

Questions for God: Mysteries of evil and goodness

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Humans are meaning-seeking creatures. We want to make sense of life. After the massacre at Virginia Tech, we want to know why it happened and whether something could have been done to stop it. And many of us ask: where was God in all of this?

It's as troubling to wrestle with the question of why some people were spared as with why 32 were killed (plus the assailant himself). To say that God had something special in mind for those who escaped would seem to suggest that God had no plans for those who were killed. What kind of God is that?

Where was God on that fateful morning on the campus of Virginia Tech? We could say that God is present now in the way the Virginia Tech students and community have rallied to support one another, present in the countless vigils and memorial services held around the country to remember the dead and celebrate their lives. We could say that God is present in the survivors and loved ones who don't want this horrendous event to define their lives and who believe that good does prevail over evil in the long run.

Yet the questions linger. All of our explanations about the horror and randomness of the murders seem inadequate. In fact, to try to explain it merely trivializes it. We're left with a mystery. Silence may be the best response of all.

Sometimes God's presence comes to us seeming like absence. And in such moments we're left to abandon ourselves to the One who abandoned himself for us, the One who also got caught in the cross-hairs of violence and in his moment of abandonment cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" After such a massacre, silence is one appropriate response, lament is another.

There are two mysteries, says British theologian David Ford: one is the mystery of evil, the other the mystery of goodness. We have no adequate account of either. But we do have a narrative, the story of Jesus Christ, in whom the two mysteries of good

and evil converge in the deepest way. Jesus Christ is One who “engages evil at its worst,” says Ford, and “can be trusted in any situation no matter how terrible.” After events like the one at Virginia Tech, we can perhaps do nothing more than ponder again the story of Jesus’ death and resurrection. For in the story of how God’s own Son engaged evil and found a way through we can find our own story.