

Crucifixion: Exposing The Failed Script

April 1, 2007
“*Science without Humanity*”

Rev. Broadbent:

Our Palm Passion Sunday question is: “Jesus, why are you crying?” We might ask this with the same compassion as we might ask someone we have encountered crying. “Why are you crying?” We might also ask it of Jesus, because it seems like an odd response to such a joyful entry.

“Jesus, why are you crying? You just rode into Jerusalem, and people came out in droves, and they laid their coats down on the ground before you. What is there to cry about?”

In a phrase, Jesus is crying over the failed script. What do I mean? Walter Brueggemann one of the foremost biblical scholars in the country wrote an article that was printed in the *Christian Century* called “Counterscript.” In it he suggests that all of us, all of us, live by a script that might be informed by our particular economic system, like capitalism or socialism. It might be informed by our media values that get put out there. Perhaps, for some of us, it is through family, or society.

But we all live by a script, and that script is largely unconscious of it. Brueggemann names the script under which we in this culture live as that which is therapeutic, technological, consumerist, and militaristic. We do not have enough time for me to go into all of these. I will say them again though – therapeutic, technological, consumerist, militaristic.

I do want to focus on the portion of the script which Brueggemann calls technological, because it speaks well or fits well with our theme for this Sunday, Science without Humanity, articulated by Gandhi. Brueggemann says that we live by the script, of which we are largely unconscious, and what we don’t realize is that it has failed. The script has failed us.

For example, with regard to technology, technology claims that it can solve our problems. That it can remove suffering from us or distract us from our suffering just long enough. Its promise is that technology can, or will soon be able to, solve all of our problems. But it has failed to do that.

Oh, technology does have some benefits. I know this because of this past week. It has been a chaotic week in our house. Brooke, Marin and I have moved from San Miguel to East Platte; and I have had to use the mantra, “Embrace the chaos. Embrace the chaos. Embrace the chaos. You are not going to fix this over night.” But what has helped me during that time? My cell phone. It is the one thing that has gone with me that works the same, connects me in the same way it did in the other house. It has been my lifeline, really, amidst all of the

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chaos. And yet, it has helped me realize how addicted I am, and maybe all of us to some degree, to order and routine and that ability to connect – now.

But even this has failed us. Even technology has failed us, despite its promises to the contrary.

Vincent Miller in an article about the iPod and the cell phone, he spoke at Colorado College as part of the Religion Symposium last fall, writes that “... with the cell phone, we participate in something called ‘placing.’ That is when we receive the phone call, we always tell the person where we are. ‘Oh, yeah, I’m at the grocery store now. I’m walking down the street. Oh, I’m driving. I’m swerving.’” The irony of this is that while we tell the person we are talking to where we are, in the act of talking to them, we are pulled out of the place where we happen to be.

So on the one hand it helps us connect in a way that would not otherwise be possible. On the other hand, it removes us from the face-to-face contact that we would otherwise experience, enjoy, and maybe even suffer.

What does this have to do with Palm Sunday? Shifting to the Palm Sunday text from Luke, it is interesting to note that in Luke there is no word “Hosanna.” There are no palms. The action is all instigated by the disciples, although there is a crowd there. A crowd has gathered. As I considered this scripture in the past week and as I consider it now, where is the failed script, because something has failed? There is a failure there. Where is the failed script? I have to make a shift, because I have preached, and you have heard, sermons that go something like this, “We were the crowd.” We who were there on Sunday waving palms and singing Hosannas and welcoming in the king were later the ones who gathered and yelled, “Crucify him. Crucify him.” How many of you have heard that song before? Okay, a number of you.

John Dominic Crossan and Marcus Borg in their newest book, *The Last Week*, point out that if you read the Luke narrative, actually all the Gospel narratives closely, you will find there is a difference between the crowd that gathers on Palm Sunday and hails the arrival of the king and the small elite group of leaders and chief priests who gather in the court of Pilate. All those people who would have shown up on Palm Sunday would never have been granted admission to Pilate’s court. They would never have been able to draw themselves within an ear shot of Pilate in order to yell out, “Crucify him.”

To the contrary, Borg and Crossan point out that the crowd, throughout the week, protects Jesus. The Pharisees and the leaders, those who are threatened by this new kingdom that Jesus is presenting, are threatened by the crowd. They do not want to get too close to that crowd because of what they might do. The crowd actually follows and protects Jesus.

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So the failed script is not that we, that they, abandoned him, turned him over, but that they, we, were not able to face his eventual suffering. We, in our culture, and they, apparently, in that culture, did not like to face suffering, did not like to face the suffering that is before us. And I would claim that a primary belief of Christianity is that salvation comes in bearing another's suffering, in being with another as they suffer, as facing suffering. And yet, in our modern world, where we boast all of the capabilities of technology, we are given just enough snippets in order to feel guilty or enough snippets of others suffering in order to feel guilty but also to feel powerless. We also have enough technology that we always have the option of turning off the suffering that may be at arm's length and distracting ourselves – with the cell phone, with the iPod, with the DVD, with our car. You name your distraction.

And so we are part of the crowd. We are part of the crowd that truly celebrates the arrival of Jesus and have so many expectations for what that arrival might mean; but when it comes down to his death, we turn the other way. I think we are very often tempted to do that when faced with one another's suffering.

Yet suffering is the path to salvation. But let me be clear, because so often we are told that our suffering must just be borne. "That must be your lot in life. It must be borne." Or, "Well, that person's suffering is their suffering. They must just be allowed to go through it." No. By facing our own suffering in others, by baring our own suffering and others, by being a part of the crowd in protecting and bearing suffering one with the other, this is how suffering is not only endured but absorbed.

There is a lot of talk about the inevitability of Jesus' death on the cross. I think there is a way to that that sounds unacceptable to me and another way that sounds acceptable. The unacceptable way is often put out there as the Orthodox belief in Christianity, namely that he knew ahead of time exactly what was going to happen. He knew the script ahead of time, and he walked it exactly as it was written and went forward to the cross. He knew exactly what was going to happen, and he suffered exactly as he was supposed to. Some would even claim that he never really suffered; he just went through the motions.

I do not accept that. I think it was later on, when people were talking about the inevitability of the suffering that those stories emerged. The truth in it is this: that suffering in life is inevitable. All of us have suffered, even you children, even you teenagers.

We could go around; and if we were really honest, we could share some pretty heavy stuff. Some people have had losses this week. Some people's bodies are

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broken. Some people's spirits are broken. Some folks have been looking for a job for a long time. Some people want to work but have not been able to. Some people are worried to the point of feeling physically ill.

Suffering is inevitable. Jesus' road to the cross, I think, points that out. Not that he had some kind of special suffering that he had chosen and he knew was coming, but that life, in life, there is suffering. Yet we, as people in this modern age, tempted by technology that can distract us or convince us that it can be removed, always, are called, I think, to face each other's suffering and to ask others to bare our own suffering with us.

So the question becomes, on this Palm Sunday, not only "Jesus, why are you crying?" but also, "Why aren't we?"

Amen.