

There has been some grisly stuff on the news the past few weeks. Recent headlines have been especially gruesome: I am talking about the guy who was trying to eat another man's face and almost got away with it until the police shot him. Then there was another man who did a murder on tape and dismembered the body, sending parts all over the country, and other things he did should not be mentioned; I hear the murderer was some Canadian porn star. Recent news has talked about flesh eating diseases that seem to be attacking the life and limbs of really nice people. Finally, speaking of 'grisly,' there was that grizzly bear that ate a murderer—which, I must confess, seems like a cheaper solution than hiring dozens of lawyers to tell the jury why the murderer should be let off. How should we respond to these shocking bits of news? Several thoughts.

First, this world is not paradise. Any philosophy or religion that skirts the problem of evil is inadequate. The Bible is a pretty graphic book, going way back to the beginning in Genesis—particularly chapter three--where Adam and Eve eat the forbidden fruit. The immediate impact of their sin was a lost relation to God: tossed out of Eden. But also, the first family on earth watched one of their sons murder the other over a matter of religious sacrifice and personal jealousy. So much for Mary Poppins.

Perhaps the prophet Jeremiah summarizes the somberest view of human nature in the Bible; he wrote: "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately corrupt; who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9).

Second, it seems to me we are living in a world where bad news gets amplified and good news gets short shrift. A thousand kind deeds of exceptional merit occur on the very same days as the gruesome stuff. The good deeds go unnoticed; but "gory" makes national headlines. Why? Because bad news sells. What can we do to get a better sampling of human history in real time?

I think the current trend toward shock-journalism provides a good reason to watch and read local news. That is because local news is more likely to report a Rotary or Kiwanis scholarship, an honor band, Little League game, or softball followed by a picnic. Of course, bad stuff happens locally too. But, much of today's national news is tailored to be exceptionally titillating.

Third, it seems to me that there is a sense in which the fast pace of life today is accelerating out of control. The faster we go, the less time we make for each other. And the more our relationships stretch and break, the more broken we become. A religious community is called to be a place where relationships are healed and broken lives are mended. Sadly, we do not always live up to this calling. But without religion there would be no hospitals, few orphanages and slavery an acceptable institution.

Finally, the Bible is not a cute, sentimental story. The Hebrew prophets were imprisoned and killed. Jesus came and loved; we bloodied him up and nailed him to a cross. But out of the blood and mayhem comes hope for healing human evil.

This has been Dan Price for Community Comment