

November Season

Reconciling Mission through Prayer and Reflection

2: Facing the Monsters



Photo: Paul Everett

Reflection

The names of the 19 hijackers are not included in the 9/11 memorial and had they been it is likely that those names would have been attacked and defaced. Yet those people also died and left their families behind. The fact of their deaths does not go away, and raises the question: how, as Christians, do we deal with ‘monsters’? How do we also think about those who commit atrocities, including, in our own country, child-killers such as Ian Huntley, Ian Brady and Mark Bridger? How do we pray for suicide bombers?

Such people are monsters to us because they can harm us and our children. We are frightened by people that want to hurt us or will hurt us if we don’t do what they want. Any horror movie will make that very clear. But we also fear monsters that want to do other harm than just hurt or kill us. There are monsters who want to steal our possessions or hack our computers and steal our identities; monsters who might accuse us of something we didn’t do and take us to court; monsters who prey on our vulnerability to exploit us; monsters who make promises of employment and shelter and sell us into slavery. When we read about such things in the newspapers or see them on TV they cause us fear.

Food for thought or for group discussion

What monsters do you most fear?

‘Monster’ is a word tabloid newspapers often reserve for people convicted of terrible crimes. When such a crime occurs newspapers stop at nothing to convince us of their monstrosity. Andrew Brown, writing in the Church Times (22/11/02 p 12) commented on the tone of theological certainty when newspapers write lurid headlines like ‘Go to HELL’ when violent criminals are sentenced or when they die. He also commented on the way the papers give their readers what they want: ‘the promise of eternal torment for someone else’.

Monsters arise from our fear and what we want is to be sure that those monsters are locked away from us and from our children, not just in this world, but in the next. We want monsters to go to prison, where we can’t see them or know about them, and we want monsters to go to hell, where we won’t meet them. Our freedom and salvation necessitates their entrapment and punishment.

Can we get past the ‘monster’ and see the person made in the image of God?

For example, Pavlo Lapshyn, a Ukrainian man working in the UK stabbed to death Mohammed Saleem who was leaving prayers at his mosque. Despite this hate crime against an 82 year old man, Mr Saleem’s daughter said she felt pity for Lapshyn when seeing him in court:

‘We just looked at him and we felt pity. He looked pathetic. He looked frightened and stressed. We are very pleased with the outcome of today's hearing. It's a relief not to have to sit through a long and tedious trial and listen to horrific details of this violent crime. Our dad was a lovely, kind man who left prayers for the last time that night. He did not do anything to deserve this horrific killing other than being a Muslim. He was targeted simply because of his faith. His beard and his clothing represented who he was. Pavlo chose to kill him that night with only that intention in mind. It's such a pity that he has lost his whole life for some personal hatred or opinion that he has of a particular faith. To kill someone because of what they look like and what they believe in is unforgivable.’

<http://www.itv.com/news/2013-10-21/racist-student-pavlo-lapshyn-admits-murder-of-muslim-pensioner/>

What do you think about Shazia Khan’s words?

What if the monsters repent? Is it enough that God forgives them, or do we also have a continuing responsibility for them and towards them?

In the film *Con Air*, an evil child murderer escapes and is seen entering the home of a little girl. She invites him to play with her. They have tea and they sing ‘He’s got the whole world in his hands’. We see the killer leaving alone and later....we see that the girl is still alive and untroubled. What has happened? What has changed? In the film, we see at the end that the killer stays free. He has another chance. What do you think he might have done with the rest of his life?

Food for thought or question for group discussion

There are monsters, such as Herod, in the story of Jesus too. How do you think the November season prepares Christians to live in a world where some monsters have great power and can do great evil?

Something to watch: *Longford* (Channel 4 film)

Exploring Scripture

Revelation 20: 11-15

11 Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. The earth and the heavens fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. 12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. 13 The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what they had done. 14 Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. 15 Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.

Food for thought or for group discussion

Suppose you had to record in the book what the 9/11 hijackers had done – what would you write?

Prayer

For those harmed by monsters

God of earth and heaven,

You are the God of the lost and broken,
You are the God of the murdered, the stolen, the tortured, the disappeared.
You know the resting places of all your children,
Each bone is known to you
Each broken hope is gathered up by you.
In you alone is all restored, all found.

Our Father in Heaven,
Even as your son our Lord Jesus Christ,
Was lost to you and broken on the cross,
So in his resurrection we find again,
The vanished ones who have broken our hearts.

Amen

For the monsters

God of earth and heaven,

You are the God of the outcast and the sinner,
You are the God who grieves for the murderer, the thief, the torturer, the evil doer.

You know the deeds of all our hearts,
Each act is known to you,
Each story of pain and hate is gathered up by you.
In you alone the true face of those turned away is found.

Our Father in Heaven,
Even as your Son our Lord Jesus Christ
Went to the wicked, the spurned, the hated, the insane,
So in his resurrection we find again,
The ones we cannot love with our hardened hearts.

Forgive them Lord
Forgive us Lord.

Amen.

If you are going on to the next resource you might want to start thinking about this: how would you offer hope to a monster?