

VIEWING ACTS OF KINDNESS AS HEROIC

Monday
April 22, 2013

In a previous posting, I wrote about "Free Will versus God's Will." In follow-up comments to my original post, I discussed how even the worst of tragedies was an opportunity for ordinary people to do extraordinary things, and a few weeks later, there were a number of examples which perfectly illustrated exactly this point. I'm referring of course, to the bombings at the finish line of the Boston Marathon, and the fertilizer explosion in West, Texas.

Make no mistake, both of these events were horrific, and had a profound impact on everyone who witnessed it, either in person or on television. Neither should have happened, and the more we learn, the more we realize that both probably could have been avoided. Although it would have been better for everyone had these incidents not happened, there was a silver lining to this dismal cloud, as ordinary people stepped forward in each of these to help out their neighbors in a way that would leave a lasting and deeply profound impact, not just on the people they helped, but also on those of us who could only watch as the horror unfolded.

As an inmate in a state penitentiary, I don't exactly have access to the Internet, so as I write this, I find myself unable to provide exact details about some of the truly remarkable events which transpired during these trying times. Still, while I may not be able to remember exact dates, times and the names of the people involved, the events themselves are nevertheless permanently imprinted on my mind. There are two in particular that stand out, not because they involved anything risky to someone's life, but because these acts said a lot about the people doing them, individually and collectively. And for each act that I seen discussed on the news, there were hundreds, if not thousands of others that weren't mentioned, performed quietly by the unsung hero.

As everyone now knows, the city of Watertown, Massachusetts was put on lockdown as the authorities hunted for their suspect. While this probably wasn't a "mandatory" lockdown, the population nonetheless did as requested. As with most lockdowns, this one caught people totally unexpected, and with local businesses, including stores, closed, there was at least one family unable to leave their house to get milk for their young children. Rather than seeing them suffer, a police officer whose name I don't know, made a personal delivery of a gallon of milk to the family in need, exemplifying the police motto of "Serve **and** Protect." Many people who seen this act of kindness from one stranger to another may not have seen anything all that remarkable. After all, this was a police officer, which meant that he wasn't under any sort of lockdown. As such, it meant that he had the means and the opportunity to, at least in theory, go to the store, but as someone who's been involved with the system from the inside looking out, I can assure you that his act was more complicated then it at first appeared.

For starters, he probably had to clear it with his superiors. After all, they expected him to be looking for a suspect, not delivering milk, no matter how badly it was needed. And even if they did give him permission, where was he going to get it? Keep in mind that the entire city was on lockdown, which meant that he had to find a way to get outside of the perimeter, get the milk, and then make his way back inside the containment zone, all while his fellow officers were hunting for an armed and dangerous suspect. Still, he found a way. While everyone else was hunting for the suspect, he found a way to bring help to a family in need. His single act of kindness represented the best that his department had to offer. As if this wasn't enough, this would have been the last thing anyone would have expected from a police officer, not because there's no kindness to be found in law enforcement personnel, but because in all reality, he truly had his plate full with trying to find a dangerous man. Yet somehow, he found a way.

The second act that stood out, or rather, series of acts that stood out, was the explosion in West, Texas. As I was watching the news, they said that not a single rescue shelter needed to be used, because everyone in that city had opened up their homes to everyone in need. While West, Texas may not have been the size of New York City, or even Boston, this was nevertheless a significant accomplishment, meaning no less because the city was smaller. Think about it: every single person had a safe and secure place to sleep, not in a rescue shelter, but with their neighbors. When tragedy struck, everyone who was in a position to help opened up their homes and their hearts to those in need.

In the grand scheme of things, both of these incidents may have been minor. They didn't involve someone risking their lives to defuse a bomb they knew would explode in a matter of seconds, but at the same time, they represented the best of what this country has to offer. Perhaps this is the image we need to be showing the rest of the world: that we truly care about what happens to our neighbor, whether they live right next door to us, or on the other side of the world. And to me, this is what humanity is all about. I can only hope that one day I'll have a chance to have such a positive impact on someone else's life, leaving this world in a better place than it was when I entered, as opposed to leaving behind memories of pain and suffering.

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