

Pilot's words rang loudly for me this Holy Week.

“TRUTH? What is Truth?”

Maybe those words reverberated for me because of the release of the Mueller report and the tsunami of responses trying to determine what is the Truth.

Maybe it's because of my lifetime personal wrestling match with the God-awful theology that has evolved over two millennia about the meaning of the crucifixion, a theology that was shaped by the prior thousands of years of Old testament scriptures, which themselves reflected a pagan world view centered on a “mean” God, a God of vengeance, a God of retribution.

Today, I ask Pilot's question about our understanding of the **TRUTH** of Good Friday theology.

TRUTH? Jesus came on earth to save us.

TRUTH? Salvation was necessary because of the sin of Adam and Eve, who had angered God.
God's anger then justified shunning humans from Heaven.

TRUTH? Jesus' suffering and death was to appease the anger of God, and restore Heaven to us humans.

Holy Week liturgies abound with these theological “Truths”:

“He came among us as a man, to free mankind from darkness”.

“The suffering and death of your Son brought life to the whole world”.

“He is the sacrificial lamb.”

“Though innocent, he accepted death to save the guilty”

“He has opened the gates of Heaven to receive his faithful people”.

Would God create humans,
who lived on this earth for hundreds of thousands, even millions, of
years before Jesus, then reject them for all that time?

Really?

TRUTH? God requires a blood sacrifice.

That makes God out to be a cruel, vindictive being, who lives in a different realm ‘up above’. Human sacrifice was common in all cultures, everywhere, to appease gods. Animal sacrifice came to replace it as civilizations became, well, more civilized. Human sacrifice was reserved more for entertainment purposes then, as any visit to a coliseum will verify.

So, the one true God, reverted to the blood thirsty, avenger, god, back-tracking on civilized religious practices?

Really?

Atonement theology emphasizes that humanity was separated from God, until Jesus accepted that he had to suffer and die a horrible death to appease God on behalf of sinful humanity. This is the Abraham and Isaac story with a different, a worse ending. God not staying God's own demand for the killing of God's own son because humans were so offensive, so sinful, that the only way God could redeem them was to make God's own son pay the ransom of death, a really gruesome death?

Really?

That just *makes no sense to me.*

(TRUTH: I am completely done with the theology of human blood sacrifice.)

(TRUTH: I am done with the theology someone needing to be ransomed by death for me to be redeemed.)

(TRUTH: I am done with myths masquerading and perpetuated as theological truths.)

(TRUTH: I am done with any theology, doctrine or dogma that ignores what Jesus taught and his example for living.)

These archaic theological *TRUTHS?* explained the purpose of Jesus' life on earth as the necessity of his coming into the world so he could be crucified because God demanded it, according to Paul, (writing in the years right after Jesus died and rose), and to Anselm, (writing in the eleventh century a millennia later.

These old theological Truths just don't reflect the God I have to believe in to be a person of faith.

Three basic beliefs inform my faith:

1. Creation is NOT a historical event, but that it is a constant reality; Divine action is the heart of it, inspiring and energizing it.

(TRUTH: I am done with biblical literalism.)

2. Divine Presence (God) does not live in a distant realm, removed from creation, but is imbued in all aspects of creation.

(TRUTH: I am done with a distant God.)

3. Humans are not born into sin, but are born into life and love, the unfailing love of the Creator God for all his creation. You only have to look at a new born to realize that they are pure and sinless. I dare you to find a sinful baby.

(TRUTH: I am done with original sin)

TRUTH! Jesus' suffering and death were NOT dictated by God;
Jesus challenged the secular and religious institutions;
Jesus confronted the full, crushing force of imperial power with a
a powerful message of nonviolence, no matter what: forgive those who
insult, injure, persecute you; love your enemy.

Jesus turned the social norms of his world inside out and upside down,
He reversed the social rules of life.

The Truth about Jesus is that the institutions did to him what they do to
anybody who challenges them,
They got rid of him,

(TRUTH: I am done with the "mean God" theology that blames
God for humans' own personal and structural sin.)

*I am convinced that focusing on the death of Jesus gives an unbalanced,
distorted understanding of his death.*

(TRUTH: I am done with focusing on the dying Jesus.)

**TRUTH! The IMPORTANCE AND PURPOSE OF JESUS was His life and
teaching.**

Contextually rational but really flawed New Testament theology re-worked Old
Testament-rooted theology. It has been taught as TRUTH for two millennia that
Jesus came into the world just to die in order to appease his VENGEFUL Father.
It reflects worldviews of people who needed a scapegoat for their troubles, who
believed in human blood sacrifice, who needed some way to explain their
suffering and to have a way to DO SOMETHING to undo it.

(TRUTH: I am done with human blood sacrifice and atonement
theology.)

**TRUTH! Jesus came to show by his example and teaching how human
beings should live in this world.**

Remember, Jesus referred to 'the Kingdom of God' constantly.

He wanted God's kingdom to come on earth as it is in "Heaven."

Jesus was totally a man of his time.

He was trying to bridge the old ways of thinking about a God "out there" in a
supposedly perfect heavenly world far away with the possibility of humans
creating a more perfect world right here by the way we live and love each
other.

Behold! He was doing something new!

TRUTH! Learn to live by the values and attitudes that Jesus outlined in his life.

TRUTH! Know the Divine Presence that is not distant, but is within us, and all creation.

TRUTH! The Divine Presence' one desire is to pour out Divine Love on us every moment, until we reach its fulfillment when, after we die, we become part of that Presence.

John Dominic Crossan has pointed out that the Eastern Church has since its beginning imagined the resurrection with Jesus rising as he is grasping the hands of Adam and Eve, taking them with Him.

Crossan said,

“All great religions offer humanity parables bigger than themselves. So also here. When Christ, rising from the dead after having been executed for nonviolent resistance against violent imperial justice, grasps the hands of Adam and Eve, he creates a parable of possibility and a metaphor of hope for all of humanity’s redemption. Even though Christ is crucified for his nonviolent resistance, this Crucifixion and Resurrection imagery challenges our species to redeem our world and save our earth by transcending the escalatory violence we create as civilization’s normal trajectory. And the universal resurrection imagery makes it clear that we are all involved in this process.”

The view from the cross on the cover of your Order of Worship is not the usual view. I chose it because it captures the meaning of the cross for me. What do you see dead center at the bottom of the painting by James Tissot?

Yes. Christ’s feet. And what would have been in His line of vision as he hung on the cross? Yes. The women at the foot of the cross, standing in a holy and separate space from the crowd who was responsible for his crucifixion. The view from the cross is about Jesus witnessing the fidelity, the faithfulness of His disciples who stayed with Him in His suffering, never leaving Him through his agonizing death. He was not alone. And He stayed true to His teaching of non-violence, despite his persecution and suffering at the hands of human beings for human reasons.

The theology TRUTH! of the cross for me is that to be a follower of Jesus is to journey with others in their suffering, knowing that a loving God, not a vengeful one, is present in us all and the kingdom comes on earth as it is in Heaven when we do not suffer alone. God doesn’t demand suffering, isn’t to blame for it.

Good Friday Homily - April 19, 2019

God is the Divine love and Presence in our shared fidelity to the non-violent teachings of Jesus as we live and care for each other and all of creation.

Amen.

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Good Friday, April 19, 2019
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Note: In this homily, I drew on ideas from the writings of Rev. Tony Flannery and John Dominic Crossan and combined them with my own theological reflection on the theology of the cross for Good Friday.