

Dear Friends,

Hearts are heavy and minds are reeling from the shock of two mass shootings occurring in our nation in less than one week. Shaken by such terrible tragedies, there is often voiced the plaintive inquiry about God's presence. Where is God in the midst of such suffering? The writer of Psalm 139 stands firm in the knowledge that we are never outside or beyond God's reach, God's hold, and God's presence.

*"Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?
If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.
If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,
even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast." Psalm 139:7-10*

One of the ways that we feel God's reach, hold, and presence is through the care of others. On Monday, I heard a story on National Public Radio about a 96-year-old, World War II veteran named Tom Cornish who lives in Minnesota. For most of his life, he has endeavored to help others. He volunteered for the Salvation Army when he was a teenager and then he joined the Navy just out of high school. His sense of service and duty continued after the war as he has attended to the needs of homeless people at the Salvation Army.

For the past 20 years, he has been knitting hats to give to newborns and also to poor people who can't afford warm clothing. His rationale? He said, ***"I really enjoy helping others. Others really come first."*** Due to the pandemic, he has had few visitors and more time to knit so he resolved to make a hat a day for a year. He estimates that he has spent 1,460 hours making hats during the past year.

He said, "I see these people that really need some clothing. And they're cold and hungry, can't afford either one. So I'm hoping that some of these people will know that the Lord is in their lives if they want him."

This past year at our church, we've seen how handcrafted masks, prayer shawls, and prayer squares have been an extension of faith in the Lord and a way to help people. The knitters have long brought comfort to people in need of healing or in need of a lift or even to help celebrate a milestone event.

Prayer shawls and squares won't solve the horrors and hardships of life, but they are inherently and undeniably therapeutic and uplifting as they bring comfort and warmth. These items are tangible reminders that people care. They are a witness to the words of hope and light of the Psalmist who writes,

"Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light around me become night, even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you. For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well." Psalm 139:11-14

Each of us is ***knit together*** in our mother's womb. Each of us is deserving of life and love. Each of us is a child of God, worthy of help and care. Each of us is called, in the words of Mr. Cornish, to ***"really enjoy helping others. Others really come first."***

God bless,
Jane