

Good Friday
Matthew 27:50
March 21, 2008

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“Jesus gave one more great cry, and died”

(Phillips Paraphrase)

What if he didn't die? What if some rescue had been arranged, some seizing of history by his followers. Things would have turned out very differently.

Eventually, I suppose he would have been famous, with everyone running after him. Pushing and shoving, the crowds would have finally listened to him. There would, no doubt, have been many more healings. People might have seen the error of their ways. There would have been much reform of personal lives, institutions, regimes. The church would have been famous right away. The church, being the closest to him, would represent him, speak for him. Then he could have kept us from all this dying as well.

Then he could have joined us in our efforts to stave off death. We could all have eaten right, lived right, been proud of our accomplishments. Together we could have saved creation and fixed the world. With a living hero on our side our defenses against death would be fortified.

Because we don't "die." We sense that in spite of our best efforts, there will be an end to all this for us. But we don't "die." We "pass on," "pass away," "go to meet our maker," or we "leave a legacy."

So intent you and I are on staving off death, we never get around to living it either. So life is just frittered away.

But Jesus died. It is as though because you and I can't even do that well, he did it for us. It is of course hard on proud beings to be reduced to this. Watching Jesus death, and hearing that our salvation hangs here in the balance. Well, that by itself is a kind of death for us. What can you say to that?

We try really hard to make sense of this. We may attempt some "meaning" in all this, or much worse, fix on some moral take away from his dying, some lesson for all in this dying. Then we could convince ourselves that Jesus was really doing something else in this dying, something that was more profound, religious, moral. We could construct some atonement structure over it all and render it all understandable. Settling on some deep eternal meaning, the banality of this death could be avoided.

The custom of the Seven Last Words is remarkable not so much for the profound words Jesus uttered, but for the silence between the words. A whole afternoon of dying, and only seven words. If there were only seven words, most of this day was empty silence. In those seven words, is of course much to contemplate, but understanding is not among them.

And after Jesus' final great cry, he died. Here is the silence which no prattled meaning can help. This is why he came. Not for the words, but for the dying. In the end that is all he can ever do.

And so he did die. It cannot be prevented. There is nothing here to emulate or imitate. There is no example here. For you and I will not "understand" this dying. Actually, by Jesus' death you and I are understood. For in Jesus' death you and I are described. In Paul's words, by this finally are all mouths stopped. The effect of Jesus' death is the darkest silence in all creation.

Seven words. Mostly silence. So that every mouth shall be stopped.