

Why Did Jesus Die?
Hebrews 9:11-14
April 5, 2020

In the opening sequence of the film, **Grand Canyon**, a tow truck driver played by Danny Glover, is being threatened by five men out to attack and rob the man Danny has been called in to help. The man he is helping, played by the versatile Kevin Klein, has just attended a basketball game. Traffic gridlock outside the stadium has forced him to find an alternative route home. Unfortunately, he finds himself in the black ghetto of Los Angeles where his car breaks down. In the quiet, dark street of the ghetto he becomes the target of a gang. Kevin is terrified and puts in a call for help. Danny Glover arrives to find Kevin surrounded by his assailants. Danny says to them,

Man, the world ain't supposed to work like this. Maybe you don't know that, but this ain't the way it's supposed to be. I'm supposed to be able to do my job without askin' you if I can. And that dude is supposed to be able to wait with his car without you rippin' him off. Everything's supposed to be different than what it is here.

So yes, we can respond to the question of what's wrong with the world by pointing to the underbelly of societies that is the source of our darkness. It's the bad apples in the barrel that cause the disease of the whole lot. But Isaiah won't let us off so easily. He says: *all we like sheep have gone astray we have all turned to our own way.* (Isaiah 53: 6)

Jesus said this in response to those requiring observance of the purity laws: *Listen and understand: it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it what comes out of the mouth that defiles.* (Matthew 15:10ff) And most of us know that there is truth in this statement. There is something within all of us that pulls us in a direction away from God. Our natural inclination seems to be to rebel against God. The bible calls this sin.

When the **London Times** asked writers to respond to the question 'what's wrong with the world' G.K. Chesterton replied, *I am!* Chesterton recognizes that the reason the world isn't working the way it ought to can be laid at each of our doors. We are the problem, not

just the bad apples. Our natural inclination is to reject the Lordship of God over our lives. This inclination is rooted deep inside each one of us and cannot seem to be healed by our efforts to be good, our grand philosophies, our noble gestures. And don't misunderstand me here; there are lots of good done in our world. But all of them fall short of God's standards to love God above all else.

Into our seemingly inability to change our pattern of life God sends his Son, a move planned from before the beginning of time. The basis of this new movement is God's love for us. Jesus is God's remedy for our sins and failures to live up to our created purpose. All of this was foreshadowed in the Old Testament.

And so this path our Lord took leading up to his arrest in the garden was one he took on our behalf. And this Sunday is designated "passion Sunday" for a good reason. It is the Sunday before Black Friday or the day we reflect on the crucifixion. What does that cross mean for you and me in the 21st century?

The Hebrews readings helps answer this question: *But when Christ came as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and perfect tent... he entered once for all into the Holy Place, not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption. (Hebrews 9:10ff) In short, the entire sacrificial system of Israel was unable to resolve the sin issue.*

Walter Brueggemann, a wise Old Testament scholar, is helpful on this: *the self-giving of God is kept hidden in talk about animals and sacrifices... The animal is the means for sacrament. The animal given is the sign of the self-giving of God, whose self-giving is required for a new beginning. (Finally Comes the Poet)* The author of Hebrews tells us that Jesus entered the holy place with his own life blood as our high priest in order to open the way to forgiveness, healing and reconciliation for us all.

What the cross means is that his death highlights our inability to resolve our dilemma. We needed help from outside ourselves. No amount of self-discipline, good works, self-sacrifice, no amount of religion, bridges the chasm separating a holy God from us sinners.

This is what Jesus' death/resurrection accomplished. Nothing else could do this! It was in simple terms, **a rescue operation**.

What we ought to learn from Jesus' death is the following: **one**, God notices our lives and our drift from God's Lordship over us; **two**, God takes that drift seriously; **three**, God responds with the remedy.

All of this is captured in the reading from Isaiah this morning. The prophet says: *But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities, upon him was the punishment that made us whole and by his bruises we are healed.*

This is the consistent message of the New Testament. Jesus death was for us. We cannot heal ourselves. We cannot bypass God's accomplishment in Christ with our own attempts to please God. All of our efforts, noble and good as they might be, fall short. That is why Jesus died. Jesus' self-giving is God's remedy.

And so with the hymn writer we are asked to respond, *nothing in my hand I bring, simply to thy cross I cling; naked, come to thee for dress; helpless, look to thee for grace; foul, I to the fountain fly; wash me, Saviour, or I die.*

Danny Glover was correct in the movie to say that the world "ain't supposed to work this way." Perhaps you are feeling that ache and powerlessness in your life. This pandemic has only heightened our anxiety and fear. May the love of God in Christ meet you in your loneliness, isolation and fear. May the Lord bring you hope, healing, love and peace on this passion Sunday.

Amen