

STANLEY HAUERWAS: THE CROSS

Trinity Institute, *The Good News Now – Evolving with the Gospel of Jesus*

How'd I look? (Laughter) I didn't get to see it. I wrote a memoir a few years ago called *Hannah's Child*, and I said at the time I worried to do that, that it wasn't an exercise in narcissism, but I was just narcissistic enough to do it so you wonder what you look like. **TK (Inaudible)** is very clear about that.

It also separates the crucifixion from Jesus' life and resurrection, as Elizabeth said eloquently last night in her video. And if Jesus' cross is isolated from Jesus' life, you lose the significance, interestingly enough, that Jesus is the Messiah of Israel. Part of that move about making Jesus the forgiver of sin, (**TK sin**), is that you lose the narrative context in which he works as the one who has come to be the Messiah. Moreover, when the cross is separated from the resurrection, the God whose justice allegedly must be satisfied, so our sins can be forgiven, is quite simply a monster. The God that is allegedly the God of justice, associated with satisfaction accounts of the atonement, is not, interestingly enough, the God who is the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Jesus does not satisfy a justice that the Father holds him to. Jesus is the justice of God. He is the justice of God if you remember he is the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity.

I mean it's just fascinating how often evangelical emphasis upon Jesus' necessary sacrifice makes it sound as if the Father and the Son are not mutually bound in love. Satisfaction theories of the atonement – and this is, I think, probably the most important thing I have to say – interestingly enough reflect an understanding of the church that makes the church secondary. It reflects an understanding of the church that makes the church secondary. I take this to be one of the developments that was the result of the Constantinian settlement, and I understand that the whole question of when Constantinism begins is quite disputed. But prior to Constantine, Christians knew God was present in the church, but they had to have faith that God was working in the world, because the world was beating the hell out of them, but the church was their politics.

After Constantine, Christians knew God was present in the world because now things were going better for them, but now they had to have faith that God was present in the church, because the church was now filled with such unfaithfulness. So when salvation was offered by the church, the salvation was understood, after the Constantinian turn, to be primarily internal. It was something about me that had to be changed, not the politics of the world.

So what is the good news of the cross of Christ after we are now beginning to see Constantinism finally come to an end? I think it is well summed up by John Howard Yoder's claim that the cross and resurrection give us an understanding of God who

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has worked and continues to work to give us life that is not a tale told by an idiot. Rather, we believe, as Christians, we are part of a history of redemption, in which faithfulness to Christ makes us a participant in God's redemption of the world through constituting us into a people, in which we lose our fascination with ourselves.

In particular, Yoder calls attention to John's claim in Revelation that the lamb that was slain is worthy to receive power. Yoder comments, "John is here saying, not as an inscrutable paradox, but as a meaningful affirmation that the cross, and not the sword, suffering, and not brute power, determine the meaning of history. The cross and not the sword. Suffering, and not brute power, determine the meaning of history. The key to the obedience of God's people is not their effectiveness, but their patience. My way of putting that, as Christians, as a people, constituted to be at war, was war. We do not believe that being nonviolent is necessarily a strategy to end the world of war, but rather as faithful followers of Christ, we believe we must be nonviolent in a world of war. That's patience.

The key to the obedience of God's people is not effectiveness, therefore, but it is faithfulness to the one who was resurrected from the dead. This is the attempt to show that the right is assured not by might that comes to the aid of the right, which, of course, is the justification of the use of violence throughout history. The triumph of the right, rather, although, it is sure, because of the power of the crucified one's resurrection, as the crucified one, is good, not because of any calculation of cause and effect, not because of the inevitable greater strength of the good guys. Rather, the relationship between the obedience of God's people sustained by cross and resurrection and the triumph of God's cause is not a relationship of cause and effect, but one of cross and resurrection. That is what you might say a massive metaphysical claim, that the triumph of God's cause, the patience of his people is not a relationship of cause and effect, but one of cross and resurrection.

It obviously has implications, as was clear from last night, which means that materialistic reductionist accounts of human action has one of cause and effect Christians cannot agree to. All of which means that the good news of the cross is that death and the fear of death has been defeated. Death, or at least the fear of death, is the motor behind the powers that were defeated at the crucifixion. The powers were God's good creation, but because of sin, became deeply perverted and tempt us to do good in the name of having to secure a lesser evil. I can illustrate the power of death over our lives by asking how you want to die. I suspect most people in modernity want to die quickly, painlessly, and in their sleep. We want to die quickly and painlessly, for obvious reasons, but we want to die in our sleep because when we die, we do not want to know we are dying. So we then ask doctors to keep us alive to the point that when we die we do not have to know we're dying, and then we get to

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blame doctors for keeping us alive to no point.

If you want to know what it feels like to be under a power, it is exactly to be possessed by the desire to get out of life alive, and that fuels the fear-driven politics of which the crucified and resurrected Lord is the alternative to. The good news of the cross is through Christ's cross and resurrection, and the cross is not a general symbol. It is Christ's cross. The good news of the cross is that through Christ's cross and resurrection, we have been baptized into his death and resurrection, making Christians a people capable of staring down death by refusing to let death determine our living. We are people trained to die young. Christians are people who have been made part of a people at war with war, because we have learned our security will never be gained through violence, and I hope that sounds like very good news, indeed. Thank you very much.