

**From:** Mary Craig

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Mary Craig Ministries, Inc.

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Senseless tragedies like that at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, touch us to the core. We move through learned responses of grief—balloons loosed into the air, memorial places with flowers, candles, pictures, and stuffed animals. We hold vigils, dinners, and church services. We talk about taking action so that “it never happens again” and ways to remember those lost to the growing violence in our nation. It’s especially heinous when death and destruction come during what should be happy times, like Christmas.

I heard one doctor on TV say that the trouble with Christmas was religion, that we needed to get rid of religion and just have gift-giving, family time, good food and friends, and all the lights and glitter; what! Just forget the Christ of Christmas? Another doctor referred to letting the psychologists and psychiatrists deal with tragedies. They have medications available, and grief counselors—this in response to a question about the role of the clergy in the Sandy Hook School Shooting.

**People know, however, that through the grief, through the senseless tragedy of evil, they must find safety. We MUST find the One, True, and Living God. We must find hope in our faith in order to overcome evil with good.**



We can go through the motions and traditions of Christmas. We have done that ourselves—decorating, shopping for gifts, church dinners, “cookie day” at school, Christmas caroling, enjoying the lights as the darkest day of the year passes by. There’s beauty, something some would call magical in the air. There’s something assuring about family and church traditions, about Grandma’s recipe for stuffing, the angel tree-topper from World War II, the china used only for special occasions. They help us “keep it all together” through good times and bad. We need the continuity of Christmas, and more importantly, its truth.

We enjoy the excitement of anticipation, of wonder, of something new. That’s why it’s so much fun to be around little children; what is familiar to us is new and fresh to them. They are just learning about the world. There’s an innocence at work, one which Jesus honors when He calls for faith as a little child.

When tragedy strikes and the evil of it, the advice is to return to normal routines as soon as possible. The fact is, however, that for those touched by random acts of violence and the futility of it and the grief of it, a person is changed internally. The event becomes part of who they are now and who they will be. The event has touched their core.

Whatever our lives, whatever our days, we must strain to find truth and have truth in our inward parts, at our core. As believers, we deal in realities because God deals in reality. Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Jesus sanctifies Himself on behalf of believers in Truth (really, not in types or shadows). Jesus is the Faithful and True. The Spirit is Truth.

Death may seem normal in the scheme of life, but actually, it is abnormal to God, who is the God of the Living. Jesus came to bear witness to the truth, to abolish death. (Hebrews 2:14, 25) He came that through Him we might no longer fear death, but know Him who is the Resurrection and the Life. Deep down where we live, we know that death is just wrong. Murder is wrong. So we seek for safety; and that safety is to be found in God, in the Presence of God. No matter what we do so that something “never happens again,” we live in this “present evil age.” We find hope in our faith as we remember the Christ of Christmas, who He is, what He came to do, and why we trust Him, especially in the dark.

Senseless tragedies shake us to the core. **Often, it takes tragedy, trials, and times of persecution for those of the Church to be loosed from the earthly securities of our “sanctuaries” in order to seek sanctuary in the Holy Spirit alone. This is such a time.**

*If you make the Most High your dwelling—even the LORD,*

*Who is my refuge—then no harm will befall you,*

*no disaster will come near your tent.*

*For He will command His angels concerning you*

*to guard you in all your ways. Psalm 91.9-11*

Psalm 91 begins by informing us that the one who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. In the sanctuary of God Most High we find safety from the snare, safety from pestilence, night terrors, and enemy arrows. As we acknowledge the Name of the LORD, He will rescue and protect us. Even if tragedy strikes in the providence and sovereignty of God's plan for our lives, so also we will find Him faithful to turn what was meant for evil into good. (Genesis 50:19, 20; Psalm 23; Romans 8)

You that fear the LORD, trust in the LORD:

He is their help and their shield. Psalm 115:11

In the Old Covenant, the Holy Spirit would come upon a man or woman at various times, and God chose prophets, judges, kings, and priests to serve as vessels to mediate His presence. In the New Covenant, believers receive the very life of God and become "a temple of the Holy Spirit." (1 Corinthians 6.19) The Church is not a building or programs, but people, living stones built upon the foundation of Christ, the Chief Cornerstone. Believers are called out ones, called to be a holy nation, the family of the Father, the household and house of God, a holy sanctuary and dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit. (Ephesians 2.19-22)

Today, believers carry the presence of God. We are kings and priests unto God Most High. The light and love that flow out of us demonstrate to those around us that we are God's holy domain, His dwelling-place, a place where people can come and find sanctuary.

**We are a holy sanctuary in the Lord**, a habitation of God through the Spirit. (Ephesians 2.21, 22) A sanctuary is "a holy place set apart from profane use for the purpose of worship of or communion with a deity." In Ephesus, a stone statue of Diana (Queen of Heaven) inhabited a temple. People came there to worship and commune with it. But "God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that He is Lord of heaven and earth, dwells not in temples made with hands; neither is worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed any thing, seeing He gives to all life, and breath, and all things." (Acts 17.24, 25) God dwells in relationship incarnate, in His people.

As we worship, honoring the Blood of His Son, welcoming the glory of His Presence, the Holy Spirit will come to move in our midst, to intercede, to bring us where Jesus is, to cause us to dwell/abide/enter the relationship of sanctuary. **He will be our sanctuary as we are His sanctuary.** He is our holy place and refuge as we are His holy place and tabernacle. He comes to dwell in us as we come to dwell in Him.



As we come to **live in the relationship of sanctuary**, we no longer need a tabernacle made with hands, for we are His tabernacle made with His hands. The refuge is in us and us in it, for He is in us, and we are in Him. We are encircled, enveloped, in Him as a hiding place, a shelter—the secret place of the Most High. We are safe in Him. Nevertheless, we are exhorted to assemble ourselves together in order to encourage one another to love and good works. (Hebrews 10:24, 25)

As we are cleansed and being cleansed of all filthiness of flesh and spirit, we become that holy place set apart for God's Spirit, and we are filled with His Spirit, permeated by His Spirit. We are declared clean, pure, according to the gospel



of grace; and we become so by the power of the Holy Spirit. We believe, walk in it, and become what God has declared us to be. We beckon others to enter into our joy. We bring all of ourselves for all of His Spirit.

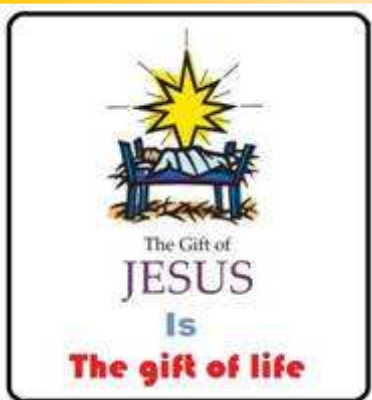
**Let's see ourselves as the holy sanctuary of the Holy Spirit**, separated to a holy purpose, to serve the LORD in holiness and righteousness, without fear, all the days of our lives. Let's see ourselves as a worship center, a place where the LORD of Hosts is sanctified (Isaiah 8.13, 14), a house of prayer for all nations (Isaiah 56.7), the abode of God to which He brings His redeemed people to reign over them as King (Exodus 15.17), a place for the Lord to dwell in our midst (Exodus 25.8).

The important factor in sanctuary is the presence of God, the establishment of right relationship with God. Mother church doesn't bring us into that right relationship. Jesus does. Jesus, by His Blood and righteousness, becomes that new and living way by which we have access to the Throne of Grace and Glory. Jesus, full of grace and truth, God Incarnate, is the Word become flesh who dwelt/tabernacled among us.

That Word dwells/tabernacles in us through the Holy Spirit. **We become the sanctuary of the Holy Spirit.** We are a refuge to those around us seeking rest for their souls. We have the water for which they thirst, the bread for which they hunger, the key that opens the door of their prison, the comfort of the Comforter, the clothing to cover the shame of their nakedness. We extend "safety in God" to others as God's love moves through us, being in us.

**Let us sanctify** the LORD of Hosts. Let us sanctify Jesus as Lord. Let us sanctify the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Christ. Let us **sanctify life**. Where does sanctity of life come from? It stems from love, for God is love and created us in His image—to love. Love seeks not its own. Jesus came to suffer for the sin corrupting creation, to live in conscious agreement with the will and Law of God and to die to pay the penalty for sin as sin-bearer and curse-bearer in order to satisfy divine justice.

**People will not stop aborting and murdering life, whether of the unborn or the born, until they see the signature of the Creator on the creation.** He signed His Name in Blood, and His Name is the Word of God. He sent His Holy Spirit to bring life and preserve it. Love frees from death, expelling it, overcoming it. It stems from the goodness of God, His holiness. Understanding God's goodness encourages us to overcome evil by doing specific acts of good. (Romans 12)



We must find our safety in God as the sanctuary of the Holy Spirit. Do not be ashamed of Him or of the gospel of grace of which we are His witness. He is the Spirit of Christ, and He is given to us. He is "the gift." He is "the blessing." He is the passion of the Presence. This is why Jesus came and what we celebrate at Christmas. Even on the darkest days, God will let us find joy. God will enable us to be overcomers. Rejoice! Rest! Rise up in the power of the Spirit!

Wishing you a blessed Christmas,

*Mary J. Craig, D.P.M.*

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*Behold, the Tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them,*

*And they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them,*

*And be their God. Revelation 21.3*

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