

In The End - God

Presented By Pastor Scott Walters on 11/24/09
At Crossroads United Methodist Church
Waunakee, WI

When Jesus died it was a small event. Just another execution, a diversion for the people, entertainment for an afternoon.

He died and nothing changed. It was a small victory for Roman rulers -- one suspected revolutionary was dead. It was a insignificant victory for the religious establishment -- one questionable leader died. It was a sizable tragedy for his followers.

At the time, his death barely registered as a blip, quite unremarkable, quite unexceptional. Certainly not what sociologists might describe as a generational defining moment.

Robert Putnam, one such sociologist, argues that generations can be shaped by a singular event that becomes the ruling metaphor for their approach to life. "Depression era children grew up being frugal," he says. "The baby boomers came of age in a time of great prosperity, but also great uncertainty in witnessing the assassinations of Martin Luther King and JFK and the Vietnam war. For what's called Generation X, the Challenger explosion might be their defining moment."

There have been a number defining moments in our national history. Each event was personal in impact. Think of:

**The sinking of the Titanic*

** Pearl Harbor*

** Hiroshima*

** The assassination of JFK*

** The Challenger explosion*

** The Pan Am crash over Lockerbie*

** Columbine*

** 9/11*

Tragic deaths always leave scars that are profoundly personal. On December 7, 1941, the Rev. Fred Robie, found his defining moment. Young Fred was a sailor on the day the Japanese flew in to sink our Pacific naval fleet. He had not been aboard the Arizona, but his ship had also been hit. He expressed vividly the horror of being aboard the flaming and sinking vessel as bullets flew and bombs roared.

Fred described being caught below deck: feeling disoriented as the ship took on water where he stood, fire coming from above and the smoke stealing his breath. His buddy lay dead at his feet as the young sailor struggled in the darkness to escape; fear and adrenaline propelling him to the surface. It was indeed a day that lives in infamy, and from then on, that generation of Americans was forged into a new people.

Decades later, shortly after President Kennedy was murdered, telephones rang in schools across our nation. Classes were canceled. School children were sent home. Machine shops closed. Gas stations stopped pumping. Shops and markets drew their curtains. Mothers stopped working. Architects laid down pencils. Lawyers put down pens. Doctors stopped doctoring. Clergy opened churches for prayer. Citizens in mourning went to their homes, turned on their black-and-white sets to watch and try to understand the assassination of JFK.

This was a sudden end of a new beginning. Our nation grieved for a magnificent dream, and for our president, both lost. That one November day shaped a generation.

In The End - God

JFK, his brother Bobby and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. --all killed. The Civil Rights Movement, the Vietnam War, and the Watergate experience defined a generation, leaving it splintered, fractured and alienated.

September 11, 2001 is another generational moment; a time when something that happened in 3 different locales in the United States began to shape a new generation. Words like 'Remembrance,' 'honor,' and 'duty,' took on meanings never anticipated by a new generation.

Putnam was right. Generations can be shaped by a defining moment or event. So what of Jesus' generation?

When Jesus died, his generation wasn't defined. When Jesus died, except for some women at the foot of the cross, no one mourned. No one knew this death was exceptional. There was no press report. No news briefing. No shocked nation. Few took notice of another Jew's execution.

He did change the course of history. That we now realize. But at the time, who knew? Who cared?

The disciples didn't know. They had fled and returned to their former occupations, hauling nets, collecting taxes, pounding nails, trying to forget, trying to blend in, trying to hide.

Religious leaders didn't know. Many rejoiced that an agitating rabble-rouser was eliminated. They were anxious to get on with Passover.

The political leaders didn't know. They just wanted to get rid of that troublemaker and keep peace in an unimportant Roman province.

The people didn't know. They were thoroughly disillusioned.

The soldiers didn't know. They gambled for his clothes.

The thief beside him didn't know. He taunted Jesus as he hung dying on the cross.

Do we know? Do we understand choosing the cross can be for us a defining moment of our spiritual lives?

Have we encountered Christ in a way that affirms that Jesus was not just a good man, not just someone who showed us how to love one another, but as the Savior who died on this day, Good Friday, in a specific time and place, died for the sins of the world?

It was a tragedy. He died that day. Yes, he did, and his death was a terrible tragedy, but it was also a magnificent victory. It was a Tragic Victory that, over the centuries, has become pivotal, formative and earth changing.

In his rising, through his holy transformation, he became our only hope that life is more than flesh and bone. Jesus Christ, through death and resurrection, becomes our open channel, our willing vehicle, our ransom, who can and will lead us home to God, if and only if, we are willing.

Unless we open our hearts, souls, minds and lives to Christ, his great victory will remain but a tragedy ... not for him, but for us.