



March 24, 2019 - Bring It On, Lord Jesus

Given by Rev. Mattei

Lk 13:1-9

“Galilean pilgrims whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifice” and people killed when a water tower fell on them are not different news than this past week’s massacre of people offering their sacrifice of prayer in a Christchurch, New Zealand, mosque¹ and the many hundreds killed by a cyclone that struck Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Malawi.² Here in the Midwest people are experiencing their own share of loss and grief.³

The usual questions come to mind: Is there a God? If so, what kind of God? A Good Father who protects and nurtures us or a Cosmic Judge who measures out people’s behaviors, and showers down blessings and distributes punishment accordingly? Or an Indifferent Spectator who does not intervene in human affairs even when there is innocent suffering?

We all try to make sense of life tragedies, and the answers we give to those questions reveal the kind of God we worship. Unfortunately, it is not rare to hear Christian leaders espousing what Luther proclaimed a theology of glory, meaning: our God can be expected

¹<https://www.newshub.co.nz/home/new-zealand/2019/03/christchurch-terror-attack-march-for-love-to-be-held-in-christchurch-on-saturday.html>

²<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-47678743>

³<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2019/03/20/midwest-flooding-nebraska-iowa-missouri-could-last-all-spring/3220970002/>

to deliver blessings to the good and punishment to the evil ones. We, perhaps, don't go so far as to claim that God is punishing people for their sins when something terrible happens to them (loss of health, of life, of property, divorce) but we do tend to think that, if nothing really unpleasant and challenging happens to us, then it must mean that we are blessed, and this reinforces our self-delusion of being "good."

Martin Luther, instead, encouraged Christians to embrace a theology of the cross: only by looking at the cross of Christ can we perceive the unstoppable, unshakable, unrelenting, unthinkable, and unconditional love of God for humanity (1 Cor 2:2). In the torture and the senseless killing of Jesus, in the weakness and shame of the cross, we see a suffering God who chooses to be vulnerable and helpless with the millions who experience despair, and suffer by the hand of those in power, those who care less, those who have only their "belly" (personal goal of power, glory and honor) to worry about (Phil 3:17-20).⁴

This love of God, this "face" of God we are on a journey to see (Ex 33:18-22; Jn 1:18; 1 Jn 3:2; 1 Cor 13:12; Rev 22:4). It's an inner journey that promises growth and holiness.

Franciscan priest and author, Richard Rohr,⁵ reflects that in the first part of life we are involved in establishing an identity, learning social skills, exploring relationships, making friends, creating community, building a home and a safety net. During early life, part of the journey is about establishing externals, an effort to apply Bible imperatives and religious

⁴<http://essays.wls.wels.net/bitstream/handle/123456789/2604/Luther's%20Theology%20of%20the%20Cross.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

⁵ Richard Rohr, Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life

doctrines, rituals, and projecting an image we think may earn us respectability, honor and glory, all of which largely substitute for an authentic spiritual experience.

But at some point, we need to progress spiritually.

*Authentic God experience always “burns” you, yet does not destroy you, just as the burning bush revealed to Moses (see [Ex 3:2-3](#)). Early-stage religion is primarily preparing you for the immense gift of this burning, the inner experience of God, as though creating a proper cradle into which the Christ can be born. Unfortunately, most people get so preoccupied with their cradle, and whether their cradle is better than other cradles, or whether their cradle is the only *true* cradle, that they never get to the birth of God in the soul. Many feel that believing a few doctrines or performing some rituals is what religion is all about.*

Yet, people get to a point when they face real-life situations (social injustice, divorce, failure, gender identity, illness and loss, grief, an inner life of prayer, or a radical reading of the Gospel) and the basic spiritual training received or soul depth achieved is not sufficient. When people reach that fork in the road, they reach a fundamental and critical point in life: this is a decisive moment that will either make or break them. Then there is the potential for a great spiritual development.

German theologian, philosopher and mystic, Meister Eckhart (1260–1328),⁶ explains:

“God’s seed is in us. If it were tended by a good, wise and industrious laborer, it would then flourish all the better, and would grow up to God, whose seed it is, and its fruits would be

⁶ Meister Eckhart, “Of the Nobleman,” *Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense*, trans. E. Colledge and B. McGinn (Paulist Press: 1981), 241.

*like God's own nature. The seed of a pear tree grows into a pear tree, the seed of a nut tree grows to be a nut tree, the seed of God grows to be God."*⁷

In today's gospel, the people who died were not more deserving of death than others. It's not about being punished but about being prepared. The point is that death is unexpectedly near and one better be ready. It can happen when engaged in ritual or standing by a water tower. And when it happens so suddenly there is no time for repentance. The mystics recommended to "die before you die" meaning: die to your ego, to the selfishness, to the old self and embrace the new self of Christ remembering your Baptism. The focus is not to be on the right amount of effort made in avoiding sin or improving ourselves but on the availability of one to be transformed, to let go of perceived control and to trust God.

Repentance is not simply a turning from sin but an acceptance of the visitation of God. God wants to do something with us and, for that purpose, God calls us closer to Him for and in depth fertilization (do you remember the *manure* the gardener wanted to put around the fig tree?). So our prayer becomes: Bring it on, Jesus, bring it on.

⁷ <https://cac.org/relinquishing-ego-2019-03-21/>