

## Does evil really exist in our world?

If anything, the shootings Friday in Aurora, Colo., show the existence of evil.

And evil is hard to understand. Science might give us a multitude of answers, none of them precise or comforting – or ultimately, satisfying.

Evil acts can be explained by mental disease, by physical problems such as a brain tumor, by various sorts of intoxication and resulting brain damage, by the environmental influence of a violence-prone society, media exposure, gun worship, video games, you name it.

The church, on the other hand, teaches that evil exists, both in the hearts of men and in the person of the Evil One, the antithesis of all that is good. The church teaches that, given the doctrine of original sin, evil lurks within us all, and that we are only as good as we are successful at resisting its temptations, from racism to assault to murder.

But what makes an apparently normal young man plan quietly to kill and maim his neighbors in a solid, working-class, ethnically diverse neighborhood?

The Evil One, or a bad case of the evil within us all?

Perhaps it makes no difference. Once we recognize and admit that evil exists, do we need to know what sets it free? Or is it enough to recognize evil for what it is?

Both President Barack Obama and his challenger, Gov. Mitt Romney, acknowledged the reality of evil in the senseless violence Friday. But only the vast number of victims in this case elevates it above the ordinary, everyday violence of our world.

Killing and maiming, stealing and lying, abuse and neglect, are so common that we seldom remark on their evil nature. Man's inhumanity to man is legion. It's only when the victim count starts to add up that we seem to recognize it.

We all might be able to agree on the evil nature of the likes of Adolf Hitler, Pol Pot, Josef Stalin and their ilk. Mass murderers and serial killers we recognize as evil.

But what about the prison guard who helped keep the Jews from escaping, or the police officer who looks the other way while his friends beat some prisoner senseless? The soldiers who, freed from restraint in the heat of battle, kill civilians or even their own comrades?

And how could our loving God, however you look at Him, allow evil to exist at all?

Does evil have to exist?

The answer should be apparent, theology aside.

Evil does exist. And seldom is it seen more starkly than it appeared Friday.

But that was only the tip of the iceberg. It'd be easy to forget that humans are, mostly, noble creatures more likely to help their fellow man than to kill or maim him.

Still, we're reminded again and again that it may take only one small thing to release the evil within any one of us. Happens all the time.

And that should be cause for both prayer and watchfulness, repentance and celebration. For despite the presence of evil, that's not what we were intended for. We're better, far better, than that. Every evil event brings out the best, the very best in us; witness the woman who stayed behind to save her best friend from bleeding to death.

Evil is not in control; we are. But we cannot afford to let down our guard, because evil could be, probably is, right around the corner.

— Steve Haynes

### On the Prairie Dog Steve Haynes



## Making sense of senseless things

No one will deny the horrific events of last Friday's shooting in the Aurora movie theater, but the spin of it, by some, has surprised me. A dear friend of mine said it was because God is no longer in our country. We have taken him out of the schools and, I suppose, that would include malls and other events. She continued her tirade about the country's evil ways.

It is amazing to me how we can take the actions of one very sick man and make our country the evil one and yet every day there are incredible acts of heroism.

We don't have to look far to find those either. When a fire recently threatened the home of Bill and Joy Johnson, neighbors sprung into action driving back the flames and, in the process, saving the family home.

Small towns survive because of the

### Phase II Mary Kay Woodyard



goodness of people, from a volunteer fire department to a home grown county fair. We see these neighborly actions, if not always hearing about them, across the country each and every day.

So why are some so willing to see our country as void of God? Surely if His absence results in such things as the Aurora shootings, His presence is visible in the actions to save the Johnson home. The action of the young man in Aurora who sacrificed his life by shielding his young female friend's

body, thus saving her life, surely has God's thumbprint on it.

Sometimes we try to make sense of the senseless, or try to be able to place blame. Perhaps all of that gives us a sense of control, of power over powerless situations. To be sure, there is a need to evaluate the events before we rush out to pass more laws. We need to look at mail order anything, from vitamins to guns. We need to have better assessment for mental health problems.

Unfortunately, we can't point to one thing that caused this young man's breakdown and society's loss of a talented mind. But before we point the finger at the country as a whole, we need to look at the sum of its parts and say, "He made it, and it was good." Mail to: mkwoodyard@ruraltel.net

## A must read list of books for the lifetime reader

Currently there is a survey circulating via Facebook: 100 Books to Read Before You Die. I'm competitive, I want to win. I started checking off titles.

Apparently I got a great literary start. Dad read to us every night and "Winnie the Pooh" (on the list) was our favorite.

I read and enjoyed quite a few of those books myself.

Some I vaguely remember as required reading in High School. What is it about required reading? Any story immediately loses whatever appeal it may have held.

Does it count if you attempted to read something? "War and Peace" gave me an understanding of why Russians drink so much vodka! You have to live in Russia and Tolstoy is probably required reading! Just to be certain I had not misjudged I tried "Anna Karenina" not long ago, still not my thing.

Hamlet was on the list. We've been embroiled in a controversy about Hamlet. Sunday Church was informal. Instead of a sermon, Dave quizzed us about last week's message; then we did a Bible Study on this week's Gospel lesson.

Last week's message: Herod ordering John the Baptist's head delivered on a plate to Salome. It made an impression. I'd even discussed it with a friend who heard a similar sermon at another

### This Too Shall Pass Nancy Hagman



church.

Dave expanded on the theme of Herod's guilt.

He used some examples of situations where people tried to run from their deeds. For instance: Hamlet, who killed his brother. He repeatedly attempted to wash the blood from his hands, uttering the famous line "Out, damn'd spot!"

I don't remember reading "Hamlet". Yet I knew something was wrong with that version of the story.

So I asked our Sunday dinner guests. I was certain there was a sleep walking woman. Was it Hamlet's wife? No one at the table had a clue.

The hubby chided me for nitpicking "He was just reinforcing a point."

Maybe, but I can't let things go that easy. I looked it up. Not only was it not "Hamlet" who said it; the quote is from "Macbeth", spoken by Lady Macbeth. Ah yes, I remember now: the witches, the doctor. You'd think I'd read Macbeth. Perhaps I have? (Unfortunately it's not on the list!)

Further research revealed Hamlet did

not kill his brother, either. But a brother was killed—I don't have the space to explain. Anyway, you've probably read it!

Recently I picked up about a dozen books from the local library's "discard" sale. Make a donation, take home books and have a dish of homemade ice cream. Heck of a deal.

I started reading "The Last Girls" by Lee Smith. It's entertaining. During a description of the landscape the author keeps describing the trees as "live oaks". Why is she telling us the trees are alive?

I'm looking out the window at a pine dead tree. Drought or pine bark beetles, who knows? I'm trying to keep my chin up about the weather and I just don't want to hear anymore about live oaks!

I research. Hey! There is a variety of trees called "live oaks!"

When I did the 100 Books to Read survey, I complimented the poster. She had read 56! She replied, "Just enjoy. Don't count!" (I'll try as long as I don't have to read "War and Peace".)

It's true, it is not a contest. It's not about who is right and who is wrong.

It is about enjoyment. And finally figuring out things some English Teacher probably tried to tell us long ago.

Some things we learn for ourselves in our own time. ENJOY!

Thumbs up to Denise Schmitz for her letter to the editor: It is agreed by many, with the negative attitude in Norton, it is no wonder many local people go out of town shopping. If the business owners want the locals to shop hometown, they best start training the employees and themselves the importance of proper, friendly and courteous Customer Service. Emailed in.

Thumbs up to Mary Kay Woodyard for passing on an attitude we all should adopt when she recently wrote: "Anyone can see the bad. Anyone can be angry. The real skill in life is when you are able to experience joy, because someone else found it." Thank you, Mary Kay for such a incite to life!!!! If everyone in Norton could adopt that attitude, wouldn't Norton be a wonderful place to live? Emailed in.

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ISSN 1063-701X

215 S. Kansas Ave., Norton, KS 67654

Published each Tuesday and Friday by Haynes Publishing Co., 215 S. Kansas Ave., Norton, Kan. 67654. Periodicals mail postage paid at Norton, Kan. 67654.

Postmaster: Send address changes to Norton Telegram, 215 S. Kansas Ave., Norton, Kan. 67654. Official newspaper of Norton and Norton County. Member of the Kansas Press Association, National Newspaper Association, and the Nebraska Press Association

Nor'West Newspapers  
Dick and Mary Beth Boyd  
Publishers, 1970-2002

Kansas Press Association

