

Dear Lillian Methodist Church family,

Jesus said in John 12: "Truly, Truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." Jesus is of course speaking of His own death on the cross. As He continues speaking, it is clear that these words are also true for His followers: "Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life." The servant is not greater than his master. They persecuted Jesus. They will persecute His followers. Sometimes, to the point of death. The Church Father Tertullian has said, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church." When that seed dies, "it bears much fruit," just as Jesus said.

Charlie Kirk died a martyr. Of this, I am sure. His martyrdom was unique in that it was so public. He has much in common with the martyrdom of Stephen in Acts 7. [I will speak more of this in an upcoming letter.] Only eternity will reveal the amount of fruit his death will bear.

Unlike Charlie, most martyrs are unknown and unsung. This is especially true of a current group of ongoing martyrs who are dying for no other reason than being a Christian. Even the Christian world is shockingly unaware. The ongoing persecution of Christians in Nigeria has been hidden in plain sight. Apparently, the slaughter of Christians by Islamic jihadists is not very newsworthy.

Newsweek online reports that since 2009, over 125,000 Nigerian Christians have been martyred. That is twice as many Americans killed in Vietnam. Men, women, and children are dying for their faith. Churches are burned, and pastors are killed. The ruling Nigerian government is fully aware, but chooses to turn a blind eye to the carnage.

Often, the believers are rounded up as a group. They are then offered the chance to renounce Christ and embrace Islam. Those who refused to convert to Islam are then beheaded. I could find no reports of any of these brave Christians denying Jesus to save their life. They are fulfilling scripture every day, ".... for they loved not their lives even unto death."

I Corinthians 12 says, "And if one part of the body suffers, all the parts suffer with it." Our brothers and sisters in Nigeria are suffering. We cannot remain unaffected. We must pray, but also act if possible. I know the Global Methodist Church has a presence in Nigeria. As Lay Leader, I will investigate further how we can assist our African brethren.

See y'all Sunday
Perry Cunningham
Lay Leader