

Column: EVIL IS REAL: HOW DO WE RESPOND?

Over the past several weeks a court case in South Carolina has captured the attention of the nation. The tentacles of the story of a double murder are so complex and spread out that no mystery writer could make up such a story, let alone turn it into a believable novel.

On the evening of June 7, 2021, a mother and her grown son were brutally shot at close range as they were tending a friend's chocolate lab in a kennel near the main house of their hunting lodge. Charged in the case is the woman's husband and son's father. As I write this column, a nearly month-long trial continues.

Regardless of whether the defendant, Alec Merdough, is found guilty or cleared of the charges, this case has again brought before people's eyes the reality of evil. There is a dark and negative force which takes over when men give their supreme allegiance to the pursuit of such things as power, money and status. Following close behind, like railway cars on a train, are sorrow and loss, desperation and death.

If the defendant is guilty of these two murders, the downward trajectory I have just described would certainly be in evidence in his life. But even if he is innocent (as I think we all would hope and pray), the reality of evil remains. If he did not do it, someone else did. The minions of darkness were loose in the kennel that night.

More than that, clearly from testimony presented in the case, there was darkness and dysfunction in Mr. Murdough's household which may well have led to what happened that evening. For example, again based on testimony presented in the trial, there seems to have been an inordinate devotion to the family's status, name and wealth.

This case, no less than 9-11 two decades ago, reminds us that all is not right on Planet Earth. What should be our response? Allow me to offer two suggestions:

Our first response should be one of vigilance. Evil is not just the problem of a person or family whose picture you see on television. No, it is a problem we all face. We have met the enemy, and he is in our own quarters; therefore, stay on guard. We get our marching orders in 1 Peter 5:8: "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour."

Our second response should be one of confidence. We must not view the devil (personified evil) as an equal force to God . . . picture two children of equal size and weight playing tug-a-rope . . . you don't know which one is going to come out on top. That is not the case with God and evil. The former – God – rules over all. Even the devil is a devil on a chain.

The Christian's approach to evil might be compared to a man walking along a roadway overhung with trees. On both sides, there are dark and shadowy figures posing real danger. This man recognizes these figures for what they are, but instead being led off the path by them or being overcome by them, he keeps walking confidently ahead into the light. That light, of course, is God's light and His future for His redeemed people.

Pray that truth may prevail in the Murdough murder case (and indeed for Mr. Murdough himself), but also pray for yourself. Let vigilance and confidence be your watchwords as you make your way through this world. ///

O LORD, who never failest to help and govern those whom thou dost bring up in thy steadfast fear and love; Keep us, we beseech thee, under the protection of thy good providence, and make us to have a perpetual fear and love of thy holy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (The Collect for the Second Sunday in Lent from the Book of Common Prayer)

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