

Hobart Lecture
by
The Right Reverend George E. Packard
Bishop Suffragan for Military Chaplaincies and Federal Ministries
at
Cathedral of St. John the Divine
on
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Bishop Sisk and Diocese of New York family thank you for this invitation to speak today. As a graduate of Hobart College in upstate New York I am very aware of the energy of Bishop Hobart. Occasionally I was asked to give tours of the college so I knew a bit about the Bishop and there were often times when I would be looking out over Seneca Lake and I wondered about his nearly perpetual trips on horseback to the frontier of the region and his insistence that it be pastorally engaged regardless of how hard it was. One tale says that he dismounted and strode into a field, planted his cane in the earth, and said, "And here we will build a college."

INTRODUCTION

As I look over the short but esteemed history of these lectures my contribution is modest by comparison. My job has put me in a unique observer's position as our culture takes on a high profile search for certainty. In brief the war--and now this hurricane disaster--is like a series of windows of clarity, which open one after another disclosing things about who we are as Americans, what we need, and how we intend to satisfy those needs. Are these days delivering a wake-up call? How does one pastor in such an environment?

I had to revise what I had already basically written for this paper from the perspective of learnings from the battlefield. As I thought of this lecture while visiting disaster chaplains amidst their duties in every describable, wretched and unthinkable awful situation in Louisiana and Mississippi last week this talk began to change and now had the awkward feel of presenting two equally terrible places to you: Iraq (Persian Gulf) and the other Gulf (American) and a comparison of their miseries and solutions.

There is a popular top ten list to give us a sense what it's like in Iraq¹. I'll only give you four entries. # 1 replace your garage door with a curtain and then sleep in the garage on a cot. # 2 have someone shine a flashlight in your eyes at 2 AM and then say, "Sorry!" # 3, set your alarm clock to go off intermittently during the night. And # 4, drive around with sandbags on the floor of your car. Indeed those deployed can teach us many things about absences—good and bad—and having someone miss you.

And what is it like for evacuees during this time? Would anyone dare to put a top 10 together for them? If we want to count things there are four levels of trauma at work here. First, a flight from wind and water. Second, transfer to an evacuation center; third travel

¹ USAA Magazine, Number 2 USAA Publications, 2005, San Antonio, Texas, page 13

from the center (one woman died on a roof, others grabbed for food and then at each other at an evacuation shelter), Fourth, a connection with the final, temporary home. Think of what effect all these cycles have on vulnerable populations like the frail elderly, the sick, and children.

George Washington Carver once wrote,

“How far you go in life depends on your being tender with the young, compassionate with the aged, sympathetic with the striving, and tolerant of the weak and strong. Because someday in life you will have been all of these.”²

One young girl I know of, parent-less, and shivering went to the hospital across from an Episcopal church. Once there, she was given refuge in a hallway with bodies “stacked to the ceiling.”³ Traumatized, she fled that location and fended for herself and searched for another shelter. When she finally landed at St. Luke’s, Baton Rouge she couldn’t be left alone. Consoling the innocent seems true in both afflicted gulf regions.

WHAT ARE THESE TIMES SAYING TO US?

I guess it’s that there is a pastoral implication in how we relate to casualties.

This battlefield and this disaster area are among the most lethal in history and for different reasons. In combat we like it that way but of course we try to reduce such lethality for recovery in disasters.

Maybe because of Vietnam's legacy we are afraid of our own casualties therefore we have made sure that an opposing combat environment is more toxic than the enemy can bear and so our technology can take us to some dark and terrible places. This becomes a curious exercise for a country so self-consciously dedicated to a high and noble opinion of itself. The application of Just War propositions is out of the question. Of chief worry are the five or six requirements for the just cause to begin a conflict. It is now a matter of record that thinkers like Jean Bethke Elshtain have taken the initiative and proposed an alternative philosophy that fits the times for a preventative strike against terrorists.⁴ And here is an opening for a parallel between these two areas, war and disaster: we often choose utility above all, that is, what’s convenient and what works and maybe to our moral peril.

That said, the estrangement of Just War propositions doesn't stop even when just cause can be established for the warfare exceeds acceptable levels of proportional violence and the consequent umbrella of lethality covers an ever-increasing circle of non-combatants. It should be worrisome that there is such a high contrast between the amount and abrupt use of technology in today's warfare and the increased need for sensitive pastoral care.

² George Washington Carver

³ Interview with the Rev. Jerry Kramer, Church of the Annunciation, New Orleans

⁴ Just War Against Terror, The Burden of American Power in a Violent World, Elshtain, Jean Bethke, Basic Books, 2003, New York, NY, pp. 59-70

Technology was either absent or bluntly present after Katrina. In the earliest hours when there was a provision of relief supplies they were not mediated by any sensitive delivery.

Again, there is a similarity to this storm disaster. I see this in the battle area and in the recovery area. Our chaplains are becoming irrelevant tag a longs, or worse, begin to collude with the mindset which indiscriminately employs force and violence, or, in the case of the aftermath of Katrina unwittingly concur with what authorities say they should do. At the very least a mobilized pastoral care person should walk sensitively and cautiously taking issue with any intellectual posturing or dictation which violates his/her values. We will discuss what these might be.

In most cases the troops executing this war are young, highly trained and dedicated to each other, and they are anxious. And on the ground disaster responders though not always young or highly trained become surprisingly keen and self-reliant. They are first on the scene, rarely well-trained, and nearly always heroic and appropriate...at first.

And what about those noble recovery ministry souls in the American Gulf? There is a problem for them unlike that of September 11th. Victims are mixed into the population of those who need de-briefing and post trauma care. In short, how do you have an evacuee who is recovering from his/her own trauma minister to others? In New York terms it would be like an employee of Cantor Fitzgerald who had just escaped from the Twin Towers signing up to be a counselor. It's a big problem although moderated, I had contended, by the upstate clergy presence in Louisiana. But as one resident said to me, "we are all from New Orleans in this state." She continued tearfully, "I don't know where my friends are!"⁵

The soldiers in Iraq come from small town America and they have been forgotten. The chances of becoming a casualty are remote--there is more danger from being in a traffic accident in Iraq. But if you are a casualty it will be from an IED, improvised explosive device.⁶ The medical teams are rightfully proud that 20 minutes after being wounded you will be staring into the lights of a surgical suite. That is quite impressive. You can forget that dynamic if you were a casualty in the "other Gulf." Aid might arrive after four days.

And what about the average soldier and the wounds he/she sustains? Chaplains have been at the entries and exits of this war and there are some things of note. There have been 12,500 soldiers wounded in this war so far. That means there are 8 soldiers wounded for every one killed, double the rate for Vietnam. There are twice as many amputations in this conflict than any other and a quarter of those are traumatic head injury.⁷

Early war injuries were from gunfire, mortars and rocket propelled grenades and now 70 % are from IED's. Soldiers are hit from behind, below, and from either side not above and ahead. IED's with upward force fire chunks of shrapnel and dirt into unprotected helmets. And then there are a lot of non-penetrating head injuries. Medical reports say,

⁵ Dee Hamilton, Baton Rouge, Louisiana resident

⁶ *The New Yorker*, Annals of War, Battle Lessons, Dan Baum, January 17, 2005

⁷ Harper's Magazine, "A War of Disabilities, Iraq's Hidden Costs are Coming Home", Ronald J. Glasser, July 2005, New York, page 59

“Body armor protects a soldier’s center mass but explosions shatter arms and legs.”⁸ Limb salvage, amputation then replacement prosthetics, has become an industry.

Walter Reed Hospital is its own place of drama in the recuperation of these brave and maimed veterans. Their self deprecating humor is fortifying to be around as in one case when an amputee asked me to hand him his C (for computer) leg which was being recharged in a hall outlet. Being able to live unassisted is the singular achievement of this population. And here is another unexpected parallel. Unbelievably even in the midst of this disaster there have been occasions of humor. Searching for signs of life in the New Orleans darkness with night vision goggles an Episcopal chaplain discovered one man swimming around a building. He seemed bewildered but then it was realized that he was avoiding rescue. Finally he swam to the door of a house, entered, and appeared to barricade the door!

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) deserves its own chapter in this lecture. Of PTSD, one in six suffered in this war from major depression. Of the 290,000 vets who have left service 22% sought VA treatment.⁹ And again from the other Gulf, one resident said after being herded around from shelter to shelter achieving stability only after she secured the job of turning others away that she had to postpone crying because she was afraid she’d never stop.

We have all gone to school since 9/11 on the consequences of absorbing traumatic experiences. Indeed we know even more today than when Bill Mahedy wrote his seminal work, “Out of the Night: The Spiritual Journey of Vietnam Veterans.”¹⁰ Many in this room have become well trained and sophisticated in the ways of preventing and treating stress during and after critical incidents. Between the war and this disaster an unprecedented number of cases will be a result. This should not be surprising considering there is the ironic presentation of less combat but more anxiety during service in this theater of war. It is probably because the whole premise of engagement is based on surprise and the disruption of routine. Oddly, this is true in the aftermath of Katrina as well.

LET’S STEP BACK, HOW DID WE GET HERE?

The rush to Iraqi Freedom gave many an eerie feeling that not all options had been thoroughly explored and we all know of the undocumented link with weapons of mass destruction, this is almost a platitude in diplomatic circles now but for theologian-pastors (and indeed other Hobart lecturers have been wise to do this) performing a values analysis of the times is a necessary first step before applying pastoral care and support. It should be noted that not enough slowing of motion has occurred during these intense times. Moreover, we would all benefit from more sources saying--and often--that terrorism benefits from urging us onto a panic of

⁸ Ibid, page 60

⁹ Ibid, page 61

¹⁰ “Out of the Night: The Spiritual Journey of Vietnam Veterans”, William P. Mahedy, The Journal of Social Psychology, Number 83 (1971)

choice. But life is uncertain and so presto we have a War on Terror with purpose and design.

From an Episcopal Church recovery perspective there are two zones in this disaster. One is on the Mississippi gulf coast and the other in the City of New Orleans. In Mississippi Bishop Gray has marshaled resources quickly and is well rehearsed with his Lutheran counterpart having done prior projects together. They are far along so as to begin plans for the establishment of long-term work camps. He is quick to note the indifference of the population to the looming Katrina storm having survived Category 5 Camille. “It was the storm surge,” he said to me, “there’s not much protection against a forty foot wall of water traveling at seven feet per second.”¹¹

As you make your way around detours and downed power lines toward Louisiana the difference between the two areas is summarized in two words: standing water. Where Katrina came ashore and walloped the Mississippi Gulf it then receded whereas water in Louisiana’s low lying areas even beyond New Orleans caused evacuation, prolonged the suffering and delayed recovery. Bishop Charles Jenkins has had to start from scratch. He tapped a small sheaf of papers on a borrowed desk and said, “We have nothing, and these are the diocesan records.”¹²

FORCE

Binding our anxiety to a forceful response, I maintain, suspends the hard work of waiting in the moment and of forming an introspective design from a base of humility, compassion, and communion. If ever there was a statement to make my colleagues in the Pentagon roll their eyes that last one is it for when a crisis is at hand action, not thought, they maintain, is your ally. But if you push this further--and if pastors don't do that they are sentenced to a frantic and secondary place—we find that we are about maintaining a pale version of what our founding fathers wanted to establish as a continuing reference point all along: a place of happiness.

Force comes along as a friend of happiness because it offers a quick if artificial solution. The war on terror gives an official program and embrace to a threat that has little form or shape. I have been to SW Asia twice and expect to be there in November and each time the situation on the ground is more chaotic. The British consulate sat at his dining room table in Baghdad and listed on the margins of a map the then five sources of insurgency. To gin up a Yankee response to such confusion seems naïve and arrogant.¹³

Chris Hedges observes that a healthy culture must help its members with two things: the first is the good happiness as referred to above and the second is meaning. Meaning because the culture must live in the here and now by living by the hard rules of life: it's

¹¹ Bishop Duncan Gray

¹² Bishop Charles Jenkins

¹³ Secretary Chris Seger

short, harsh and niggardly in its returns unless you are prepared.¹⁴ Our commitment in Iraq ignores the complementary aspect of how life is meaningful in its interdependence by our nearly solo entry into the war. I would add that premise is really a bi-polar truth with happiness co-equal in the moment with meaning. Meaning is humorless and sterile without happiness and happiness is superficial without the bulk of meaning.

It is at this point Hedges introduces the theme that reality and culture are mauled by a myth of war. Instead of the hard work of meaning-happiness he says our culture chooses an easier way by default. In other words our reality is replaced by a warped version so that we can fashion a quick re-establishment of our happiness and contentment.¹⁵ This is doomed from the start because the cause has no compelling reason underneath it and--as we all know--despite a war and American casualties to the contrary, we are pretty much disinterested in what is going on in Iraq.

But now there is now some excellent research underway to link guilt and PTSD. Led by Major Peter Kilmer who has pressed the point saying that killing is morally acceptable when the enemy poses a threat to values worth fighting for and there are no non-lethal options to avoid the threat.¹⁶ This is a time bomb for the kind of war we're in for as an Army psychiatrist admitted, "As soon as we ask the question of how killing affects soldiers, we acknowledge we're causing harm and that raises the question of whether the good we're accomplishing is worth the harm we're causing."¹⁷

LET US ACCURATELY DIAGNOSE WHAT IS NEEDED FOR PASTORS TO DO

Where I vacation there is now a red house. It never used to be there. It's a fine house as houses go but in the context of the lobster fisherman's village where it now stands it takes up a commanding view of the ocean--uninvited some would say--it looks airlifted into the location and foreign to the low, quaint cottages along the shoreline. Where foxes once jumped through a meadow a double lane black top driveway now exists. This house is emblematic of what we face in the pastoral world around us. Indeed, the better purchase and construction would have sought integration with the environment. To do otherwise brings one to be arrogant and aloof from the needs around you.

When I got off the plane in Baton Rouge last week I thought of humility because they had nothing and because of the persistent dampness left over from the hurricane you could smell the earth.

Thomas Merton once wrote,

For like a grain of fire,
Smoldering in the heart of every living essence
God plants His undivided power—

¹⁴ "War, A Force that Gives Us Meaning", Chris Hedges, Public Affairs, 2003, New York, NY, page 159

¹⁵ Ibid, page 63

¹⁶ *The Wall Street Journal*, "War Wounds: Breaking a Taboo, Army Confronts Guilt after Combat", Greg Jaffe, August 17, 2005

¹⁷ *The New Yorker*, "Price of Valor", Dan Baum, July 12 and July 19, 2004, page

Buries his thoughts too vast for worlds
In seed and root and blade and flower. 18

Humility. We could trace the origin of the word back to its root, through human, to humor, to humus, to the earth itself. We might begin to see then that there is an importance in a pastoral vigilance to any behavior that keeps us from being grounded.

Thomas Merton hangs it all on humility. Moreover, humility and faith are bonded. "(It contains in itself the answer to all the great problems of the life of the soul in perfect humility all selfishness disappears and your soul no longer lives for itself but for God..."¹⁹ Before I proposed a diagnosis of the human problem: that we are on a search for meaning but abandon that in a search of happiness. I said a re-balance was in order where both happiness and meaning were necessary in the same moment. But for Merton these values are subsumed by a desire for God "that is the very root of all our quest for (true) happiness."²⁰ But rather, do chaplains get ready for deployment with assets intent on surrounding themselves in a pseudo contemplative cocoon? I wonder. One of the weakest things about our faith can be the illusion that our faith is strong when the 'strength' we feel is only an intensity of emotion or of sentiment, which has nothing to do with real faith."²¹ The humble man/woman is clear about life's doings. Jesus returns from the wilderness fulfilled, nourished, transparent, and fed by doing the will of the Father God.

I have urged our chaplains to think then of their very offering as "portable" and the challenge before them as primarily a spiritual one. And so we as a Church have a unique population of priests who deploy from among us. "A survival situation brings out the true, underlying personality. Our survival kit is inside us...when you consolidate your personality---you get the essence of what you always had. A (survival situation) simply concentrates who you are. It drives the natural system you've developed over a lifetime."²²

So a frank spiritual inventory is necessary before deployment and another must guide it. For as Merton observes, "the most dangerous man in the world is the contemplative who is guided by nobody."²³ He identifies the will of God with anything that makes him feel within his heart, a big warm, sweet interior glow."²⁴ "This is a spiritual blind alley" because they "rest in a little snug nest of private emotions." It is cheating oneself out of a reality and being content with a fake. They may be happy but there is nothing contagious about the happiness.²⁵

¹⁸ Selection from "The Sowing of Meaning", *In the Dark Before Dawn, New Selected Poems of Thomas Merton*, New Directions, 2005, page 81

¹⁹ *New Seeds of Contemplation*, Thomas Merton, New Directions, 1961, New York, page 181

²⁰ *Ibid*, page 183

²¹ *Ibid*, page 186

²² *Deep Survival, Who Lives, Who Dies and Why*, Laurence Gonzales, W. W. Norton & Company, 2003, New York, page 223

²³ *New Seeds of Contemplation*, Thomas Merton, New Directions, 1961, New York, page 194

²⁴ *Ibid*, page 195

²⁵ *Ibid*, page 195

This is the greatest advertisement to the general population to get under authority and obedience. Too many of us think of spiritual direction as a good idea but never really get around to it and it can be likened to a frail promise to ourselves or others that a sort of “let’s do lunch” take place sometime but we never really intend to get around to it.

So what does this mean for our red house does the pastor lie down in front of the bulldozer? Perhaps it simply means being clear where we put our energies and support but more than that it probably means being vigilant when synthetic and untrue realities pass themselves off as the contrary. The prevailing work of the pastor is to be about perpetually restoring the balance. This can be very hard to do for chaplains set on ministering to those in the ranks or those committed to work within the bounds of a recovery effort.

BALANCE

Simon Weil says great effort must be exerted in order for a culture to function after employing force. The lie must be total with colossal convincing for it is a struggle of humanity against power; of meaning versus forgetting, she says.²⁶ The pastor's stance is to nurture and encourage those in her care away from such thinking. The antidote is the hard work of growing in Christ. “And now Father send us out to do the work you have given us to do.”²⁷ That portion of the prayer from page 366, BCP of course refers to the repair of a broken world but it is also a commendation to live a life of conviction that humility and compassion serves truth²⁸ and not some other myth.

So restoring balance is hard work. Servants of the force or death myth can be quite convincing and certain. In fact they are riddled with certainty. After the Battle of Falluja I wrote an article pointing out the discrepancy between leveling that village and long lines of former residents requesting food and medical attention. (70% of the casualties in modern warfare are civilian.)²⁹ I received very nasty responses. Keeping in mind I am one who thinks a strong military makes sense and also keeping in mind that I led a House of Bishops effort to analyze the use of Just War principles in this conflict I was not prepared for the visceral and unthinking reaction. This says how inflamed the rhetoric can become and often because adherents make the mistake that the indiscriminate use of force has a romantic feel to it but the difference is that the use of force gives dependence--and even looks like love but as I said before delivers fleeting, false happiness.

There is an important thing to do for restoring the balance: give your opponent a name...it's a first step in repentance and turning around an all-consuming posture. But at the same time this converts the warrior into a troubled and ineffective killer. When I was in Baghdad a boy came up to me and asked if I wanted to buy war souvenirs. He came

²⁶ “The Iliad” or “The Poem of Force”, Simon Weil, Pendle Hill Pamphlet, 1993, Wallingford, Pennsylvania, page 11

²⁷ Book of Common Prayer, Church Hymnal Corporation, 1979, New York, N.Y., page 366

²⁸ *New Seeds of Contemplation*, Thomas Merton, New Directions, 1961, New York, pages 181-182

²⁹ The Bishop’s Notebook, 23 November 2004, www.ecusa-chaplain.org

back from his bike with a full selection of small arms. Later I saw many young men on the street corners next to the piles of black market appliances.

I never thought Osama might have been one of them. A portion of an interview follows. “He was the married son of a kebob restaurant owner”³⁰ “Baghdad is a shithole, rubble breeds rubble” and always the same refrain “security, electricity, employment.” Most of the population in Iraq grew up during the scarcity of UN sanctions around an “official who had sunglasses for eyes”³¹ And given what I experienced on the street and saw amongst the loitering youth this next quote has the feel of a gathering and obvious storm. “As the city fell Osama and some of his friends from the mosque gathered the rocket propelled grenades and other weapons left behind in abandoned barracks and police stations and buried them in caches”³² “At first I was worried and afraid and never expected I could do such things. When we first began hitting the Americans I considered myself a true mujahid. I feel it strengthened my character and gave me more trust in myself.”³³ Groups like Osama’s often tried to plant IED’s at night, “that one didn’t go off, we don’t know why.”³⁴ This all made him sad and defiant stuck as he was in the under dog role of this war.

In my own experience I recall how in Vietnam our RTO decided to reach across enemy lines and serve in a psy-ops unit. Substantially his new mission was to seek out the very people we were trying to ambush at night by befriending them during the day. I recall so well how this new duty vaccinated him against the posturing we were all doing and no doubt much of the PTSD. In effect Ted had warded off the indiscriminate use of force with humility and compassion.

Another thing to do in restoring balance is to get grounded. When I served on a Pentagon task force during the first Gulf War we evaluated how to care for war dead and my only worthwhile addition to the report we produced was a quote from the Book of Common Prayer, “that we respect the dignity of every human being.”³⁵ This reference was in reaction to the logistics team’s contention that we had to fight a war and get on with the battle, and that we didn’t have time to care for the dead, and that a group grave was sufficient until time availed itself to give a proper ceremony. I hear this a lot even today.

That response and the current one about body retrieval in the storm’s aftermath is wrong. Have you noticed that the indication of how we are caring for the dead has become an unsaid measurement of how civilized and responsive we are in this disaster? There may be a utilitarian need to care for the living but when you literally walk over the dead to do so an unsettling thing is communicated: your entity and essence fragile as it is can be measured and the value of it can be terminated. Everyone who walked past those bodies had a fleeting thought of, “thank God that’s not me.” And worse, what dark thoughts do

³⁰ Granta , The Magazine of New Writing, Number 84, Granta Publications, Fall 2004, New York, NY, page 213

³¹ Ibid, page 214

³² Ibid, page 215

³³ Ibid, page 218

³⁴ Ibid, page 220

³⁵ Book of Common Prayer, page 305

we have about how we are viewed in our own deaths? As Alice Sebold urged us in yesterday's op-ed *New York Times* we should "grieve the particular lives that come to (us)." ³⁶ Carla Holloway (NPR) observes that this is especially acute in New Orleans and among the African American community where certain equality is finally granted in death. When passing from this life an individual receives the ceremony and respect not granted during one's lifetime. In this City "the craft of burial is deeply cherished yet the dead had no fair terms," she said. ³⁷

Sogyal Rinpoche wrote,

"...when we finally know we are dying, and all other sentient beings are dying with us, we start to have a burning, almost heartbreaking sense of the fragility and preciousness of each moment and each being, and from this can grow a deep, clear, limitless compassion for all beings." ³⁸

The story of the burial of Vera. (*San Francisco Chronicle*) ³⁹

New Orleans – Neighbors buried Vera Smith on top of the concrete sidewalk at the edge of the Garden District on Saturday in a crude grave they made of soil and bricks they had unearthed from a little park nearby.

Smith had been dead for four days. She was killed by a hit-and-run driver Tuesday night as panicked residents fled the flooded city and looters descended on her neighborhood. She became one of the hundreds, possibly thousands, who died in the mayhem unleashed by Hurricane Katrina.

Over the next several days, the humid New Orleans heat had rendered her body so unrecognizable that strangers could not tell whether she was a man or a woman, black or white, said John Lee, one of the neighbors who helped bury her.

"I saw a bloodied corpse weeping body fluids onto the street," said Lee, who had not known her when she was alive.

But to the neighbors who knew her, she was Vera, the sweet lady in her 60s who had liked shopping and wigs and casinos, whose husband's name was Max and who had adored her two small dogs.

"That's Miss Vera right there," remarked a woman who rode on a bicycle past Smith's fresh grave, before pedaling past the boarded-up, plastered facades of deserted Magazine Street. "We know her."

³⁶ *New York Times*, "Living With The Dead", Alice Sebold, September 11, 2005, page 14

³⁷ National Public Radio, "'New Orleans' Cities of the Dead", Professor Carla Holloway, September 8, 2005

³⁸ *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, Sogyal Rinpoche

³⁹ *San Francisco Chronicle*, Sunday, September 4, 2005, Anna Badkhen

The police, too overwhelmed by the scale of the humanitarian catastrophe in the city, refused the neighbors' pleas to collect her body. Instead they spray-painted "29" – the police complaint code number signifying death in Louisiana – on the sidewalk near where she lay, along with an arrow pointing at her body.

Unwilling to tolerate the indignity of her abandonment, Smith's neighbors decided to bury her themselves Saturday, joining throngs of new Orleans residents who are simply taking charge of their own incomprehensible problems.

"Let the country see this", wept Maggie McEleny, who wore a respirator pushed up on her forehead as she freed elliptical bricks from an overgrown rock garden and arranged them to frame the grave.

Lee and Patrick McCarthy stabbed the brown earth with their dirty shovels and piled the soil on top of Smith's bloated body. A man in a white SUV pulled over, grabbed an extra shovel and joined the men.

And then it goes on to say:

"Ok, let's cover her up – let's get it over with," he said.

McCarthy, McEleney and two other neighbors, Janet Clouden and Kima Smith, picked up a square white plastic tarp and placed it on top of the grave, tucking it in under the bricks. Clouden placed two red hibiscus blossoms on either side of the grave.

On the tarp, Vera's neighbors had written a declaration of sorts in thick black letters, large enough for rescue helicopters roaring overhead to see the words.

It read:

"Here lies Vera. God help us."

The employment of force as a choice response in Iraq is not unlike the utilitarian efficiency employed by the state in this disaster. Both ignore individuality and community. The previous story of Vera is a testimony to reclaim both. In eloquent simplicity the community was grounded figuratively and literally even when everything else was not. Despite continuing pain and despair balance was restored and therein a chance for hope.

We think so much of this concept of being grounded where you are that I confess to trying to engineer it. Each of our chaplains in Iraq receives supplemental materials on Islam and the "land of Abraham."⁴⁰ The attempt is intended to help them dig in and be there. It is important for them to feel the grace of the land, its people, and its customs.

⁴⁰ *Abraham, A Journey to the Heart of Three Faiths*, Feiler, Bruce, William Morrow, 2002, New York, NY

Likewise the people of New Orleans don't want to leave the ground of their homes for what is at stake is far more than a simple attachment to realty.

What should pastors do? They should help the culture restore its balance and that means entering the struggle against the indiscriminate use of power and utility⁴¹ or the struggle between meaning and forgetting.

What is pastoring like and what can chaplaincy tell us?

Getting up and functioning in a hopeless environment has it's own importance and reclaiming scripture as a reference is equally so. Others use scripture as a source of certainty; we must use it to put ambiguity in context. And Episcopalians are in a special position to do so since we read scripture liturgically. Even when we read it alone I wonder if we are ever that far away from thinking of a liturgical setting. Not all scripture rises to the importance of that ritual and the Gospels—through posture and attention receive special focus. The recent report, “To Set Our Hope in Christ” in response to the Windsor Report discusses the same thing by the exercise of searching for “the density of holiness” in the Bible.⁴²

What we don't conclude often enough is that these selections anchor us in times of need. I witnessed reassurance over the past few days come from those prayerfully claiming their humility and counting on the gift of faith disclosed in the events of the day guided by the Spirit and aroused by scripture from the Daily Office.

Whether we struggle with power or with overwhelming desolation it is sometimes easier and tempting to live in hyper activity or a variety of distractions. We are called to grow and shun such behavior choosing instead the “hard work” of the Gospel. The recovery area right now is filled with fast talkers, (and remember this is the South!) a sure sign that individuals are giving over to fatigue and personal erosion. “We may have to shorten or postpone prayer times for the necessities of important chaplain's presence.” What a greater calamity!

Hard work refers to prayer life, which discovers the gift of humility. It is the priceless gift for the clear minded and discerning. In that sense it's not work but the result of choice, the choice to wait and act only out of humility and therein from a gift of faith. As I said in Louisiana last Wednesday, in that capacity this area may be the wealthiest spot in Episcopal Church today.

My special thanks to David Fleenor and to my wife Brook for their great support in preparing this presentation.

⁴¹ *War, A Force That Gives Us Meaning*, Chris Hedges, Public Affairs, 2003, New York, page 130

⁴² *To Set Our Hope In Christ, A Response to the Invitation of the Windsor Report*, Office of Communication, The Episcopal Church Center, 2005, New York, N.Y., paragraph (2.21)a, page 22

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