

Did God Kill Jesus? Part II

2 Thessalonians 2:13-17, 1 John 4:9-12 by Patty Friesen (Nov. 13/16)

This is Part II of Did God Kill Jesus? based on the book by Tony Jones. I think God sends books into my life when I need them and for a long while I've needed a new way to understand Jesus and his death and my salvation from the way I was raised which was that an all-powerful God demanded the death of Jesus on the cross because I was such a bad person and needed saving. Sarah Hiebert knew I struggled to articulate what Jesus' death and salvation meant to me. She wanted a clear traditional message on that at her funeral and Rev. Martin Friesen provided that for us but I'm going to jump in and try to articulate another message on Jesus' death and our salvation that fits a little more with our Anabaptist theology and my personal need for a loving God. And next Sunday I'm going to preach the tribute sermon I wanted to preach at Sarah's funeral. She won't mind.

We intentionally have the same text from 2 Thessalonians this week as last week because it is such an important center to understanding the death of Jesus. 1 and 2nd Thessalonians are Paul's first letters ever written and are the most tender and pastoral of his letters and in this passage he focuses on the love of God. In Romans, it feels like that love maybe gets kind of lost. But let me recap what we've learned so far in our journey with the death of Jesus. So far we've learned...

1. The desire to sacrifice is rooted deep in ancient human practice and psychology.
2. Israel's animal sacrifices were an improvement on its neighbours' human sacrifices during Old Testament times.

3. Through the prophets, God expressed a desire for obedience and social justice over sacrifices.
4. The Gospel writers saw Jesus' death as a Passover deliverance from slavery.
5. Paul considered Jesus' death as the single event through which all faith and life should be understood and he introduced the idea that Jesus' death atoned for individual personal sin.

Now we have to think through reasons for Jesus' death. It somehow needs to bring us closer to God and inspire us to be more loving to one another. If we can figure out how the crucifixion is good news, then we can be proud to wear crosses around our necks and have an inviting explanation for them.

From 1 John we hear that in this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. In the early church to whom Paul is writing, the love of God, Jesus' death on the cross, and love for our fellow humans are inextricable from one another. So this must be our first commitment: the crucifixion must show the love of God and it must provoke us to greater love for one another.

It may go back to how we view God in the first place. Many of us were raised being taught that God is a bundle of omnis – omnipotent - all powerful, omniscient – all knowing, and omnipresent – all present everywhere. The God of the Old Testament is this kind of God and Terri Lynn and I know this as we are teaching Old Testament at Osler School. They like to sing Our God is an awesome God – it's the only thing that settles them down and we do worship and

honour our God who is over all. But the other side of God is the incarnational God, the tender parental God who chose to come in humble human form and in Jesus chose self-sacrifice. It wasn't that the awesome God demanded it, it was that the human God chose it. So we have a whole new way of life, made known in the way of Jesus' life, teaching and death, which is defined by humility and even suffering. As a result of his life, teaching and death, the distance between God and humanity has been obliterated. The master has joined the disciples. The awesome God has joined the little people and the appropriate response to that, right from Jesus' own lips is that we too humble ourselves, serve one another and take up our own crosses of suffering bravely, whatever they may be.

This is unique to Christian faith, that a powerful God has become a personal God. God is no longer the all-powerful God of the Hebrews nor the abstract, immaterial concept of the Greeks. Jesus was our brother, our friend, our fellow journeyer in the joys and sufferings of human life. The beauty and power of the resurrection is that this fellow journeyer didn't end on the cross but lives on and through the Holy Spirit offers us the ceaseless presence of God as Advocate and Comforter. In other words, everything after the crucifixion is meant to ensure that we never again feel forsaken by God. We may at times feel alone, but since the crucifixion God has made sure that we aren't alone.

Jesus' death only has meaning because of his resurrection. When he was raised from the dead, Jesus the Christ made several appearances to those who loved him. He spoke with women at the tomb; he appeared among his disciples in the upper room; he explained his life, incognito, to a couple of men walking the

road from Jerusalem to Emmaus; he cooked fish on the beach for his disciples. Each appearance was surprisingly mundane. When you read all of the accounts in the Gospels and Acts about Jesus' post resurrection appearances, it's notable how underwhelming they are. Jesus did not come back from death with blaring trumpets and choirs of angels. Instead, he slipped back into his followers' lives in fairly unassuming ways. He was present with them.

When the earliest Christians – including Paul – attempted to make sense of Jesus' resurrection, they first thought it meant that they too would be quickly swept into heaven. But as time wore on, they realized there was a bigger plan afoot. “Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer,” wrote Paul in one of his later letters. Their hope for a future with God did not diminish, but it did change. The resurrection came to mean not an immediate escape from this life, but an initiation of the age of the Holy Spirit.

God identified with our limitations on the cross. In the resurrection, we are invited to identify with God's eternal life. Because of the resurrection, our solidarity with God is not limited to struggle and death on a cross – it's opened to victory over death and everlasting life with God. The crucifixion and resurrection are two moments in the same event, and in them the solidarity between God and human is made complete.

The single most important characteristic of any Christian is hope. In the face of strife and conflict, we are called to hope. And that hope springs exclusively directly from the crucifixion-resurrection event. God's promise that his commitment to use is not just here and now, but is everlasting. Yes, God dies

in ignominy on the cross, sharing our sorrows. But God overcomes death and sin and grief and trouble on Easter morning. And he invites us down the same path with the same promise. The way of the cross leads to resurrection. That is our hope. And next Sunday, we will celebrate that hope in the remembrance of our loved ones who have passed away this year. Please let us know if you would like anyone named and printed in the bulletin.

Let us pray...