



By the time we reach our teens everyone knows that “bad things happen to good people”, to borrow from the title of Rabbi Harold Kushner’s (1935–) famous book. For centuries this has been what Karl Rahner called “one of the most distressing questions in theology.” Medieval scholars argued about how was it possible for a benevolent and all-powerful God to allow these bad things to happen. By the 20th century most of us, like Rabbi Kushner, just accepted the fact that bad things do happen. So how do we handle it?

There was a very large response to my Friday Reflection written just before the commemoration of the liberation of Auschwitz. This was at a time when we were all also reeling from the tragedy

at Newtown. The reflection seemed to touch a chord about how we move on, how do we help restore the harmony in the world? Obviously, there is no single and simple answer. But I found many of your comments helpful and I would like to share some of them.

First of all, there is no “Delete” button to personal or social history. As my friend Jean said “We need to go to that place often.” Jay, an artist in Mendocino, was 9 years–old when Nazi anti–semitism spread into his native France. He denounces his neighbors who simply watched as his family and friends were “swallowed up by the night, never to be heard from again.” He cries out to those who “stood at the window and watched.”

Both Jean and Jay challenge us to speak up and to live our lives in a way that repairs the disharmony of the world with integrity and simplicity.

Vicki, one of the very practical and compassionate people who helps Starcross in many ways, speaks for a number of you when she urges us to remember not only the evil but also the good. “Of course we must not forget past injustices or atrocities but they don’t have to define us... let us also remember and be overcome by the world’s joys!” She is talking about very ordinary, yet miraculous, events like the birth of a child.

Lisa, poet and mother of a young child, puts it simply. We must value “every small effort to human connectedness.” And, this throws my thoughts back to Etty Hillesum (1914–1943) who wrote in one of her last letters before being shipped to Auschwitz and death,

“And, if we just care enough for each other, God is in safe hands with us despite everything.”

Need a direction for Lent? For the days in which we live? For helping to harmonize and repair the world? I think there is something for all of us in what our friends have shared.

Brother Toby