

Many thanks to all who helped our Holy Week services be so special! From our foot washing experience on Maundy Thursday, to our Good Friday worship with *Conexiones*, to our SonRise baptismal service, to Easter Brunch, to Resurrection Worship, every experience was a spiritual blessing. It was wonderful to share the week with you.

Changing subjects, one of the more interesting dimensions of the current *Noah* film is the portrayal of Noah's (non-biblical) misunderstanding of God's intent. Recognizing the deep and dark ways in which humankind has gone awry, Noah assumes that God's purpose is to destroy all of humankind forever and to let the planet return to the animals.

Scripture does tell us that *The LORD saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. The LORD regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled. So the LORD said, "I will wipe form the face of the earth the human race I have created—and with them the animals, the birds, and the creatures that move along the ground—for I regret that I have made them." But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD* (Genesis 6:5-8).

However we understand this divine regret, Scripture also tells us that Jesus is *the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world* (Revelation 13:8), which certainly indicates that our persistent wickedness was no surprise to God. Indeed, that is the central meaning of Holy Week, that *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God* (2 Corinthians 5:21).

One of the benefits of being at an interfaith center is that I'm becoming more aware of Jewish life, culture, and faith, including this week's observance of Yom HaShoah, the annual Day of Remembrance of the Victims of the Holocaust (DRVH). A week or so ago, watching the film *The Book Thief* made graphic once again the horrors of that sordid chapter of human history.

In researching Yom HaShoah, I came across these descriptions from the President's Commission on the Holocaust in the late 1970's:

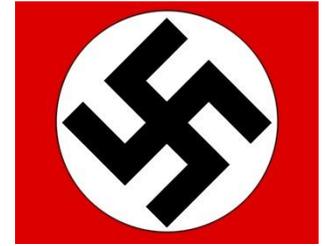
"The Holocaust was an event contemporaneous in large part with World War II—but separate from it. In fact, the *Final Solution* often took precedence over the war effort—as trains, personnel, and material needed at the front were not allowed to be diverted from death camp assignments. . . .

"The Holocaust was the systematic, bureaucratic annihilation of six million Jews by the Nazis and their collaborators as a central act of state during the Second World War; as night descended, millions of other peoples were swept into this net of death. It was a crime unique in the annals of human history, different not only in the quantity of violence—the sheer numbers killed—but in its manner and purpose as a mass criminal enterprise



organized by the state against defenseless civilian populations. The decision to kill every Jew everywhere in Europe: the definition of Jew as target for death transcended all boundaries.

“The concept of the annihilation of an entire people, as distinguished from their subjugation, was unprecedented; never before in human history had genocide been an all-pervasive government policy unaffected by territorial or economic advantage and unchecked by moral or religious constraints.



“The Holocaust was not simply a throwback to medieval torture or archaic barbarism, but a thoroughly modern expression of bureaucratic organization, industrial management, scientific achievement, and technological sophistication. The entire apparatus of the German bureaucracy was marshaled in the service of the extermination process.”¹



Now before we strike up a vigorous chorus of “Ain’t It Awful”—and it is indeed awful beyond the ability of words or photographs to depict—we do well to remember that when God said that “*every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood*” (Genesis 8:21), you and I are in that number.

Evil is not just a dark chapter in human history. Evil is resident in your heart and in mine.

Whenever we look at another person, of whatever dress, whatever ethnic group, whatever language, whatever religion, whatever *anything*, with even a moment of scorn in our hearts, we ourselves have taken a step toward Auschwitz.

When I was at the Navy’s Chaplain School in Newport, Rhode Island in the mid-eighties, one of our teachers was a Jewish Chaplain named Arnie Resnicoff. I’ve since learned that Arnie was more famous than he let on in those days. Arnie made a similar point in a prayer he offered at the 1987 DRVH commemoration in the Capitol rotunda:

“So, *from* the Holocaust, we learn: when we deny humanity in others, we destroy humanity within ourselves. When we reject the human, and the holy, in any neighbor’s soul, then we unleash the beast, and the barbaric, in our own heart.

“And, *since* the Holocaust, we pray: if the time has not yet dawned when we can all proclaim our faith in God, then let us say, at least, that we admit we are not gods ourselves. If we cannot yet see the face of God in others, then let us see, at least, a face as human as our own.”

As we ponder these things, it seems to me that, while God did not make evil *actual* in the world, God did make evil *possible* by giving us real freedom to choose and to act. Thus, it seems to me that in the last analysis, the horrors of evil really do land “in God’s lap.”

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Days_of_Remembrance_of_the_Victims_of_the_Holocaust

Carl Bates, preaching in Pittsburgh in 1984, offered an interpretation that has helped me a great deal as I've struggled with this problem. Dr. Bates suggested that the deepest meaning of the Cross might be other than the redemption we rightly associate with it.

Dr. Bates said that the deepest meaning of the Cross is that, on the Cross, God has taken responsibility for having chosen to make us truly free, and has taken into God's own being the horrors that have resulted from that choice. *God is with us, in ways far beyond our knowing, and God alone is able to bear within His heart the awful price by which we have been set free.*

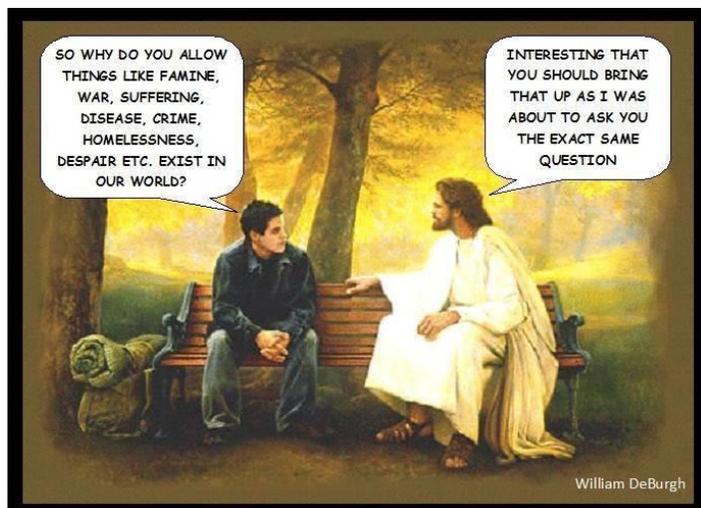


If, on this twentieth anniversary of the Rwandan genocide and during this annual remembrance of Yom HaShoah, we find ourselves appalled by the depths to which, in the history of this world, wickedness has been allowed to descend, and the extent to which it has been allowed to prevail, we may take these depths and this extent as the measure of the value God sets on our created freedom being genuinely free. *Where there appears to be an irreconcilable contradiction between the omnipotence and the goodness of God, there our finite wisdom has come to the end of its tether, and we do not understand the solution that we yet believe in.*

As we move past Resurrection Sunday, we can look back to God's complete defeat of evil at Calvary's Cross and the Empty Tomb; but we still live in the interim between Jesus' Resurrection and His Return. We live in the season between D-Day and V-E Day, a time in which evil seems as powerful as ever, even though we know how the story ends.

In the end, the problem of evil remains a mystery that we can't explain, with which we are never done, and that is more serious than most of our statements about it. **Perhaps we can come to terms with the mystery by settling for victory over it, remembering that God has transformed an ugly cross into a throne, a horrible death into the Source of our life, and a work of pure evil into the possibility of our salvation.** God caused blazing, redeeming Light and Life to burst forth from a tomb!

Dave



The Joshua Code: Fifty-Two Verses Every Believer Should Know **O.S. Hawkins (Thomas Nelson, 2012)**

Week sixteen:

*Where there is no revelation, people cast off restraint;
but blessed is the one who heeds wisdom's instruction (Proverbs 29:18).*

“Vision is vital to Christian living. Those who grew up memorizing the King James Version of the Bible remember this verse translated as, “*Where there is no vision, the people perish.*” According to Strong’s Hebrew Lexicon, the word *revelation* (vision) means “to mentally perceive; to contemplate.” The word translated *restraint* or *perish* is translated other places in the Old Testament as “to go back.” We see this in Numbers 14:3 (NIV) when those wandering in the wilderness wanted to “go back” to Egypt. Thus, those who have no vision, no perception of what they could be, seem to have no real direction in their Christian pilgrimage.

“Before every great undertaking, there is someone who has a vision for the task ahead. The football coach has a game plan before the kickoff, a vision of what he wants his team to accomplish. The army commander or platoon leader sees the infantry’s strategy, a battle plan, before the fighting ever begins. The artist has a conception in his or her mind before the painting is put on the canvas. What a difference vision makes in life. Too many Christians are just going to meetings, following schedules, simply existing—and something is missing. Vision, a perception of what God wants us to be and do, is vital. When a believer discovers God’s vision for life, that vision will do five things.

VISION BRINGS DEFINITION

VISION BRINGS DESIGN

VISION BRINGS DYNAMIC

VISION BRINGS DIRECTION

VISION BRINGS DEPENDENCE

(Buy the book to see what Dr. Hawkins said about these)

