

Steeple News

October 2024

On Being Human

As a small child, I lived in a smaller town where everybody knew their neighbors, and all of the people seemed to be known by their first name. It was a time when the news of a birth or death, sickness or hardship was passed from person to person, house to house, until almost the whole local population reveled in the joy or grieved in the sadness.

When the church bells of Bethlehem Lutheran or St. Josephs Catholic rang out the announcement of a death, everyone stopped to ask for whom the bell was tolling. One stopped to count the rings, which indicated the age of the deceased. One ring might indicate a stillborn, fifteen could be a teen who drowned in the local river, seventy-seven would be a grandma who everyone thought of as "their grandma."

But that was so long ago, and this is now. Today, the world is much bigger, more complex and so much more impersonal. The internet or the local newspaper has replaced the church bells. We know so much more about what happens in our world, but distance separates us from the pain of tragic events. Now we can sit comfortably on our sofa and read the headlines or observe on the T.V. screen the events of the day. We observe a storm which upends the lives of thousands of people; a bomb dropped which destroys the lives of many innocent people and leaves children crying and starving on a street of rubble. Then we turn the channel and catch the days football or baseball scores or watch actors perform some make-believe drama or comedy.

So often we remain untouched by the news; somebody lost their life, but we didn't know them. A town that we have never been to with a strange sounding name is flooded with a record rainfall. A distant nation of remote people is hungry today because of lack of basic food.

But there at the scene, where news stories turn to real life, there is a heart that breaks, tears are shed, hopes and dreams are lost, and pain is felt.

May God grant us empathy to look and see beyond the headlines; to comprehend more than names and faces, to translate grief into human terms, and to recognize each casualty as our brother and neighbor. Perhaps then, we can leave our chairs, look to the people around us, and at least help someone in some special way today.

Rev. Hans Lillejord