

## Wednesday, April 12, 2017 - Day 101 – I Samuel 13-15, Psalm 84, John 19

How much is a Mother or family member or someone who loves another person supposed to bear? Watching your child as Jesus' mother did being crucified or having your child shot in the street is as unbearable as it can be. My ministry has been for some 20 years or so in the city of Chester, Pa. I think it was the *Philadelphia Inquirer* that reported in rather extensive recent article that Chester has the highest homicide rate per 100,000 residents of any city in America. Because of the poverty and the fact that only 50% of the students graduate from High school residents have to try to survive somehow. Even if industry came back to the Chester, the young Chester residents would not have the skills and education to qualify for them. The Chester-Upland School district, at last count was not only failing, but was 499 out of 500 districts in the state. So, what do Chester residents do to survive? They sell drugs to residents of the affluent suburbs who come to the drive down the drug streets and make a purchase and then go back to the safety of their suburbs. Several years ago, a Chester police officer told me that there were 28 named territorial gangs in the 4.7 sq. miles of the city. Almost everyone in Chester – children included – knows someone or a family member that was killed on the streets and that includes me.

I was in one of the elementary schools in Chester maybe 15 years ago, and was talking with a 3<sup>rd</sup> grader who I will call Johnny. I asked him what he would like to do when he finishes school, and he said be a policeman, a teacher or a basketball player. I told him that he had to work hard in school for any of those. I saw him again 2 years later when he was in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade. I stopped him and asked how he was doing in school and he just looked down at the ground. I asked him again, and he continued to just look down. I then said "Johnny look up at me please, I am talking to you." He did look up and he said – and I will never forget this, "Rev, what does it matter, I will be dead by the time I'm 20." That is a true story. I am not making it up. It was one of two life changing events in my life in the city of Chester. It shattered my heart and I had tears in my eyes, that this child who had so many laudable goals just 2 years earlier saw his future as death by bullet as his destiny. This young boy has become a handprint on my heart. From that point on, my focus in Chester became education. Which brings me to one of the solutions, why can't a wealthy society like America's provide an equal education for ALL our Children, including those in the poverty inner cities. I want to scream it. Education, it seems to me, are the bootstraps we so frequently use when talking about someone pulling themselves of our poverty. The cost of not doing so is that the person who could find the cure for cancer may be in the Chester-Upland School district right now. It is very expensive, for society as a whole, to not be educating ALL our children. They too are God's children.

By Deacon Jim Ley