings - and went back at night.

In the shelters, where there was so much fear and no police support, there were almost no fights. No arguments about who belonged in the shelter and who didn't. Nothing. They cared for each other gently, lovingly and sacrificially each step along the way. They were better in that bombing than they had been at any previous point in the history of their nation. It took the sacrifice and the fear and the suffering to bring out the best in them. It was an amazing moment. They shocked themselves.

They [the military leaders] couldn't quite figure out why they ended up being that way. It wasn't until later that they started putting together psychologists to figure out what happened. Not only did the healthy respond emotionally and physically well in the shelters, but [so did] those with mental illnesses. Those who suffered all types of psychological ailments improved during the bombings. It was amazing what happened.

Psychologists said that psychiatric wards, during the bombings, had a decline in attendance. Even people with epilepsy reported fewer seizures during the bombings. To quote one doctor, "[Regarding] Chronic Neurosis of Peace Time - those people now drive ambulances and are dependable." Another ventured to suggest that some people actually did better during war time.

Later there was Dr. Lyons (I forget his first name), with the Journal of Psychometric Research, who was studying what was happening in 1979 in Belfast - Northern Ireland with all of the bombings, the frustrations and fear. The same thing happened in the trial and tribulation and fear at that time - in the violence - the people were brought together and responded in a healthier manner. To quote Dr. Lyons: "When people are more actively engaged in a cause that provides more purpose, the result is an improvement in mental health." He went on to say that it would be irresponsible to suggest violence as a means of improving mental health, but the findings suggest that people will feel better psychologically if they are more involved in their communities. It will make a difference and they will heal.

Charles Fritz became a critic for rationale of the bombings - both the bombings that the British did and the bombings the Germans did. So after the war, he gathered up both Nazi and British soldiers, and tried to find out why people responded the way that they did. Fritz again found the exact same story; that during disasters people are thrust back to their ancient ways, to an organic way of living.

Disasters, he proposed, create a community of sufferers. Those communities of sufferers are all on the same page - they are all equal. There is no rich or poor distinction when you are being bombed. There is no, "I have more money than you do," or, "I am healthier physically than you are." Everyone, in that moment of panic, is put in the same place. They are all equal. In a moment of equality everyone steps up and responds with care and concern. They are all given value. It shakes the very foundation of who we are as a people, as human beings.

Now, you go to that Biblical passage. Here is the Pharisee. In that day and age, at that moment, when Jesus was speaking and the Pharisee was the good one - the respected one - the holy one. Jesus was just this poor itinerant preacher and the woman who came in the door was horrible. She was a woman and, in that day and age, you know they were worth little more than a slave. Then, she had the gall to pull her hair down. Only prostitutes did that. She pulled her hair down in front of other men. She pulled out ointment - which was valuable - and she wiped it on Jesus feet. To touch another man that was not your husband was a dire sin, that not only condemned her, but made him unclean and inappropriate as well, and Jesus didn't do a thing about it. And who got upset, rightfully? The Pharisee.

In that moment - when Jesus came to her defense, letting her keep on rubbing his feet, crying tears, and wiping his feet with her hair and defending her. In that moment, Jesus changed the very paradigm of what was acceptable, and who was appropriate. Now that woman was admired and respected more in Jesus' eyes than the Pharisees. The community changed. Now all were acceptable - not just Pharisees - but even women who dropped their hair and touched men are [now] acceptable in the eyes of God. Community became larger, condemnation ceased, and life became whole.

Think about how that woman suffered, feeling so degraded by so many for so long, and then all of a sudden you have Jesus saying, "You are acceptable. You are worthy. You are *blessed*." No wonder she fell down at Jesus feet, gave the very thing she had in the ointment, pulled down her hair and kissed his feet, because she who had nothing was now worthy in the very eyes of God. Why are we not doing the same? We can handle great tribulation as long as we have a tribe.

The stories I am telling you about came from a book by Sebastian Junger, who you might have heard about. He was the author of that really big motion picture and best seller "The Perfect Storm." He wrote a book called "Tribe." The stories I have told you come from that book.

In the book he says that people are unhealthy when they are alone, and people step up when they are part of a tribe and a tribe is strong. When it meets adversity - and all tribes will have adversity - when it meets adversity together, not that some are better than others, not that some are worthy and some are not, but when everyone, treated equally together, responds great, healthy meaningful changes take place in the world, in the tribe and in the individual heart.

What that woman was doing that day was begging to be part of Jesus' tribe and what Jesus did was to bring her in. What we do as a Church - we are just a big tribe - we are a tribe of Christians, a tribe of people of God - interfaith - larger than just who we are as Christians. We are people of the tribe of this Church, reaching out together as equals to respond to the needs of this world. We do it well when not one of us is better than the other; but together we respond to the community around us.

Now today is a Sunday like any other Sunday, but we just commissioned people to go out in our name and go out to different not-for-profits, to feed the hungry and poor, to provide help for those who are having their greatest moments of fear in hospitals, and other situations, and for those who are struggling. They represent us, and we will support them as our tribe to make our community better and more whole. Then you look at what we are

doing at the very same time - we are going to the gay pride parade and walk in that, and at the same time going to CROSS Ministries to their open house as they begin the next step in their ministry life.

That is what we do in our tribe. We care. We worry about the poor. We don't just say, "Gee, it's a shame they can't get their act together. We know that is not true." We know that some people have been given more opportunities than others - but they are us. They are us whether they are Muslim or Christian or no religion at all. They are us. It doesn't matter where they come from or what they are doing. They are us. In that moment they are part of our tribe. We need to feed them, clothe them, and care for them. When we do *we* are stronger, because we have them and they are us and we are one.

Jesus knew that. That is why he took that woman in. We need to learn that by taking others in to a parade, to an open house and through ministry. And, that is just one Sunday morning. We celebrate what this tribe does to support, and care for; to walk with those who suffer. Bombings come in different ways. It can be a bomb that is dropped out of the sky, or a bomb that comes when you lose your job, or when your child is having trouble, or you can't put enough food on the table with only one income.

We are there to help.

In Jesus name. Amen