

# Kingdom Dreams Violent Realities

Reflections on gun violence  
from Micah 4:1-4



**CHURCH & SOCIETY**

The United Methodist Church

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*“In days to come...they shall beat their swords  
into plowshares,  
and their spears into pruning hooks;  
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,  
neither shall they learn war any more...for the  
mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken.”*

*Micah 4:1-4*

*Kingdom Dreams, Violent Realities* is a three-week Bible study produced by the General Board of Church and Society of The United Methodist Church. First created in 2014, this edition has been revised and updated by Jeania Ree V. Moore, Director of Civil and Human Rights.

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### **A message from Bishop Sally Dyck**

Dear Friends:

Recently in the Chicago Tribune, there was an article about “one gun’s journey” (October 7, 2016). A woman’s South Shore apartment had been broken into and a gang member stole her .40-caliber Glock handgun. The woman purchased the gun for her personal safety. But in the hands of a gang member who stole it, it left a trail of 42 bullet casings, two people dead and five wounded.

The “journey of guns” is a reality across our nation and our world. In Chicago, the police seize one illegal gun about every 75 minutes, so imagine the multiple journeys of these guns alone in one city. The “journey of guns” happens between states where guns are trafficked into states with stricter laws. The “journey of guns” happens globally, for instance between the US and the Philippines, where there is a major gun violence problem after recent elections.

Chicago is known throughout the world for its gun violence. As I write this, there have been over 600 deaths and over 3500 shootings in 2016. Only cooler weather seems to deter the shootings.

If 3500 people have directly experienced gun violence in one year alone, and they each have 2 family members (they probably have more), that’s 7000 people that have been traumatized. If they have 5 friends (probably more) that’s another 17,500 people impacted with trauma. If they belong to any group, like a church, club or school, another 50 people (probably more) are traumatized in their circle, totaling 175,000 people.

All told that’s about 200,000 people who have been traumatized in some way in one year’s worth of gun violence so far! Gun violence is a public health issue for many reasons, including major trauma for individuals and communities.

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Most residents in the United States—9 out of 10—would prefer stricter gun laws (New York Times, Editorial Board, 10/10/16). Even gun owners prefer that there be stricter laws, such as sensible laws including background checks and bans on gun ownership by domestic abusers or the mentally ill. Yet, year after year our elected officials in Congress and in statehouses reject even mild, gradual changes and continue to pass legislation that allows people to carry concealed weapons in public places with no permit, no background check, and no training. Many good Christians own guns and use them for appropriate purposes. However, without stricter gun laws—nationally and internationally—we actually place ourselves and others in greater jeopardy.

This Bible study, Kingdom Dreams, Violent Realities, is important in helping us identify and articulate the common good that is essential in our policies and attitudes toward guns. We need biblically-based and faith-filled conversations about this public health epidemic. Lives are at stake!

Sally Dyck  
Resident Bishop  
Chicago Area  
October 2016

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## Introduction

### Micah 4:1-4

<sup>1</sup> In days to come

the mountain of the LORD's house  
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,  
and shall be raised up above the hills.

Peoples shall stream to it,

<sup>2</sup> and many nations shall come and say:  
"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,  
to the house of the God of Jacob;  
that he may teach us his ways  
and that we may walk in his paths."

For out of Zion shall go forth instruction,  
and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

<sup>3</sup> He shall judge between many peoples,  
and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away;

they shall beat their swords into plowshares,  
and their spears into pruning hooks;  
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,  
neither shall they learn war any more;

<sup>4</sup> but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees,  
and no one shall make them afraid;  
for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken.

At the 2016 General Conference of The United Methodist Church, the resolution "Our Call to End Gun Violence" was passed, becoming an official church statement and part of the Book of Resolutions. "Our Call to End Gun Violence" draws on Micah 4:1-4 for its biblical inspiration, applying Micah's prophetic dream of peace to our violent reality. This study deepens the connection between gun violence and Micah 4:1-4 by providing an opportunity to delve into the text thematically while exploring the multifaceted issue of gun violence. Over the course of the three weeks, we engage Micah 4:1-4 through the themes of the common good, transformation, and flourishing. These themes draw out the theological meaning of the passage, provide a window into the causes and implications of gun violence, and suggest faith-filled responses to this scourge.



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At the end of the study is the text of Resolution #3428 “Our Call to End Gun Violence” and a list of advocacy issues and resources.

As “Our Call to End Gun Violence” states, “Whether it happens in the towns of northeastern Nigeria, a suburb in the United States, the streets of Australia, or an office in France, gun violence has become an all-too-often frightening phenomenon. We need the reality of Micah’s vision more than ever.” Gun violence is a tragic reality the world over. In light of this global context, this study provides particular focus on the United States. Gun violence in the United States of America is staggering, with 91 people killed by guns each day. The U.S., which has less than 5 percent of the world’s population, has 30-50 percent of the world’s civilian-owned guns. This has a tremendous impact both on the United States and on other nations. If gun violence is not a significant reality in your community or country, there are several ways you can engage this study. Use the points of connection and juxtaposition with the picture presented here to probe how your community might engage the issue of gun violence. Consider what issues of violence are a reality and what lessons may apply from this study. Pray for your fellow Christians where gun violence is a reality.

As suggested in the title of this study, there is a gap between prophesied dreams of the Kingdom and the present violent reality. What do future visions of peace mean for a very violent present? How are we to understand this and other prophetic scriptures? Is prophecy of the Kingdom only about a far-off time yet to come, or does prophecy about the future have some bearing on the present? This tension is, in many ways, at the heart of this study. Read on to learn how prophetic dreams of the future Kingdom can infuse and transform the reality of the present.

<sup>1</sup> Everytown Research, “Gun Violence by the Numbers,” <https://everytownresearch.org/gun-violence-by-the-numbers/>, accessed 1 November 2016. Data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control.

<sup>2</sup> D’Vera Cohn, Paul Taylor, et al, “Gun Homicide Rate Down 49% Since 1993 Peak; Public Unaware: Chapter 5: Context,” Pew Research Center, 7 May 2013, <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2013/05/07/chapter-5-context>, accessed 1 November 2016.

# Kingdom Dreams Violent Realities

## Week 1

### The Common Good

Micah 4:1-2

<sup>1</sup> In days to come  
the mountain of the LORD's house  
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,  
and shall be raised up above the hills.  
Peoples shall stream to it,  
<sup>2</sup> and many nations shall come and say:  
"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,  
to the house of the God of Jacob;  
that he may teach us his ways  
and that we may walk in his paths."  
For out of Zion shall go forth instruction,  
and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

### The Passage

Little is known about the eight-century BCE prophet Micah, yet his words and imagery are some of the most memorable in the Bible. Throughout the book of Micah, prophecy alternates between condemnation for injustice and opportunities for repentance. Micah 4:1-2 begins a message of repentance. To grasp its meaning, we must recall the condemnation in chapter 3 and the broader context of the book.

The political situation within and without ancient Israel sets the backdrop for Micah's words. Micah lives at a worrisome time for Israel. Powerful nations like Assyria lurk in the shadows, ready to invade the Kingdom of Judah.<sup>3</sup> These external threats mirror the rockiness of the internal situation. Previous years of economic development, coupled with corrupt leaders, have sprouted grave inequality and violent injustice within the nation

<sup>3</sup> Klaus Koch. *The Prophets: The Assyrian Period*. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, p. 104.

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Micah condemns the political and religious leaders who are actively involved in the oppression of the poor. They “hate the good and love the evil” (3:2) and declare war against the hungry (3:5). Micah accuses them of being cannibalistic towards the people (3:2) and desiring personal gain to the extent of causing bloodshed and widespread corruption. Justice in the courts is skewed towards the affluent and religious teaching can be bought. As a result of such fraud, God chooses to remain hidden and unapproachable: “Then they will cry to the LORD, but God will not answer them; God will hide God’s face from them at that time, because they have acted wickedly” (3:4).

Israel at this time is thus a people in peril. Their outward security is compromised as powerful nations lie in wait, and their inward security is likewise at risk as widespread injustice has separated them from God. Violence due to self-interest threatens from outside and inside the nation. The security compromise is so great that Micah prophesies the flattening of the stronghold of Zion, the utter ruination of Jerusalem (3:12).

The message of Micah 4 comes amidst this desperate situation for the people of God. Against the closing image in chapter 3 of God’s city being brought low, the opening to chapter 4 envisions the “mountain of the LORD’s house...established as the highest of the mountains, and...raised up above the hills” (4:1). The reestablishment of God’s rule is not limited to Israel or Judah. Instead, the unsurpassable height of the mountain declares the limitless reach and universal recognition of God’s transcendence.

As Micah 4:2 shows, this universal recognition is not only of God’s greatness, but also, in light of that, of the error of people’s ways. Micah’s vision foretells of a deep desire among the peoples for change: the heartfelt pangs of earnest repentance. There is a universal hunger for something more, something higher than what they have been mired in. In Micah 4:1-2, we see that the path of violence has led nowhere. Seeking out one’s own welfare against others—whether fueled by fear, self-protection, or self-interest—has failed. God’s ways and paths are needed. These sketch a different route, one holding great promise.

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The journey to God is not an individualistic pursuit. In Micah's vision, we see that Israel and Judah's salvation is not separate from that of the rest of the world, but connected to it. All peoples, with no distinctions made for some nations or social groups above others, stream to God's presence so "that God may teach us God's ways and that we may walk in God's paths" (4:2). Antagonistic borders formerly fraught with violence, societal divisions predicated on injustice, and the isolating distance that separated God from God's people are all dissolved as the nations go up to God together to learn God's ways. Participatory, transcendent, and universal, God's justice is the justice of the common good.

## Contextual Application: Gun Trafficking

The common good is a central issue at stake in the reality of gun violence, both philosophically and practically. Philosophically, talk and thought about guns is often framed in the discourse of rights, where guns are conceived of as an individual right. The individual right to bear arms is often construed of as being at odds with talk of the public good, as if the two are mutually opposed, or as if consideration of the public good is a threat to—rather than core component of—individual security. Individual security is often weighted against public security. Micah's vision, though, shows us that this is not God's way – individual security is bound up with common security.

Practically, people often seek guns out of fear and self-protection, acting in a way that presupposes that individual security is set at odds with common security.<sup>4</sup> While many claim that the prevalence of guns in society *is* the path to common security, studies have shown the opposite to be the case. When a gun is present in a household, the risk of gun violence—whether accidental or intentional—increases.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Kate Masters, "Fear of Other People is Now the Primary Motivation for American Gun Ownership, Landmark Study Finds," *The Trace*, 19 September 2016, <https://www.thetrace.org/2016/09/harvard-gun-ownership-study-self-defense/>, 1 November 2016.

<sup>5</sup> Evan DeFilippis and Devin Hughes, "The Myth of the Good Guy with a Gun," *Slate*, 25 January 2015, [http://www.slate.com/articles/health\\_and\\_science/medical\\_examiner/2015/01/good\\_guy\\_with\\_a\\_gun\\_myth\\_guns\\_increase\\_the\\_risk\\_of\\_homicide\\_accidents\\_suicide.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/health_and_science/medical_examiner/2015/01/good_guy_with_a_gun_myth_guns_increase_the_risk_of_homicide_accidents_suicide.html), accessed 1 November 2016.

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The fact that, in the United States, more people were killed in 2015 by toddlers with guns than by terrorists is a heartbreaking testament to the fact that the mere presence of guns is a reliable indicator of gun violence.<sup>6</sup>

Looking at some of the most common situations of gun violence, we see that an embrace of the common good is absent from many of the laws and cultural attitudes surrounding guns. Gun trafficking is a major source of gun violence. Gun trafficking often consists of the movement of guns from one locale where they are legally obtained to another where they are not, or the purchasing of guns by a “straw purchaser,” a person who can legally buy guns and then sells them to someone who cannot legally possess guns. Trafficking patterns reveal that weak gun laws in one locale fuel a flow of guns to another locale where there are stricter laws.

The extreme gun violence in Chicago, Illinois provides an example. The city has seen its worst violence in two decades in recent years (2015 and 2016).<sup>7</sup> On October 19, 2016, Chicago passed a tragic milestone: its 600th homicide of the year, a number it has not seen since 2003.<sup>8</sup> Police cite illegal guns as a significant factor in these deaths (and in the 3,000 shootings that affected Chicago to date by October 2016).

<sup>6</sup> Lindy West, “The macabre truth of gun control in the US is that toddlers kill more people than terrorists do,” *The Guardian*, 13 March 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/mar/13/the-macabre-truth-of-gun-control-in-the-us-is-that-toddlers-kill-more-people-than-terrorists-do>, accessed 1 November 2016. Josh Hafner, “‘Guns don’t kill people; toddlers kill people,’ gun control group says,” *USA Today*, 17 October 2016 <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation-now/2016/10/17/guns-dont-kill-people-toddlers-kill-people-gun-control-group-says/92310384/>, accessed 1 November 2016.

<sup>7</sup> While Chicago is a commonly-cited example, cities in California, Florida, Texas, Kentucky, Nevada, Maryland, Massachusetts, and Colorado also saw significant increases at similar or worse rates. See Mark Berman, “America is safer than it was decades ago. But homicides are up again in Chicago and cities across the country,” *The Washington Post*, 26 July 2016, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2016/07/26/halfway-through-2016-homicides-are-up-in-more-than-two-dozen-big-u-s-cities/?tid=sm\\_tw&utm\\_term=.368d92ca81b5](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2016/07/26/halfway-through-2016-homicides-are-up-in-more-than-two-dozen-big-u-s-cities/?tid=sm_tw&utm_term=.368d92ca81b5), accessed 1 November 2016.

<sup>8</sup> Mark Berman, “Chicago surpasses 600 homicides in 2016 and is on pace to have its deadliest year in two decades,” *The Washington Post*, 1 November 2016, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2016/11/01/chicago-surpasses-600-homicides-in-2016-and-is-on-pace-to-have-its-deadliest-year-in-two-decades/?utm\\_term=.5b6f9cc4568c](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2016/11/01/chicago-surpasses-600-homicides-in-2016-and-is-on-pace-to-have-its-deadliest-year-in-two-decades/?utm_term=.5b6f9cc4568c), accessed 1 November 2016.

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Sixty percent—that is, three in five—of the guns recovered by officials at crime scenes in Chicago were first sold in other states. Indiana, Mississippi, and Wisconsin—none of which require a background for every gun sale—were found to be the top out-of-state suppliers. Like 17 other states, Illinois goes beyond federal law in requiring background checks on all handgun sales; yet, its largest city is one of the most notorious for gun violence.

We see the same situation elsewhere in the United States. Law enforcement officials have identified the “Iron Pipeline” as a pattern of trafficking from states with weaker gun laws—such as Virginia, Georgia, Florida, Pennsylvania—up Interstate 95 to New York and New Jersey.<sup>9</sup> A 2016 report from the New York Attorney General’s Office found that 74 percent of firearms used in NY crimes were originally bought in states with weak gun laws.<sup>10</sup> The lack of policy change on this issue reveals the failure to embrace and take into account the public good as part of the private good.

This failure is magnified on an international level. Though the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Arms Trade Treaty in 2014 to prevent illegal trade of small arms (assault rifles, sub-machine guns, light machine guns, and more) across international boundaries, gun trafficking is still a major issue.<sup>11</sup> Notably, the U.S. fuels the spread of guns around the world, facilitating violent crime in other countries. Though having less than 5 percent of the world’s population, the United States has 30-50 percent of the world’s civilian-owned guns.<sup>12</sup> Of the illegal rifles seized by law enforcement in the Philippines in 2013, 90 percent originated in the U.S.<sup>13</sup> Of the guns seized in Mexico and traced between 2009-2014, 70 percent originated in the United States.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>9</sup> New York report: “Report Highlights How Guns Flow Into New York From States With Weaker Laws,” [http://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/25/nyregion/report-highlights-how-guns-flow-into-new-york-from-states-with-weaker-laws.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/25/nyregion/report-highlights-how-guns-flow-into-new-york-from-states-with-weaker-laws.html?_r=0), accessed 1 November 2016. For the full report, see “Target on Trafficking: New York Crime Guns Analysis,” <https://targettrafficking.ag.ny.gov/#part1>, released October 2016.

<sup>10</sup> “Target on Trafficking: New York Crime Guns Analysis,” Office of the Attorney General of New York: Eric T. Schneiderman, October 2016 <https://targettrafficking.ag.ny.gov/#part1>, accessed 1 November 2016.

<sup>11</sup> United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, “The Arms Trade Treaty,” <https://www.un.org/disarmament/convarms/att/>, accessed 1 November 2016.

<sup>12</sup> D’Vera Cohn, Paul Taylor, et al, “Gun Homicide Rate Down 49% Since 1993 Peak; Public Unaware: Chapter 5: Context,” Pew Research Center, 7 May 2013, <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2013/05/07/chapter-5-context>, accessed 1 November 2016.

<sup>13</sup> Small Arms Survey 2013.

<sup>14</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office, Firearms Trafficking Study, January 2016.

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Despite these findings, gun trafficking is not a federal crime in the U.S. and only 17 states and Washington, D.C. require background checks on all gun sales. Only federally licensed gun dealers are required to conduct criminal background checks; those who state that they sell guns only occasionally are not required to conduct background checks or hold a dealer license. The lack of concern for the common good reflected in laws, regulations, and attitudes facilitates the proliferation of guns and spread of gun violence across the U.S. and world. The unregulated desire for guns as a source of individual security in certain parts of the U.S. and world impacts others, at a high price.

### **Personal Connection: A Gun Violence Victim**

On January 21, 2013, Hadiya Pendleton performed with her high school band at President Barack Obama's inauguration in Washington, D.C. One week later, on January 29, 2013, she was killed by a gang in her hometown of Chicago. Hadiya was taking shelter from the rain with friends when a shooter, thinking they were members of a rival gang, approached them and fired. She was 15 years old.

Like so many other victims of gun violence, Hadiya was shot and killed with an illegally trafficked gun that entered Chicago through the weak gun laws of neighboring states. Her death sparked international response: President Obama spoke about it in his 2013 State of the Union address, First Lady Michelle Obama attended Hadiya's funeral, and a bill in Hadiya's name was introduced in the Senate in 2015. Her birthday, June 2, was declared National Gun Violence Awareness Day and her friends started a movement to get people to #WearOrange on this date, orange being the color hunters wear to protect themselves in the woods. Yet despite this movement, guns still flow rapidly into Chicago and other areas around the country and globe due to the absence of change in regulation, enforcement, and attitudes. As the death tolls in Chicago since Hadiya's death indicate, the desire for guns in states with weak gun laws continues to affect the lives of others elsewhere. The common good is not yet embraced.

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## Questions for Discussion

1. How is gun trafficking impacting your community today? Visit the Gun Violence Archive (<http://www.gunviolencearchive.org/>) or conduct quick research for statistics on incidents of gun violence in your community (city, state, region, country). Were the guns involved in these incidents trafficked? What factors—neighboring states, distant countries, the drug trade, or other causes—affected the trafficking?
2. Better legislation is only part of the solution to stopping gun trafficking. What other types of interventions could have been made by whom and when to prevent the death of Hadiya Pendleton and others? In other words, who and what else beside the law is part of the solution to stopping gun trafficking? What actions should the Church take in facing this issue?
3. Where in our world have you seen the picture presented in the opening of Micah 4 people coming together to seek out God's justice?
4. In what ways does the common good inform your decision-making process? In what situations, or regarding what issues, do you take the security of others into account when making decisions for yourself?



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## Week 2

### Transformation

Micah 4:3

<sup>3</sup> He shall judge between many peoples,  
and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away;  
they shall beat their swords into plowshares,  
and their spears into pruning hooks;  
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,  
neither shall they learn war any more;

### The Passage

The third verse of chapter 4 contains some of the most remarkable and beautiful imagery among the prophets. In Micah 4:1-2 we saw that many nations will stream to the mountain of the Lord's house. Here, we see what happens when they arrive: God establishes justice, arbitrating among them. Even for "strong" and distant nations, God's judgment will stand. Nothing in the passage indicates that this arbitration will occur only among monotheistic nations or nations already in peaceful coexistence with Israel. Once again, following week one's focus, this judgment affects all nations, regardless of their belief systems or prior relationships to one another. God is the final judge and the nations will voluntarily journey to God out of their desire to live in peace, without violence and bloodshed.

Notably, Micah 4:3 specifies that the nations will still be armed when God arbitrates between them. The transformation of weapons into instruments of harvesting food occurs after judgments are made in the prophecy. Micah envisions God's judgments as so just that the nations will not simply turn in their weapons of warfare, but will actively engage in their transformation: they will undertake the difficult work of beating weapons into agricultural instruments that provide for the welfare of all people. It will require a great deal of specifically human effort to transform weapons into peaceful instruments. God does not collect or transform the weapons.

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Once the judgments are handed down, the nations themselves – the text specifically states, “they shall beat their swords” – will transform what was once violently used to cause bloodshed into instruments to benefit all people.

It is intriguing to note that plowshares and pruning hooks can be used as weapons. The transformation that occurs, then, is not only in the weapons but in those who wield them. It is a holistic and total transformation, not a temporary one. The purpose of these instruments changes as the peoples’ focus transforms from self-centered violence to all-centered welfare. There is thus a culture change that is part of the eradication of weapons. Previously defining disputes—among nations and within them, rooted in racism, ethnic hatred, nationalism, sexism, and more—end with the recognition of God’s justice. There is no more “learning war,” as the violent divisions that gave nations their identities are eradicated. A new culture, a new way of peaceful co-existence and reconciliation for all, will be established.

It is vital to reemphasize that it is not God who will remove the weaponry. God does not treat the nations as if they are small children who cannot be trusted, taking the weapons away on God’s own; nor does God magically change the culture. The nations themselves participate in the hard work of their own transformation, changing weapons and cultures of violence into vehicles of peace and provision supporting the welfare of all. This is a picture of corporate conversion – a full, universal repentance.

### **Contextual Application: Suicide and Domestic Violence**

The transformation of weapons into plowshares has meaningful connections to gun violence. In the reading of the passage offered here, guns used in hunting could be affirmed and would go hand in hand with the cessation of guns used for violent ends. Guns used, in design or purpose, to harm, kill, and destroy others are not weapons transformed. Suicide and domestic violence provide two windows on the holistic transformation that is needed in facing gun violence.

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Suicide and domestic violence are hugely implicated in gun violence. Almost two-thirds of all gun deaths in the U.S. are suicide<sup>15</sup> and most mass shootings in the United States are related to domestic or family violence.<sup>16</sup> Of the 91 deaths that occur each day in the United States due to guns, over 50 are suicides.<sup>17</sup> Though the U.S.'s suicide rate is comparable to other nations, its rates of suicide by gun are over eight times higher than other high-income countries.<sup>18</sup> As regards domestic violence, of females killed with a firearm in the U.S. in a homicide in 2011, over half were killed by an intimate partner.<sup>19</sup> In an average month, 51 women in the U.S. are killed with a gun by intimate partners.<sup>20</sup> Many women have also been threatened with a gun or shot at by intimate partners and have survived—about 4.5 million women alive today.<sup>21</sup> In international perspective, studies have found that women in the U.S. “are more than sixteen times more likely to be murdered with guns than women in other high-income countries.”<sup>22</sup> The U.S. is by far the most dangerous place for women among so-called “developed” countries when it comes to gun violence. In women’s fatal encounters with guns in the U.S., domestic violence is the largest context. Suicide and domestic violence are thus major contexts for gun violence.

The issue of access is one of the main contributing factors to the intersection of suicide and guns and the intersection of domestic violence and guns. Weak laws enabling easy access facilitate gun violence in both situations. Studies show that access is a major factor in the prevalence of suicide.

<sup>15</sup> Margot Sanger-Katz, “Gun Deaths are Mostly Suicides,” *The New York Times*, 8 October 2015, [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/09/upshot/gun-deaths-are-mostly-suicides.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/09/upshot/gun-deaths-are-mostly-suicides.html?_r=0), accessed on 1 November 2016.

<sup>16</sup> “Guns and Domestic Violence,” Everytown for Gun Safety, <https://everytownresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Guns-and-Domestic-Violence-10.12.16FINAL.pdf>, accessed on 1 November 2016

<sup>17</sup> “The Truth about Suicide and Guns,” Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, <http://www.bradycampaign.org/the-truth-about-suicide-guns>, accessed on 1 November 2016.

<sup>18</sup> Robert Preidt, “How U.S. gun deaths compare to other countries,” *CBSNews*, 3 February 2016, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/how-u-s-gun-deaths-compare-to-other-countries/>, accessed on 1 November 2016.

<sup>19</sup> <https://everytownresearch.org/reports/guns-and-violence-against-women/>, accessed on 1 November 2016.

<sup>20</sup> “Guns and Domestic Violence,” Everytown for Gun Safety, <https://everytownresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Guns-and-Domestic-Violence-10.12.16FINAL.pdf>, accessed on 1 November 2016.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

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The New York Times reports that in early 20th-century England, many people committed suicide by intentionally inhaling fumes from coal gas ovens.<sup>23</sup> When oven technology advanced, fewer people died by this method and only some found an alternate means of suicide. In other words, the suicide rate as a whole dropped substantially when a major means of access was restricted. Similarly, when the Israeli army stopped letting service members take guns home on weekends in 2006, the suicide rate fell by 40 percent.<sup>24</sup> Limited access impacts suicide rates overall; only some continue to pursue suicide. Access is similarly a factor in the impact of guns in domestic violence. What is known as the “boyfriend loophole” in U.S. federal law allows domestic abusers to easily access guns. As Lindsay Nichols of the Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence explains, “[For] a couple who has never been married—they don’t live together, they don’t have children together—gun prohibition won’t kick in. Even if there’s been a violent assault that does lead to a criminal conviction, [an abuser] will be able to get a gun.”<sup>25</sup> Most states in the U. S. do not have laws that cover this gap.

In addition to access, culture is a significant factor for gun violence in the case of suicide and domestic violence. Toxic masculinity, or cultural views of maleness that center male identity and masculinity in social, physical, and other forms of violent dominance, often over women, contribute to domestic violence and suicide. Contrary to the idea that survivors of domestic violence should purchase a gun to keep themselves safe, studies have shown that when a gun is present in a domestic violence situation, the risk of death for women increases by 500 percent.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, domestic violence victims are not to blame, nor are they the ones responsible for fixing the crime. Criminalizing domestic violence abusers and reforming understandings of maleness is the necessary response.

<sup>23</sup> Margot Sanger-Katz, “Gun Deaths are Mostly Suicides,” The New York Times, 8 October 2015, [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/09/upshot/gun-deaths-are-mostly-suicides.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/09/upshot/gun-deaths-are-mostly-suicides.html?_r=0), accessed on 1 November 2016.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Alli Maloney, “The ‘boyfriend loophole’ in U.S. gun laws is costing women’s lives,” The New York Times, 18 September 2015, <http://nytlive.nytimes.com/womenintheworld/2015/09/18/the-boyfriend-loophole-in-u-s-gun-laws-is-costing-womens-lives/>, accessed on 1 November 2016.

<sup>26</sup> “Guns and Violence Against Women: America’s Uniquely Lethal Domestic Violence Problem,” Everytown for Gun Safety, 16 June 2014, <https://everytownresearch.org/reports/guns-and-violence-against-women/>, accessed on 1 November 2016.

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Regarding suicide, cultural stigma around mental health support inhibits people from seeking help. As suggested by the fact that men comprise over 87 percent of all firearm suicide deaths, toxic masculinity harms men as well as women.<sup>27</sup> The provision of better mental health services and other forms of care and community are needed. Social isolation is often a factor in suicide. As the provision of community is a core function of churches and faith communities, these groups specifically can aid in lowering the numbers of people turning to suicide as an answer.

Attending to guns in this context of domestic violence and suicide reflects a larger point to be made: that gun violence is a public health issue. Seeing gun violence as a public health issue is a major culture change from what stands currently. Drunk driving, wearing seatbelts, and smoking tobacco are all examples of “personal” matters that were successfully re-framed and re-approached as public health issues.<sup>28</sup> That the Centers for Disease Control and the National Institute of Health are currently prohibited from conducting research on gun violence shows the resistance to the culture change needed to approach gun violence as a public health issue.<sup>29</sup> Yet, as the contexts of suicide and domestic violence show, gun violence is desperately in need of legislative as well as cultural changes. Holistic transformation is needed, not just of guns but also of the attitudes and cultures of those who wield them.

<sup>27</sup> “Firearm Suicide in the United States,” Brady Center to Prevent Gun Violence, <http://www.bradycampaign.org/firearm-suicide-in-the-united-states>, accessed on 1 November 2016.

<sup>28</sup> Katie Day, “Gun Violence and Christian Witness,” *Journal of Lutheran Ethics*, 1 May 2014, <https://www.elca.org/JLE/Articles/65>, accessed on 1 November 2016; “Fact Sheet: Removing Barriers and Reinvesting in Public Health Research on Gun Violence,” Center for American Progress, <https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/09090359/CDC-factsheet.pdf>, accessed on 1 November 2016.

<sup>29</sup> “Fact Sheet: Removing Barriers and Reinvesting in Public Health Research on Gun Violence,” Center for American Progress, <https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/09090359/CDC-factsheet.pdf>, accessed on 1 November 2016.

# Kingdom Dreams Violent Realities

## Personal Connection: A Domestic Violence Survivor of Gun Violence

I wanted to hold my mom's hand, to hug her. I just got a call from my mom who was in the hospital because her husband, John, had shot her.

Our previous conversation hadn't ended well. A year before, I'd learned that her husband had been arrested for strangling her and threatening her with guns. They had since reconciled and were living together. I'd yelled at my mom, told her that she was being stupid and reckless. I'd pleaded with her and threatened to stop speaking to her. Nothing worked.

And now my mother had become the victim of a crime that is the leading cause of injury to women. While mass shootings garner headlines, paralyze us with fear, and fuel debate on gun issues, many more people are likely to be affected by domestic violence. Statistics show that one in four women will experience domestic violence in her lifetime.<sup>30</sup>

Between January 1, 1997 and June 30, 2010 in Washington state alone, there were 463 homicides committed by domestic-violence abusers, with more than half of the victims killed with firearms, according to the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence (WSCADV). In the cases where the victim had children, 55 percent of the children were present at the scene of the homicide; 16 children were killed.

Domestic violence also plays a role in mass shootings. In a study by Mayors Against Illegal Guns of every identifiable mass shooting (shootings in which four or more people are murdered) between January 2009 and January 2013, 57 percent of the incidents involved the killing of a family member, or a current or former intimate partner of the shooter.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> "Domestic Violence National Statistics," National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, <http://www.ncadv.org/files/DomesticViolenceFactSheet%28National%29.pdf>.

<sup>31</sup> <https://s3.amazonaws.com/s3.mayorsagainstillegalguns.org/images/analysis-of-recent-mass-shootings.pdf>, accessed 2013.

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My mother's gun attack was both the culmination of years of fear and denial and the beginning of a powerful transformation for our family. I was 7 when my mom began dating John. After a brief courtship, they were married. Suddenly, our home felt like a strange dictatorship. The rules were unpredictable and changed with John's whims.

A common myth about domestic violence is that it's only prevalent among those who are uneducated and living in poverty. John was extremely intelligent: He read books on abstract mathematics and had a master's degree in engineering. My mom held an MBA and earned two more masters' degrees during their marriage. From the outside, we probably seemed perfectly normal. We lived in an upscale neighborhood. We attended church.

John collected guns and liked to conduct target practice on the television with the laser sights on his gun. He would pull out his gun when President Bill Clinton was on, cursing as he fired his unloaded weapon, the sight on Clinton's head. The "click, click, click" of the gun was always a warning that he was in a bad mood.

Through the years, John became more controlling and violent. We all learned to tiptoe around him, to try our best to go unseen and unnoticed. He found ways of justifying any physical abuse, but years of abuse warps people. Abusers know this. They start off charming and loving, but slowly peel away the self-worth of their victims like the layers of an onion. That's how they get them to stay.

My mother's experience isn't uncommon, and the toxic mixture of domestic violence and firearms made her particularly vulnerable. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), an estimated 1.3 million women in the U.S. are victims of a physical assault by a partner each year.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>32</sup> "Cost of Intimate Partner Violence Against Women in the United States," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, March 2003, <http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/ipvbook-a.pdf>, accessed 1 November 2016.

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When guns are a part of the equation, the risk of homicide skyrockets to more than five times higher than in instances where there are no weapons.<sup>33</sup> The WSCADV put together a list of 11 recommendations after reviewing 13 years of domestic-violence fatalities.

One of those recommendations is to “maximize the use of existing legal means to restrict abusers’ access to firearms.” WSCADV cites numerous cases where the state’s failure to do this resulted in homicide.<sup>34</sup>

I learned after the shooting that my mother nearly bled to death after John shot her through the foot with a .45-caliber bullet, blowing off some of her heel and leaving her with a permanent limp. They were struggling over the gun when it went off. According to my mom, he attacked her, punched her, choked her and pinned her to the ground, then reached for the gun. She tried to knock it out of his hand when it went off. He’d left her bleeding on the ground while she begged for him to dial 911.

Months of surgeries followed and recent MRI scans have revealed that she has some brain damage, likely from lack of oxygen to the brain due to traumatic blood loss. The brain damage has affected her ability to effectively do her job and to remember things.

Police seized 24 guns and hundreds of rounds of ammo from my mom’s and John’s home after the shooting. Unless new legislation passes in our state, my mother may have no legal recourse for ensuring that John doesn’t get his guns back.

<sup>33</sup> [http://www.jhsph.edu/research/centers-and-institutes/johns-hopkins-center-for-gun-policy-and-research/publications/IPV\\_Guns.pdf](http://www.jhsph.edu/research/centers-and-institutes/johns-hopkins-center-for-gun-policy-and-research/publications/IPV_Guns.pdf), accessed 2013.

<sup>34</sup> Jake Fawcett, “Up to Us: Lessons learned and goals for change after thirteen years of the Washington State Domestic Violence Fatality Review,” Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence, December 2010, <https://fatalityreview.files.wordpress.com/2013/11/2010-dvfr-report.pdf>, accessed 1 November 2016.



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My mom went on to testify in front of the Washington state legislature in support of Substitute House Bill 1840 which would ban people under full protection orders from buying or owning weapons while that order is in place. A New York Times investigation by Michael Luo, “identified scores of gun-related crimes committed by people subject to recently issued civil protection orders, including murder, attempted murder and kidnapping. In at least five instances over the last decade, women were shot to death less than a month after obtaining protection orders. . . . There were dozens of gun-related assaults.”<sup>35</sup>

If state history is any indication, though, things aren’t looking too promising for SHB 1840. The bill failed in 2004 after strong lobbying against it by the gun lobby. Unfortunately, it failed again in 2010. But gun-safety and victims-rights advocates are pressing for change on multiple fronts.

Initiative 594, which will be voted on by the people of Washington state in the fall of 2014, would require anyone buying a gun in Washington State to pass the same background check, no matter where they buy the gun and no matter from whom they buy it. Currently, loopholes allow firearms to be sold between private sellers and at gun shows without criminal background checks.

Having grown up in Idaho, I understand that many of the people opposing gun reform are genuinely concerned about protecting their personal freedoms. My conservative hometown just outside of Boise is full of people who take their Second Amendment rights very seriously: responsible gun owners, hunters, and gun enthusiasts. I stand behind their right to bear arms. Gun-responsibility legislation will not affect the rights of law-abiding citizens. It will only ensure stricter protocols to keep guns out of the hands of potentially dangerous people.

<sup>35</sup> Michael Luo, “In Some States, Gun Rights Trump Orders of Protection,” The New York Times, 17 March 2013, [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/18/us/facing-protective-orders-and-allowed-to-keep-guns.html?\\_r=1&](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/18/us/facing-protective-orders-and-allowed-to-keep-guns.html?_r=1&), accessed 1 November 2016.

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I want to know that my mother doesn't have to worry about her ex-husband getting his guns back. I want to send my son off to school, confident the loopholes that allow people to buy guns legally from private sellers and gun shows without background checks have been closed. I want domestic-violence victims who seek protection orders to find comfort in the knowledge that guns could be removed from the equation. I want to know that I live in a state and country that don't stand idly by while gun violence takes more lives.

*Rory Graves is a mother to three young children and ParentMap's social media coordinator. She lives in the Seattle, Washington area with her husband and kids. Some names have been changed to protect those affected by domestic violence. This story is taken from "Normal from the Outside: A Family's Story of Guns and Domestic Violence" by Rory Graves, November 2013.<sup>36</sup>*

## Questions for Discussion

1. Do you see any evidence today of the vision Micah shares: nations recognizing that their ways of violence are not sustainable and beginning to recognize God's ways are higher and better than our ways?
2. It is noted in this study that the culture change of nations no longer "learning war" is just as significant—and difficult—an effort of beating weapons into instruments that provide for the welfare of all people. What specific cultural characteristics of your nation, culture, or community need to change to "not learn way anymore?" How are you and your church participating now in this change?
3. What ministries is your church currently engaged in to prevent suicide and domestic violence? What might be some ministries your church can engage in to prevent these tragedies?
4. How could the Church have been more active in the family of Rory Graves before the terrible shooting of her mother by her step-father?

<sup>36</sup> Rory Graves, "Normal from the Outside: A Family's Story of Guns and Domestic Violence," ParentMap, 25 November 2013, <http://www.parentmap.com/article/normal-from-the-outside-a-familys-story-of-guns-and-domestic-violence>, accessed 1 November 2016.

# Kingdom Dreams Violent Realities

## Week 3

### Flourishing

Micah 4:4

<sup>4</sup> but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees,  
and no one shall make them afraid;  
for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken.

### The Passage

After the mountain of the house of the LORD is raised up, after the nations stream to it in repentance seeking God's ways of peace, after God renders judgments, and after great effort is poured into transforming weapons and cultures of war into instruments of peace, we see in verse 4 the final outcome in Micah's vision. That outcome is universal flourishing: the attainment of genuine security and peace for all.

As explored in week one, underlying so much of the violence between nations and among them is a desire to secure individual welfare. Whether securing borders, guarding against real or perceived enemies, defending economic or foreign policy interests, conducting wars for territorial expansion, or seeking to exploit another nation's resources, nations often engage in violence by protecting their own interests. On the individual level, similar situations of desire for security or advancement and related emotions—of fear, jealousy, greed, desire for domination—function as motivators to violence. Violence is, in so many ways, fueled by fear, self-protection, and self-interest.

Micah's dream rejects this logic. The way to genuine peace and security is through repentance and transformation from violent paths for self-protection or self-interest. As seen in week two's lesson, the nations ascend the mountain of the LORD together, enacting repentance as full transformation—in tools, culture, and self—from the former path of violence to God's path of peace.

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Significantly, this is not the abandoning of justice, but the fulfillment of it. Total transformation is the corollary to God's justice and it yields what the nations were searching for with violence. Verse 4 gives a picture of true flourishing: genuine peace and security, the provision of sustenance, and freedom from fear. In verse 4, we see that physical and economic security is given to all peoples by God only after the weapons of warfare are beaten and the nations themselves are transformed. It is following the participatory transformation enabling the well-being of all peoples that the treasure they were seeking is found. Repentance and the rejection of violence brings the dreams so often associated with conquest and domination – dreams of peace, safety, and economic security – into reality.

Micah's vision is ultimately about salvation. In acknowledging our inability to save ourselves, we acknowledge salvation by God—and, what is more, we find that we are invited to participate with God in the salvation and liberation of the world. Micah's vision is in the process of being fulfilled through the coming of the Messiah, the Christ. Jesus declared at the beginning of his ministry that he was the one about whom the prophet Isaiah (Micah's contemporary) spoke, stating that he would “proclaim the year of the Lord's favor” (Luke 4:19). Our ability to participate in the peace and security characteristic of God's Kingdom is dependent on our recognition that we are powerless to bring about our own security, peace, and fulfillment. Whether we own every type of gun there is or we do not have access to guns at all, we are all in need of recognizing our utter inability to manufacture our own salvation.

One must wonder what it will be like for the first nation or individual to see the mountain of the house of the Lord lifted up and, in that vision, acknowledge the error of their current path. Who will be the first to gaze upon the mountain of the house of the Lord and be willing to acknowledge that our attempts to protect and secure our own prosperity are in vain? Who will be the first to repent?

These are not rhetorical questions, but questions we are equipped and called on to answer, for Micah's vision is not utopianism or a prophecy pertaining only to the distant future.

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Micah's vision is not meant to be forgotten and dismissed the minute we put down the Bible. It is not hyperbole where meaning lives more in the force of words than of actions. It is exactly the opposite. Micah 4:1-4 is sealed with the promise based on God's character: "For the mouth of the LORD has spoken." God intends to bring this dream about because it is rooted in who God is and what God has promised. If we indeed believe in who God is and in what God says, then we can count on Micah's dream coming to pass. The only question we have to ask is if we want to participate in making these Kingdom dreams real and if the day Micah speaks of longingly might be today.

Our theological understanding of this passage—repentance, confession, and transformation involving active participation in making Kingdom dreams reality—points to specific actions we can take. Corporate repentance must include, and may even begin with, individual repentance. Cultures cannot change without their individual members changing. Just as God desires that cultures of violence become ones of peace, so too does God desire the same transformation of us as individuals. Violent individuals are not to be eradicated, killed, or destroyed, but transformed. God wants to transform our anger into compassion, our indifference to the suffering of others into love, our covetousness into mutuality, our pride into humility, and our obsession with self-preservation into concern for the flourishing of all, rooted in love of God and people.

Take a moment and recommit all of who you are to the Lord. Invite the Holy Spirit to convict you of sin and to cleanse you. Our world will be more peaceful as we resemble more of Christ. There can be no social holiness without individual holiness—as Micah's dream shows, the interrelation of the two is the beginning of the path to God.

Belief in the reality of God's promise coming to pass means that we live to see the promise of God's Kingdom made real in our lives and in our world today. To refuse to work toward that dream, to continue to hoard weapons of violence to create fear and intimidation in others, and to make self-preservation our greatest focus, is a statement of unbelief in the power of God to make God's Kingdom on earth as it is in Heaven.

# Kingdom Dreams Violent Realities

## Contextual Application: Mass Shootings

Though accounting for less than 1 percent of total gun deaths annually in the U.S., mass shootings—gun violence in which four or more people, not including the shooter, are killed—attract widespread media attention and reactions of deep pain, sorrow, terror, outrage, and solidarity.<sup>37</sup> They also attract responses that point to the difference between our ways and God’s ways, and the flourishing that is found only in the latter.

Mass shootings are, perhaps, the clearest situation where the flourishing of all is threatened by guns. Armed gunmen wielding weapons that can, and tragically do, wipe out dozens pose a grave threat to the wellbeing of individuals and society. These acts of terrorism create a national and international stage for their motivating beliefs—white supremacy (Charleston, South Carolina 2015), homophobia (Orlando, Florida 2016), religious extremism (Paris, France 2015; San Bernardino, California 2015; Nairobi, Kenya 2013), political extremism (Norway 2011, Nevada 2014), or other (Newtown, Connecticut 2012; Aurora, Colorado 2012). These incidents traumatize society not just with death, but with fear.<sup>38</sup> In addition to the horrific loss of life that happens in the event of the killings, mass shootings leave us feeling afraid. Fear, rather than flourishing, takes root in the social fabric.

As noted above, fear often leads to violence. In the case of mass shootings, we see the fear left in their wake provoking a desire to turn to weapons for greater security. Public responses to mass shootings often involve both calls for further restricting access to weapons and calls for the loosening of barriers preventing access to weapons. Following the rampage of a gunman in Norway in 2011 that left 77 dead at a summer camp, some criticized the country’s policy in which most police do not carry guns.

<sup>37</sup> From FBI 2012 data; see “Analysis of Mass Shootings,” Everytown for Gun Safety, 20 August 2015, <https://everytownresearch.org/reports/mass-shootings-analysis/>, accessed 1 November 2016.

<sup>38</sup> These are just some of the recent incidents of mass shootings in the world.

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An independent commission following the incident, however, recommended tightening gun restrictions, prohibiting pistols and semiautomatic weapons.<sup>39</sup>

The belief that “the only way to stop a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun” is a prevalent one, and has contributed to changes in policy in the United States.<sup>40</sup> Open carry laws, concealed carry laws, “Stand Your Ground” laws, and other legislation is currently being hotly debated and passed. These laws reflect the belief held by many that the public safety threatened by guns is also only secured by guns—and guns everywhere, in churches, schools, airports, and other public places. However, Micah’s vision of God’s Kingdom shows us that self-protection is a matter of belief in the power of God which cannot be attained through fear and intimidation.

For those in the United States and other nations where similar legislation is being embraced, believing in Micah’s vision means repealing legislation such as “Stand Your Ground” laws in places where they have been adopted.<sup>41</sup> Stand Your Ground laws allow for anyone in any place to use deadly force if they reasonably believe that they are in danger of bodily harm. As seen in the shooting of Trayvon Martin by George Zimmerman, “Stand Your Ground” laws enable violence and violent offenders to go unpunished. Both before and after his encounter ending in the death of Trayvon Martin, George Zimmerman had a long history of violence, including assaulting a police officer, four incidents of domestic violence, and a road rage incident in which he threatened another driver.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Jonathan Masters, “Gun Control Around the World – A Primer: Lessons from Canada to Japan,” *The Atlantic*, 12 January 2016, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/01/worldwide-gun-control-policy/423711/>, accessed 1 November 2016.

<sup>40</sup> “NRA: ‘The Only Way to Stop a Bad Guy with a Gun is with a Good Guy with a Gun,’” CBS DC, 21 December 2012, <http://washington.cbslocal.com/2012/12/21/nra-only-way-to-stop-a-bad-guy-with-a-gun-is-with-a-good-guy-with-a-gun/>, accessed 1 November 2016.

<sup>41</sup> As of October 2016, the list of U.S. states includes Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, New Hampshire, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, West Virginia, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. Similar policies are found in Germany, the Czech Republic, and Ireland.

<sup>42</sup> Center for American Progress, “Fact Sheet: Have Gun, Will Travel: Mandated National Concealed-Carry Legislation,” February 2015.

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The absence of universal background checks and of stronger domestic violence laws regulating access to guns, and the presence of concealed-carry laws, enabled Zimmerman to have a gun and use it to kill. As reflected in Zimmerman's trial and acquittal, these laws, like many others surrounding criminal justice and violence in the U.S., are vehicles for racial bias. When Stand Your Ground laws are applied, shootings of a black person by a white person are found justifiable 17 percent of the time, while the shooting of a white person by a black person is found justifiable 1 percent of the time.<sup>43</sup>

If the nations in Micah's vision had applied Stand Your Ground reasoning, or had carried weapons in response to a threat (or to intimidate others, creating a threat) as with concealed or open carry practices, it is highly unlikely that they would have peaceably ventured up the mountain to the house of the LORD. The nations would not have repented, nor would they have participated in their own salvation through transforming their weapons into instruments to care for the welfare others. Ultimately, none would have found true security and flourishing.

We are called to repentance from such course of action, turning away from violent strategies for self-protection to place our security in God. We are called to interrupt the cycle of violence and transform it, not perpetuate it. The "stand your ground" response that advocates using deadly force seems to be a repudiation of belief in the power of God to be the one to bring about genuine security and peace. The Church must be on the forefront of the efforts to repeal such laws and uphold transformation if we are to accept the vision given to us by God through Micah.

<sup>43</sup> Patrik Jonsson, "Racial bias and 'stand your ground' laws: what the data show," The Christian Science Monitor, 6 August 2013, <http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Justice/2013/0806/Racial-bias-and-stand-your-ground-laws-what-the-data-show>, accessed 1 November 2016.



# Kingdom Dreams Violent Realities

## Personal Connection: A Gun Violence Interrupter – A Model for Action

*\*This section draws from an interview available online. Listen to the interview in full at <http://www.npr.org/2014/01/31/268417580/how-one-womans-faith-stopped-a-school-shooting>*

In the case of Antoinette Tuff, we see that the Church is on the forefront through the witness of everyday Christians. On August 20, 2013, Antoinette stopped a mass shooting before it even began at the school where she worked in Decatur, Georgia. Armed with an AK-47 and 500 rounds of ammunition, 20-year-old Michael Hill entered Ronald E. McNair Discovery Learning Academy, where Antoinette worked alongside 100 employees serving 800 students. Hill took Antoinette hostage in a brief standoff with police. In the face of this would-be killer, Antoinette offered peace. She shared with him her own struggles and told him she loved him. Through her message, she convinced him to surrender.

Antoinette's extraordinary action catapulted her to widespread acclaim. She became known as the "bookkeeper who talked down a school-shooter."<sup>44</sup> However, rather than bravery or self-assuredness, hurt, fear, and faith are what Antoinette cites as guiding her actions on that day.

In an interview with National Public Radio, she describes the pain in her life at the time of her encounter with Michael Hill: "I had just lost my husband after 33 years...he was actually leaving to be with another woman [and] I had just gotten a phone call to tell me that I was in the process of losing my car, and they wanted me to give them almost \$15,000 [which] I didn't have...So before I got there [to her seat in the front office that morning],...I was in tears and screaming out, 'God help me!'"<sup>45</sup> When Antoinette encountered Michael that morning, she was dealing with this personal pain. Michael slipped past security to enter into the school's front office, where, firing bullets randomly, he declared that this was no joking matter.

<sup>44</sup> "School 'shooter' armed with 500 bullets but talked down by hero bookkeeper before opening fire is jailed for twenty years," DailyMail.com, 16 September 2014 <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2757989/Georgia-man-gets-20-years-gun-battle-school.html>, accessed 1 November 2016.

<sup>45</sup> "How One Woman's Faith Stopped a School Shooting," National Public Radio, 31 January 2014, <http://www.npr.org/2014/01/31/268417580/how-one-womans-faith-stopped-a-school-shooting>, accessed 1 November 2016

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Antoinette says, “I was screaming and terrified on the inside. I didn’t even know I was calm until [I re-listened to the 911 tape]. And to be honest with you, I didn’t even recognize my own voice. And so I knew at that moment that it was God that guided me through that day.”<sup>46</sup>

Michael announced that he was off of his medications for a mental disorder and did not care if he died, having nothing to live for.<sup>47</sup> Antoinette shared her struggles with him, telling him about her husband, about the difficulty of raising a son with disabilities, and about her own suicide attempt. In reflecting back later on what she said that morning, Antoinette says:

“All of us have a purpose in our life. And so God prepares us all for one. That day was very important for me that every word that proceeded out of my mouth at that point in time could be life or death, not only for me and Michael Hill [the gunman], but for everyone in that building. And so I knew that that was the moment that I had to make sure that everything that I heard God say to me, was what I came out of my mouth with.”

Antoinette’s answers to questions about faith and struggle get to the heart of this study:

### *On whether she questioned her faith*

“No, ‘cause I was too terrified to question him. I needed him to talk every minute he was there. I was calling on him more than I’m calling on him any day. I was like, ‘God, what we going to do now, what we going to do next, what do I say, how do I say it?’ ‘Cause remember now, he had already shot a bullet right there in front of my face, in the office, and it ricocheted. I’m sitting there literally watch him unfold mentally. You know, spraying bullets everywhere, loading up the magazines, you know loading bullets in his pockets everywhere. I’m actually seeing him self-destruct right there. So I knew that the power of my words had to be powerful.”

<sup>46</sup>“How One Woman’s Faith Stopped a School Shooting,” National Public Radio, 31 January 2014, <http://www.npr.org/2014/01/31/268417580/how-one-womans-faith-stopped-a-school-shooting>, accessed 1 November 2016

<sup>47</sup> “911 Call Captures School Employee Talking Down Gunman,” National Public Radio, 22 August 2013 <http://www.npr.org/2013/08/22/214576953/911-call-captures-school-employee-talking-down-gunman>, accessed 1 November 2016.

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## *On healing from the pain*

“Do I feel more healed than I did on August the 20th? Yes. Am I completely there? No. You can’t have an AK-47 in your face and lose a marriage after 33 years and don’t feel.”<sup>48</sup>

Antoinette Tuff stopped a mass shooting from taking place by responding with peace to a violent situation. She saved the lives of 800 children, 100 adults, and as many families. She kept would-be shooter Michael Hill from becoming a mass murderer.

Antoinette’s actions of peace were not without fear or pain. As she shares in the interview, pain and fear were very present in her life at that time and in that moment for her and after. Yet so was faith, and her faith directed her pain and her fear not to violence but to love. It transformed her actions, and saved a man and community from becoming another in a long list of mass shootings.

That transformation from violence to peace, from certain death to life, is exactly what lies at the heart of our faith. We can only imagine the death that would have ensued had Antoinette responded with violence, escalating the situation. Such action would have been fully supported by the mentality of Stand Your Ground laws, of concealed and open carry laws, and of laws, attitudes, and cultural perspectives celebrating the spread of guns as defensive personal weapons. However, Antoinette did not go that route of acting on concern for self-protection only (or for protecting her community from a threatening “other”). In sharing her pain with Michael Hill and joining him in his suffering, Antoinette acted on the recognition that self-interest is bound up with the common good, which expressly included Michael Hill. His welfare as a human was not antithetical to hers (or to that of the schoolchildren or other employees), but deeply interwoven. Through following God’s path with this recognition, Antoinette enabled flourishing for all.

<sup>48</sup> “How One Woman’s Faith Stopped a School Shooting,” National Public Radio 31 January 2014, <http://www.npr.org/2014/01/31/268417580/how-one-womans-faith-stopped-a-school-shooting>, accessed 1 November 2016.

## Kingdom Dreams Violent Realities

A final excerpt from the interview captures the elements of Micah's dream (common good, transformation, flourishing) in Antoinette's actions:

*On why she never mentioned that Michael Hill is white, and she is African-American*

“Well you know, one thing God says, he doesn't say anything about color. He says 'love thy neighbor.' He doesn't say love thy neighbor because you white. He doesn't say love thy neighbor because you black. He doesn't say love thy neighbor because you purple, green or orange. ... And so for me, I didn't see color. To me, I seen someone that was hurting, and did not need me to judge or pass judgment on them, show anger or be frustrated or mad at him. But I seen a young man in an unstable condition mind needing me to show him love.”<sup>49</sup>

### Questions for Discussion

1. What mass shootings have touched your community or, if you feel comfortable sharing, you personally?
2. How viable do you think non-violent responses to gun violence are as a strategy? Would an unarmed police force work in your community, city, state, or country? If no, what are the ways that your community could begin to be transformed for such a practice to become reality? Do you think such a thing is desirable?
3. Do you know anyone like Antoinette who has responded with peace and compassion in a situation of violence? Have you ever been in a situation of violence in which you or someone else has responded in this manner? What effect did it have on you or other bystanders or participants?
4. Micah sees the nations each sitting under their own fig tree free from fear. Look up the significance of figs in the Bible. What meanings can this imagery have in Micah? How can these meanings translate for us today?

<sup>49</sup> “How One Woman's Faith Stopped a School Shooting,” National Public Radio 31 January 2014, <http://www.npr.org/2014/01/31/268417580/how-one-womans-faith-stopped-a-school-shooting>, accessed 1 November 2016.

# Kingdom Dreams Violent Realities

## Conclusion

The title of this study is Kingdom Dreams, Violent Realities. As noted in the Introduction, Micah 4:1-4 is a prophetic dream of a future time and yet, as seen through the application of this text to a very real and current issue, prophecy is not solely about the future. It is also about the present. The glimpsed vision of the hereafter affects how we see, engage, and understand the here-and-now. God's Kingdom that is to come is being established on earth.

Over the three weeks, we explored Micah 4:1-4 through the themes of the common good, transformation, and flourishing. The core image of transforming swords into plowshares ties the three themes together and shines light on the need to address various facets of gun violence. The transformation of weapons into objects of provision is complete and stunning, located in the objects as well as in the culture and the individuals who wield and shape both. This transformation is life-giving repentance, a turning from our ways to those of the Lord, which provide genuine security and peace. Such transformation comes about through placing faith not in guns, but in God.

A joke told in the “pro-gun” community in the United States casts lights on this point:

“A state trooper stopped a 95-year-old woman on Interstate 20 and noticed as he was checking her driver's license that she had a concealed carry permit. He said, ‘Got any guns with you ma'am?’ She said, ‘Yes, a .45 Smith & Wesson in the glove compartment, a .357 magnum in the console and a .38 special in my purse.’ The trooper said, ‘Lady, what are you scared of?’ She said, ‘Not a thing!’”<sup>50</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Conservative Tribune, <http://conservativetribune.com/state-trooper-gun-joke/>, accessed 1 November 2016.

## Kingdom Dreams Violent Realities

Gun violence happens for a number of reasons and one prominent reason is self-preservation: to protect one's property, to protect one's life or one's family, or to protect one's "way of life." Securing what has been entrusted to us seems to not only be natural, but also a means of good stewardship. In Micah's vision of God's Kingdom, however, security is achieved not through arming oneself and overpowering or intimidating one's enemy, but rather, in acknowledging that our ways of arming ourselves, attempting to overpower or intimidate our real or perceived enemies, is going to end in our own destruction. Our confession, as will be the nations' one day, is that God's ways are not our ways. Our weapons will not bring us the security we desire. That will only come with the reality of God's Kingdom in our world.

As seen in week one, the first step towards that reality is the acknowledgement that we cannot get there alone. Despite the large divides between warring nations or groups using guns, or between individuals on the issue of guns (for example "pro-gun" and "gun control" proponents), Micah's vision shows us that the common good is the basis of the justice meted in the Kingdom. The welfare and engagement of all, regardless of politics, is vital. Transformation and flourishing follow only when the entirety of this "all" is embraced. As Antoinette Tuff showed, "all" reaches out to include the shooter himself.

Humankind has learned how to dominate and do violence, but only God can truly fulfill the dreams and aspirations of humanity. Humankind can kill and destroy, but only God can redeem, transform, and fulfill. Humanity has historically created violent realities that put many innocent lives in peril, but God creates Kingdom dreams and invites all of us to actively participate in the difficult work of manifesting God's Kingdom dreams in the midst of the violent realities all around us. Following God's path of peace is the way forward.

## Kingdom Dreams Violent Realities

### Resolution #3428

#### “Our Call to End Gun Violence”

Passed by the 2016 General Conference of The United Methodist Church

Jesus' call to his followers to be peacemakers (Matthew 5:9) is tied to intimate relationship with God, and echoes God's dreams for peace for all of creation as expressed in Micah 4:1-4:

“In days to come, / the mountain of the LORD's house / shall be established as the highest of the mountains, / and shall be raised up above the hills. / Peoples shall stream to it, / and many nations shall come and say: / ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, / to the house of the God of Jacob; / that he may teach us his ways / and that we may walk in his paths.’ / For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, / and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. / He shall judge between many peoples, / and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away; / they shall beat their swords into plowshares, / and their spears into pruning hooks; / nation shall not lift up sword against nation, / neither shall they learn war any more; / but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, / and no one shall make them afraid; / for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken” (NRSV).

Micah's prophetic dream points to a time when all peoples will journey to God's presence so God “may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths” (4:2). Micah describes God as the final judge and the nations will travel to God's presence out of their desire to live in peace without violence and bloodshed.

The stunning imagery of Micah's dream is the transformation of weapons into instruments of harvesting food that occurs after the judgments are handed down to the nations. The transformation is not complete until the nations participate in their own transformation. The work that went into creating the weapons will be matched by the human effort it will take to transform those weapons into peaceful instruments.

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God does not collect or hide the weapons from the nations, nor does God transform the weapons outside of human effort. The text states that the nations themselves, “shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks.”

Violence, in so many ways, is fueled by fear and self-protection. Iron plows and pruning tools can be used as weapons. Yet, in Micah’s vision, genuine peace and security are given to all people by God after the weapons of violence are transformed: “they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid.” Culture as well as weapons will be transformed: Indeed, “neither shall they learn war any more.”

Whether it happens in the towns of northeastern Nigeria, a suburb in the United States, the streets of Australia, or an office in France, gun violence has become an all-too-often frightening phenomenon. We need the reality of Micah’s vision more than ever.

Small arms include assault rifles, submachine guns, light machine guns, grenade launchers, portable anti-aircraft guns and anti-tank guns, among other weapons (Small Arms Survey, <<http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/weapons-and-markets/definitions.html>>). Nations encumbered with violence from small arms face the greatest obstacles to delivering social services to those who need them the most (Ibid.). Armed violence contributes to crime, human trafficking, drug trafficking, gender-based violence, racial and ethnic conflicts, systemic economic inequalities, persistent unemployment, and human rights abuses among other social maladies (Small Arms Survey, <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/armed-violence/social-and-economic-costs/impact-on-development.html>). In many countries small arms are the greatest hindrance to food security.



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One crucial step toward curbing this violence on an international scale is the Arms Trade Treaty that passed the United Nations in 2013. Its focus is to prevent arms from being traded into already dangerous situations. The treaty does not regulate the trade of small arms within nations. In adopting the treaty, the 118 nations that signed it and the 31 nations that have already ratified it are stating that gun violence is a universal problem devastating lives and creating tremendous instability in nations and entire regions in the world. (<<http://disarmament.un.org/treaties/t/att/deposit/asc>>).

Gun violence also greatly affects families and individuals. One of the most prominent forms of gun violence is suicide. Worldwide, there are nearly one million suicides every year, which amounts to more than 3,000 per day (World Health Organization, International Association for Suicide Prevention, [http://www.who.int/mental\\_health/prevention/suicide/suicideprevent/en/](http://www.who.int/mental_health/prevention/suicide/suicideprevent/en/), Worldwide Suicide Prevention Day is September 10, <http://www.iasp.info/wspd/>). While not all of these involve firearms access to firearms makes suicide more attainable for many who attempt it. Indeed, firearms are the most frequent method for suicides in countries where firearms are common in private households (World Health Organization, <<http://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/86/9/07-043489/en/>>).

When domestic violence incidents involve the use of firearms the results are often deadly. “Gender inequality, tolerance and cultural acceptance of the use of violence against women, and common notions of masculinity that embrace firearms possession (which may be supported by both men and women) all combine to create a climate that places women at risk of Intimate Partner Violence involving firearms” (Small Arms Survey, <<http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/A-Yearbook/2013/en/Small-Arms-Survey-2013-Chapter-2-summary-EN.pdf>>). A U.S.-based study of mass shootings between January 2009 and January 2013 revealed that 57 percent of the incidents involved the killing of a family member, or a current or former intimate partner of the shooter (<<https://s3.amazonaws.com/s3.mayorsagainstilllegalguns.org/images/analysis-of-recent-mass-shootings.pdf>>).

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As followers of Jesus, called to live into the reality of God’s dream of shalom as described by Micah, we must address the epidemic of gun violence so “that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in God’s paths.” Therefore, we call upon United Methodists to prayerfully address gun violence in their local context. Some of the ways in which to prevent gun violence include the following:

1. For congregations to make preventing gun violence a regular part of our conversations and prayer times. Gun violence must be worshipfully and theologically reflected on, and we encourage United Methodist churches to frame conversations theologically by utilizing resources such as “Kingdom Dreams, Violent Realities: Reflections on Gun Violence from Micah 4:1-4” produced by the General Board of Church and Society.
2. For congregations to assist those affected by gun violence through prayer, pastoral care, creating space, and encouraging survivors to share their stories, financial assistance, and through identifying other resources in their communities as victims of gun violence and their families walk through the process of grieving and healing.
3. For individual United Methodists who own guns as hunters or collectors to safely and securely store their guns and to teach the importance of practicing gun safety.
4. For United Methodist congregations that have not experienced gun violence to form ecumenical and interfaith partnerships with faith communities that have experienced gun violence in order to support them and learn from their experiences.
5. For United Methodist congregations to lead or join in ecumenical or interfaith gatherings for public prayer at sites where gun violence has occurred and partner with law enforcement to help prevent gun violence.

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6. For United Methodist congregations to partner with local law-enforcement agencies and community groups to identify gun retailers that engage in retail practices designed to circumvent laws on gun sales and ownership, encourage full legal compliance, and to work with groups like Heeding God's Call that organize faith-based campaigns to encourage gun retailers to gain full legal compliance with appropriate standards and laws.
7. For United Methodist congregations to display signs that prohibit carrying guns onto church property.
8. For United Methodist congregations to advocate at the local and national level for laws that prevent or reduce gun violence. Some of those measures include:
  - Universal background checks on all gun purchases
  - Ratification of the Arms Trade Treaty
  - Ensuring all guns are sold through licensed gun retailers
  - Prohibiting all individuals convicted of violent crimes from purchasing a gun for a fixed time period
  - Prohibiting all individuals under restraining order due to threat of violence from purchasing a gun
  - Prohibiting persons with serious mental illness, who pose a danger to themselves and their communities, from purchasing a gun
  - Ensuring greater access to services for those suffering from mental illness
  - Establishing a minimum age of 21 years for a gun purchase or possession
  - Banning large-capacity ammunition magazines and weapons designed to fire multiple rounds each time the trigger is pulled
  - Promoting new technologies to aid law-enforcement agencies to trace crime guns and promote public safety.

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See Social Principles, ¶ 162.

# Kingdom Dreams Violent Realities

## Resources

### Advocacy Issues

#### *Gun trafficking*

Investigate the impact of gun trafficking in your neighborhood, state, country, or community. Find out what laws, if any, target trafficking and what community action has been or is being pursued, if any. Advocate for the effective criminalization of and end to trafficking.

#### *Universal background checks*

Find out whether universal background checks are required in your state or country. Advocate for their adoption.

#### *Background check loopholes: “boyfriend loophole” and others*

Is domestic violence taken into account in laws around guns in your community? Advocate for awareness of this major topic in gun law – closing loopholes in access, background checks, or other issues.

#### *Gun violence as a public health issue*

Learn more about what it means to understand gun violence as a public health issue. Advocate against the cultural and political resistance to approaching gun violence in a public health framework. Support better access to mental health services and suicide prevention programs.

#### *Arms Trade Treaty*

Find out whether your nation has signed and ratified the United Nations Arms Trade Treaty. If not, advocate for such action, and discover its implications on your local level.

#### *Responsible gun ownership*

Consider the role guns play in your culture. If owning a gun is part of your culture, make ownership part of a responsible process. Simple steps—such as those around safety, access, and the type of guns available—can ensure that the cultural obsession with self-preservation through the use of violence is not legitimized.

# Kingdom Dreams Violent Realities

## Dates

June 2 – National Gun Violence Awareness Day

December 14-18, 2016 – National Gun Violence Prevention Sabbath Weekend. Check online for future dates.

## Organizations

**The General Board of Church and Society** of The United Methodist Church is engaged in gun violence prevention advocacy at local, national, and international levels. Visit [www.umc-gbcs.org](http://www.umc-gbcs.org) to learn more about UMC witness for gun violence prevention and join the Civil and Human Rights Action Network for updates on this issue.

For more information, contact Jeania Ree Moore, Director of Civil and Human Rights, at [jmoore@umc-gbcs.org](mailto:jmoore@umc-gbcs.org).

Faiths United to Prevent Gun Violence: [www.faithsunited.org](http://www.faithsunited.org)

Everytown for Gun Safety: [www.everytown.org](http://www.everytown.org)

Community Justice Reform Coalition: [www.communityjusticerc.org](http://www.communityjusticerc.org)

Operation LIPSTICK, Ladies Involved in Putting a Stop to Inner-City Killings: [www.operationlipstick.org/operation-lipstick](http://www.operationlipstick.org/operation-lipstick)

Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence: [www.bradycampaign.org](http://www.bradycampaign.org)

Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America: [www.momsdemandaction.org](http://www.momsdemandaction.org)

Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence: [www.smartgunlaws.org](http://www.smartgunlaws.org)







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