

My wife called to tell me that the authorities had recovered and identified the body of **Kelsey Smith**, the Overland Park teenager abducted this past weekend.

On hearing the news, my heart sank and I felt sickened. A profound sense of melancholy and sadness washed over me as I contemplated the horrors that she may have endured, the staggering heartbreak that her parents are now experiencing, and the state of our culture where a trip to Target may be a life-threatening journey for the young women we love. Horror and revulsion are the only appropriate responses to the violence and violation of a sacred, human life. I felt myself eager to go home and hug my daughter and my wife; to somehow try to protect them from the evil of this world.



Some will inevitably ask, “Where was your God of love and grace when Kelsey was being kidnapped and murdered?”

My first reaction is to try and duck the question – to refuse to be an apologist for God, as there are so many things that I do not understand. Unfortunately, such a deft escape is not possible when dealing with broken, hurting hearts. There are no easy evasions. As people of faith, we must confront the hard questions; we must venture beyond what is easy and comfortable and testify to our faith in the midst of the pain and heartbreak of life.

I recall reading somewhere in C.S. Lewis that God actually surrenders a portion of His omnipotence to preserve our freedom; He actually limits His power because of His love. As dangerous as it has proven to be, God refuses to force us to be good or kind or loving. Instead, God invites and inspires us to engage the world in all our vulnerability, armed with love and grace; to offer Christ as the last great hope of the world.

Where was God? Where is Christ? I believe He is right there in the midst of the horror and heartbreak; perhaps holding a hand or a heart, undoubtedly shedding a tear, witnessing again the insane cruelty and sinfulness of humanity.

What does that mean for us today? The task of our church is essentially two-fold: we must offer Christ’s love, for it is the key to a life that is meaningful and significant, even when all else fails; and we must engage our culture so as to create a world that is intolerant of evil and intensely protective of all that is loving, true and sacred.

Having said all of that, if the Smiths were members of our church and I was their pastor, in this moment I wouldn’t say a word – I would simply hold them in my arms, mingle my tears with theirs, and strive to be for them an imperfect expression of the body of Christ and loving comfort of God.

Please join me in praying for the Smith family, and all the others who have or will suffer the horrors and heartbreaks of this life. But do more than pray – God is relying on you to take action. Form a Neighborhood Watch, be observant and alert to that which might be threatening to yourself and others be intolerant everyday evils, talk to the police about suspicions, to politicians about concerns; share with others your faith and source of strength, witness to your experience of God’s love in a world that is often hateful.