

Once again, these past few days we have been watching in horror as a person shoots others for no apparent reason. Murderous intent is difficult to fathom. But in the cases of random mass shootings like the one in Las Vegas, it's even more difficult to understand. Shooting in self defense, reasonable; shooting in retaliation at someone who has harmed you or someone you love, not admirable, but understandable. But shooting at random people you do not even know—killing as many as you can—doesn't make any sense ~~at all~~.

So why do we all want to *make sense* of this atrocity? Because we are moral beings, thus, we have empathy for the victims and want to do something, almost as if we were there. Thank God for many there who did act heroically: shielding others from bullets, dragging many to safety under a hailstorm of gunfire. And, when our sense of morality is this-much violated, we crave to know more. What would make a man do such a thing?

Let's run through the options:

#1 Mental illness:

Maybe he was crazy: ~~mean~~, just plain out of his mind. Well there were apparently no indications of serious mental illness, ~~like paranoid schizophrenia~~; if he was psychotic he seemed to hide it well. Besides, I have known many persons with various mental illnesses and few of them have become violent. More often, the damage they inflict is upon themselves.

#2 Maybe he was neglected, abused, scorned: victimized by violence. Perhaps he was; it seems that many murderers come from a background with abundant abuse and neglect. So what! Countless millions are victims of neglect and abuse and most do not turn into mass murderers. There are other ways to express rage and hurt than killing ~~and~~ I think even murderers know this.

#3 Maybe he played violent video games, watched too much television and movies containing graphic violence; newscasters have mentioned he liked to gamble. I don't think any of these things are good for you. Nevertheless: we all know people who watch violent movies, tv, video games and don't harm a flea.

What possible explanation might we find for this gratuitous evil? The truth is: clear explanations are seldom available in the face of such tragedy. We may never know why murderers wield guns and shoot at innocent people. But one thing seems clear: in reaction to such tragedies there is something deep within us that reaches out to a personal reality bigger than us. I watched C-Spann yesterday and I've never seen the senators and congressmen more prone to prayer. Xian author, Andy Crouch wrote this in response to the 2015 San Bernardino shootings: "Even those far from church will find themselves, almost involuntarily, addressing God in these moments."

If you would like to say a prayer and light a candle for peace and non-violence: remembering victims in Las Vegas, San Bernardino, Newtown, Columbine, etc. I invite you to come to the first Presbyterian Church of Eureka Sunday any time from noon until two pm. We will keep our doors open and allow prayers and a time of quiet meditation. *in response to the inexplicable evils of our day.*

This has been Dan Price for Community Comment