How Can I Pray ‘Thank you God’ Today?

And so my morning prayers began… ‘Thank you Lord God for your steadfast and endless love. Thank you that you don’t run away or leave us alone even when your church is decimated by a lone gunman in a small town in Texas.’

‘Why?’ kept floating up but then came, ‘Why not?’ Terrorist type killers have been killing people at country music fests; on running paths and a marathon; colleges; high, middle and elementary schools, night clubs, concerts, why not churches? Evil has never been shy about hurting people – even people who meet to worship on Sunday mornings.

The question ‘Why?’ still bothered me but it always will because it’s been the question behind all the hurt and hatred in the world and in our hearts. Jesus tried to help his disciples see that keeping our hands clean and our houses spotless doesn’t do a thing for the darkness in our hearts. That’s where all that’s hurtful, hopeless, hateful, hard and angry thoughts and actions germinate.

But what are we to do? Just wait like sitting ducks for the next killer to emerge? No and yes came to me. No, we need to pray a prayer of confession for we are not without sin and complicity in the darkness that pervades our world. Even ‘the church’ as a whole has not lived and loved like Jesus, if we are honest. And even if we did live just like Jesus, we would most likely face evil on a more regular and frequent basis because Jesus didn’t advocate for returning fire but for returning hate with love and prayer, which are not popular ways to address evil. Many Christians who are persecuted across the world could surely testify to this.

Yes, we will keep on going to worship – regularly and joyfully- for it is when we are the body gathered that we renew our lives, our hearts, and our identity as Beloved. It is where we confess our sin and realize how Love comes even to us who are sinners. Loved died so that even terrorists who turn to Jesus might know the love of God and the grace of forgiveness. And Love rose so that we would know that nothing can stop the love of God in Jesus. Then we can leave our gathering with faith that Jesus calls us to a love that is daring and dangerous. It is a love that turns the other cheek, walks the extra mile and sees neighbors where others see enemies.

Thank you for your endless grace, love and mercy Lord God for those in Sutherland Springs, and in NYC and in Las Vegas and all the places where hate appeared to win. We, who are claimed by you Lord Jesus know differently. Your love is more loving, more wonderful, more forgiving than any hurt caused by a terrorist bullet or careening car. Your love for this world and our love for you doesn’t end when we stop breathing. In this our hearts give thanks and we know your peace, even as we grieve.