



## CAN SANDY HILL BRING CLARITY?

December 17, 2012

With twenty little children and six adults freshly slain, how can we celebrate Christmas? Many in the grieving community of Newtown, Connecticut, in a show of solidarity with shattered friends are removing Christmas from their homes. News anchors seem desperate to make sense of the tragedy. Mourners flocked to an interfaith service. Millions tuned in to hear President Obama for words of comfort and clarity.

Americans heard prayers from Catholic priests and Jewish Rabbis, readings from the Koran, a Baha'i poem and passages from the Bible. They heard statistics on gun violence, mental health and school safety. But when one is grappling with overwhelming grief, one needs powerful truth.

If ever there were a time when the unique message of Christmas was needed more, we are hard pressed to find it. Christmas is the celebration of life over death. That God loved us so much, he gave the only son he ever had to die a brutal death so that we might find forgiveness for our sins and lose our fear of death. That baby in a manger was the very real and precious son of a God who knew when he sent him, it would one day break his Holy heart. The parents of the children who died in Newtown now understand God's grief, but they did not willingly choose it.

The story of Christmas is also that of a mother, Mary, who gave birth to a boy, knowing one day because of him a "sword would pierce her heart." Indeed it did as she sat on the hill years later

and watched her son agonizingly suffer execution on a cross. This is a powerful comfort to all mothers who mourn the loss of their children.

Even at ballgames, we used to be reminded of this by John 3:16 signs; “For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten son that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

But it’s not clear now that Americans think they need a savior. People often declare, “I am a good person.” We have only to look in the mirror of American pop culture to see how “good” we really are. We have only to look at our politicians to see what manner of people we are because they reflect us.

Dawning the spectacles of grief allows us to see the world with 20/20 clarity. We look at scenes of Newtown reflecting the idyllic. But the beauty betrays the inward darkness we have allowed to creep in, even into communities as lovely as Newtown. We have abandoned our children to violence and depravity. We have abandoned ourselves to our appetites. But we still look good, so we can’t see; not until a child of ours dons the garb of death and marches into a school to reveal the horrific underbelly of the evil we have masterfully covered.

Much like Bella and the Beast, the Old Testament prophet Samuel said, “Man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart.”

It’s not our North Face jackets or pocket technology that define us. We purchase these and adorn ourselves as though they are badges of our worth. Much more difficult is the hard work of character and discipline that you can’t see.

Contrary to Steve Carell's rendition, the real story of Noah's Ark isn't very funny. God sent the flood because the earth was corrupt and filled with violence. The thoughts of man were "continually evil all the time" and God repented he had made man.

Is that now so hard to imagine? Killing the innocent in public places is near epidemic. Teens are murdering their mothers, husbands their wives. Mothers are killing their own children, while priests and coaches molest little boys. Teachers are seducing young students while men and women abandon vows and families. We crave what we can't have, envy, steal, lie and boast about it.

"The thoughts of man were continually evil all the time." Sound familiar?

Christians don't celebrate a silly fairytale. We celebrate a very compelling story of deep sorrow and great joy with hope for redemption...for all who will listen and receive it.

That's the real clarity of the Sandy Hill tragedy. During this time of overwhelming grief and national depravity, how we need a savior. The good news of Christmas is, we have one!