

Dear Lillian Methodist Church family,

In the early hours of June 14, 2025, Melissa Hortman was murdered in her home near Minneapolis, Minnesota. Her husband, Mark, was also killed in the attack. Earlier that same morning, the same gunman, disguised as a police officer, shot and seriously wounded John Hoffman inside his home. His wife, Yvette, was also shot and severely wounded. Although they were both shot a total of seventeen times, both survived. The killer also went to two more residences with further plans for murder, but was unable to carry it out.

Melissa Hortman and John Hoffman were both sitting members of the Minnesota state legislature. Because of this, they and their spouses were targeted for political assassination by the lone gunman. He was arrested and recently convicted in Minnesota Federal court. I will not utter the killer's name out of respect for the families. During the police investigation, it was determined that the killer had a long list of political targets. Prosecutors say his actions were designed to diminish the Democratic majority in the Minnesota state legislature. All of the victims were targeted for political reasons. All of the victims were Democrats.

The actions of law enforcement are to be commended. The killer was quickly found and brought to justice. However, I cannot say that justice was done in this case. Although the death penalty was available and I believe justified, federal prosecutors chose not to seek the death penalty in exchange for a guilty plea. A trial was not held. The murderer was recently sentenced to two consecutive life terms, followed by forty years. This is a long sentence, but not justice.

The Bible has a lot to say about crime, punishment and justice. Starting in Genesis, scripture reveals the death penalty as the appropriate punishment for murder. "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image." (Genesis 9:6) The law of Moses further emphasizes the death penalty as necessary for true justice. Twice, Exodus declares the death penalty is to be exercised: "Whoever strikes a man so that he dies shall be put to death" (Exodus 21:12); "But if a man willfully attacks another to kill him by cunning, you shall take him from my altar, that he may die." (Exodus 21:14)

Leviticus also demands murder be punished by death. "Whoever takes a human life shall surely be put to death." (Leviticus 24:17) "Whoever kills a person shall be put to death." (Leviticus 24:21) Deuteronomy makes it crystal clear this is not about raging revenge. It is about the demands of a just society and its requirement for evidence and multiple witnesses in court. "On the evidence of two or three witnesses

the one who is to die shall be put to death; a person shall not be put to death on the evidence of one witness."(Deuteronomy 17:6) In all these passages, scripture assumes the victim has been deliberately murdered and is not an accidental or justified death.

The New Testament concurs with the Old Testament. The death penalty is not about revenge. It is about justice and God's agent for justice, the ruling government. Paul says in Romans 13 that as long as a government is rewarding the good and punishing the evil, they are God's appointed servants. And... "if you do wrong, be afraid for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer." Nowhere in the New Testament is the death penalty rescinded. God's law is still the best law. God commands that governments are therefore required to act as God's agent for just punishment of evil.

I can only pray that the family of Charlie Kirk does obtain justice for his political assassination. As in Minnesota, a bullet was used to try and change the political landscape. Yet, in Charlie's case, there is a distinct difference. At the deaths of the lawmakers, there was universal support for the victims and absolute disdain for the shooter. Yet Charlie's death has brought out the absolute worst of human depravity. Many in our country could not contain their gleeful approval of his death. I have never before witnessed such a public display of evil residing in a person's heart. Evil and proud of it.

It is striking in its similarity to Revelation Chapter 11. God's two witnesses have been testifying to the wickedness of the culture. They are killed and the world throws a party. They "gaze at their dead bodies" and "those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and make merry and exchange presents." I saw that same attitude with the death of Charlie Kirk. God have mercy on us. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

See y'all Sunday
Perry Cunningham
Lay Leader