



In the shadow of a horrific shooting,
a community begins to find healing.

Grace in Tucson

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Several months have come and gone here in Tucson. The memory of the shooting that took place on January 8 is not gone. It will never be gone. It is our personal 9/11. Plans are in the works to construct a fitting memorial to that tragic day to help us remember—and remember well.

After the bullets stopped flying at the Safeway where the shootings occurred, the blame started flying. From police security to the mental-health system to gun control laws to the vitriolic political environment to parents—guilt was assigned. Within the first twenty-four hours of the shooting, we here in Tucson were badly in need of grace.

In his beautiful book *What's So Amazing About Grace?* Phil Yancey

speaks of “grace-healed eyes.” Grace-healed eyes come from following Jesus. We believe that Jesus took guilt away and bore it upon himself. The book of Hebrews drives this point home. All the sacrifices in the Hebrew worship system foreshadowed the work of Jesus on our behalf: “How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our conscience...” (9:14, TNIV). A cleansed conscience is one free of guilt. Paul nearly shouts in Romans 8:1, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (TNIV).

When I stand under the cross and let grace wash over me, it changes everything. I see everything differently. I am looking through grace-healed eyes. Let

me offer two ways we see differently.

First is the Martin Luther King Jr. perspective. King's thinking aligned with Jewish theologian and philosopher Abraham Joshua Heschel, who wrote, "Few are guilty, but all are responsible." When he was in the Birmingham jail, King had personally experienced fire bombings, beatings, and humiliation. What troubled him most, however, was the tepid passivity of the church. It was the silence and inaction of the masses that broke his heart. They were not the first cause of the violence, but they were responsible for a culture that tolerated it.

So it is in Tucson. Guilt will be determined in a court of law. Justice will be served. Yet all of us are responsible for the kind of society in which we live. *We* create the culture. By the words we speak and the values we cherish, we fashion a climate of good will or one of depravity.

Assigning blame divides us. Accepting responsibility unites us. The grace-healed eyes of Christ followers are not looking for guilt. Rather, they see the common values on which we can build. When President Obama spoke at the memorial service in Tucson, pastors and churches gathered and prayed. One prayer was for God to put his very words into the mouth of the president. Displayed on the front page of the morning paper in two-inch block letters were these words: "what matters is not wealth or status or power or fame—but rather how well we have loved..." It was a trumpet blast of prophetic truth. Those words serve as a good starting point for building a sounder and safer culture.

A second perspective is that of the cross-centered community. Jesus said, "I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself" (John 12:32, TNIV). The cross, the place of suffering, is the meeting point. Paul says, "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you" (Romans 15:7, TNIV). God's acceptance of us is unreserved, unprejudiced, forgiving, and freeing. It is grace. Thus, we see "the other" as one for whom Christ died. He or she is destined to be my brother or sister. Grace-healed eyes look at people differently.

One week after the shootings, the Safeway store prepared to reopen. Doug Stevens, a Covenant minister who serves as the director of the Renewal Project, other clergy, and I were gathered to provide counsel and prayer for staff and clients. The employees assembled at the very spot of the violence. On the day of mayhem in January, many of them had stanced wounds or covered the bodies of those who did not survive. On this day, they met for a memorial ceremony and a final moment of silence.

Eventually the presiding district manager announced, "All right, let's go back to work." No one moved. Heads hung. Muffled weeping was heard. Finally, after a long moment, they all began to move—together. As one, they moved slowly through the main entrance, gaining strength from the ones standing beside them. It didn't matter what work they did in the store or what their political position was. Together they found strength to continue. They were united in their sorrow. They moved inside as one and began life again. The entire city of Tucson seeks to do the same.

Those in the cross-centered community see people differently. They have grace-healed eyes that do not see the distinctions of rank, race, or politics. They have eyes that are blind to the differences in others because they see the suffering in others. Grace-healed eyes see "the other" as someone who is vulnerable and afraid. They see others who are like themselves, deeply in need of a Savior and the God of all comfort.

It is our common need that unites us. It is in suffering that we find each other. One of the crisis counselors told me, "There were two employees who were on such bad terms with one another that they hadn't spoken in a month. Today they embraced."

Tucson is beginning to heal. It will take time. May Christians here and throughout our country look at this event, at our own lives and, most important, at others around us with changed eyes. ■

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