

**bishop's perspective:**

By **Ray W. Chamberlain Jr.**

Resident Bishop

# Would Jesus applaud or weep?

**T**OO OFTEN we reduce complex issues to “what would Jesus do” and then try to speak for Jesus. We, like people in Jesus’ day, differ on what Jesus would or should do. Some thought he violated the Sabbath when he healed the sick while others were convinced the Messiah was doing God’s will. Most of the time it’s enough just to figure out what we would or should do in light of what we know about Jesus.

Some events and situations provoked Jesus to weep. One of the most haunting portraits of Jesus is his weeping while overlooking the city of Jerusalem. He was brokenhearted. The people had collectively chosen to ignore and reject his vision of God’s kingdom on earth.

I must confess that the scene of Congress gathering to hear the recent State of the Union Address haunts me. The president proposed a \$48 billion increase in the military budget to a total of \$379 billion. And Congress

applauded! The \$48 billion increase in itself is larger than the military budget of any other country in the world.

I do not know what our defense budget ought to be. But more than \$1 billion a day ought to be enough to elicit our tears rather than cheers.

I cannot say whether Jesus would have applauded or wept that night in the Congress. I know I wept. I grieved and hurt. If the case can be made that we need \$379 billion for defense, I would hope that it be made with humility and acknowledgement of how far the human family has drifted from God’s dream for the world. What kind of world might we shape if we gave a billion dollars a day to the poverty-stricken who barely subsist without adequate food, water, housing or health care.

Something is wrong. Every ninth child in this country lives in poverty. Our schools and inner cities desperately need help. I do not write from a critical heart but from a broken heart.

I don’t know the answer to all this, but I would be too ashamed and embarrassed to applaud our defense budget. I believe it would have been much more in the spirit of Jesus for Congress to have gotten on their knees and wept for what has become of the incomprehensively wonderful earth God has entrusted to us. If in humility we conclude that more military might and weapons are the best response to make to terrorism, I would want us to lament that conclusion and ask God to have mercy on our souls. God forbid that we who follow Jesus become arrogant and confident in our military might. Jesus warns us that in society’s frantic attempt to save itself, it will lose its soul.

I remember some former parishioners whose drug-addicted son became violent. As a last resort they locked him out of their home and called the police. I could not offer them a better alternative. We were never sure it was the best response but it seemed a necessary one. However, neither the parents nor I rejoiced in this harsh measure. And the parents continued pouring energy into exploring possibilities for transformation and reconciliation. We humbly



*Bishop Chamberlain speaks at a recent groundbreaking.*

wept over the brokenness plaguing us all.

It seems to me that the least that is expected of those who follow Jesus is humility. This saves us from the sin of pride and arrogance or mere nationalism. It keeps us searching, questioning, and praying. It calls us to examine the priorities of our personal lives and those of our country. When do we withhold mercy? When do we extend justice? When do we promote policies that widen the gap between the rich and the poor? How committed are we to reconciliation?

For the life of me, I cannot see Jesus applauding the announcement of an additional \$48 billion dollars for defense.

*Prayer: O God, your heart must be broken by terrorism. And you must weep that we only know how to respond to it with more weapons and punishment. I confess I trust too much in our military solutions. I implore you, O God, to give me and all who follow Jesus Christ the courage and creativity to be your light and leaven within society. Help us to reflect more and more the disposition of Jesus and less and less of our own. I pray this for the sake of the whole world for whom you gave your son Jesus. Amen. ■*

**■ What's Your Size?**

*The Call* uses the following symbols to identify articles about small, medium or large churches:

**S**= Churches with average 85 or fewer in principle weekly worship service(s)

**M**= Average 86 to 225 in worship service(s)

**L**= Average 226 or more in worship service(s)



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**corrections:**

## It's 32939, not 32929

▶ **On page 2 of the Feb. 15 edition**, a request for local church newsletters included an incorrect post office box. If you are not already sending your newsletter to Bishop Chamberlain or *The Call*, please send to: Editor, *The Call*, P.O. Box 32939, Knoxville, TN 37930-2939.

▶ **On page 6 the byline for the article**, “Nine denominations move forward to combat racism,” was omitted. The author is M. Garlinda Burton.

▶ **On page 8, “District Roundup” states** that First Farragut UMC recently purchased 17 acres for \$7 million. The property actually cost \$2 million and the future building will cost \$5 million for a total package of \$7 million.

*The Call* regrets the errors. ■