

We Have Met the Enemy

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Matthew 26: 14-27: 54

We just can't understand it. Even all those who were for him turn out to be against him in the end. We read this story and it seems incomprehensible to us. Why would they put someone like Jesus to death? Well, the fact is, we've come up with lots of explanations that focus on Jesus and on people's mistaken views about him. One of those is that Zealots and radical Pharisees and other nationalist groups of the time wanted a Messiah to lead them in victorious battle against their enemies the Romans. And, so this explanation goes, they mistook Jesus for awhile for just such a Messiah, but when they figured out he wasn't about to do that, they turned on him. You see that kind of thing in some of the movies that are out there.

Of course, another explanation focuses on the Jewish leaders, the Sadducees and the high priests and their ability to turn the crowd against him. The most modern and "in vogue" approach right now is to blame the Romans. After all, crucifixion was a Roman form of execution, and they were finally the ones in charge of all the politics in the region. The trouble with any of these explanations is that you have to ignore major portions of the Gospel story to get there. Some have no problem doing that, saying, "well, that's the early church's account so you can't really trust that to be objective."

Maybe you can't trust the church's account to be *objective*. But, it's the account we have and by all indications you *can* trust it to be *honest*, because the church implicates itself in this account. All those who were in the admiring crowds as he rode into Jerusalem five days earlier, whether just admirers, or marginal followers are implicated, of course, because the twelve disciples themselves, the hardcore followers are implicated. Right? Even if they were not in the crowd shouting to crucify him, they had betrayed, abandoned or denied him, every last one of them. Even Peter, his right-hand man, the "rock" on whom the church was built, denied him three times. They all cut and ran, at best. So, even all those who were for him turn out finally to be against him in the end. Because this story says just like Jesus did, that to be a disciple of his means a cross given you by others. So to run is to be against what he is for, against who he is. Well, that's just the point.

The gospel stories are told the way they are not because the early church, persecuted as they were, was trying to avoid offending the Romans, or the Jewish elite, or anyone else. They are told the way they are because to blame this or that group, or this or that person is to miss the point! Because the Gospel story is not a newspaper account, telling us about a momentous event (although it certainly was that!) that happened two thousand years ago. The Gospel story is the Word of God for us. That is, it is God addressing us in our lives in our world right here, right now. The key to understanding this story is in learning to tell it about ourselves. So, the point of the story is we all did it. We all, you and I, still do it. We have met the enemy and it is us.

We crucify him. We who count ourselves "his people." We, along with drug addicts and child abusers and prostitutes and their johns, and rapists and Islamic terrorists, betray, abandon and deny this One. You see, that's why it had to be Peter, who had denied him three times, on whom the church was built. Otherwise, we wouldn't know ourselves as a community of sinners, which is the truth about all of us, and so otherwise we couldn't be a hospital for sinners. And without that self-knowledge we can never be a community of forgiveness, which is just what we are to be. So, it is we who are to take the place of the crowd in this story. We are those who call for his crucifixion, saying, "his blood be on us and on our children." Can you say that with me? Say it: "his blood be on us and on our children." And again...

As theologian Stanley Hauerwas has said, “Jesus must be killed because Jesus has called into existence a new people who constitute a challenge to the world order based on lies and deceit. Jesus must be killed because he is a threat to all who rule in the name of safety and comfort. Jesus must be killed because we do not desire to have our deepest desires exposed. Jesus must be killed because we do not want our loves governed by his love. Jesus must be killed because we refuse to forgive our enemies. Jesus must be killed because we do not believe in a God who creates us and who would come among us after our likeness.” You see what this event reveals to us is that our persistent questions about how we can deal with despicable and evil people and things in the world, is the same question as “how can I deal with that in me?” We have met the enemy and it is us!

Here is the Gospel story: everyone crucifies and so everyone is forgiven. That's the meaning of the cross, isn't it? It reveals the heart of God. God will not let us be lost to our own sin. God will not let us be lost to our abandoning of him, our denying of him, our betraying of him, for it is an abandoning and denying and betraying of who God made us to be. And so, God forgives us our crucifying of him. The cross is the place where God's heart, God's love, God's life intersects with our hearts, our loves and our lives and creates them all new in a community that lives forgiveness.

Just like the Amish a year or so ago after the horrific shooting in their school. The fact that the culture at large was so moved and astounded at their witness of forgiveness in the aftermath of that should not be surprising. We live in a culture that does not know the truth of Jesus, that confuses order with peace, and that believes the violence it calls justice is the only alternative to chaos. But, the fact that you and I were just as moved and astounded at that witness of forgiveness is an indictment of us. Because, that's just who we are as Christians. That's just what the church of Jesus Christ is! How can we be anything else after reading this story and knowing ourselves as his crucifiers? Everyone crucifies, everyone is forgiven.

So, because of God's grace, on this same day when we hear ourselves say, “his blood be on us and our our children,” we say thank God his blood is on us and on our children. Because it is Jesus' life's blood and it is given freely, poured out for us and for all for the forgiveness of our sin, that we might know ourselves and each other as forgiven.

Amen.