

Last week while on retreat, I read several books. One of them was *Falling Upwards* by Richard Rohr. In it he says among many other things that “salvation is sin turned on its head and used in our favor.”¹ Salvation is sin turned on its head and used in our favor.

That is what we are remembering today – the ultimate example of sin turned on its head and used in our favor. On the cross Jesus took the sin of the world, demonstrating our habit of scapegoating and killing, experienced the separation from God that is the result of sin, and died. On the cross, humanity did its best to kill God and all that God stands for. And apparently succeeded.

Even though we didn’t succeed, even though God brought Jesus back from the dead, using our sin in our favor, we still go on trying to kill the God in each other.

We don’t need to look far to find contemporary examples of scapegoating. Today’s headlines talk of terrible violence in Myanmar, closer to home the death of George Floyd and the recent killings of Asian women remind us that even here in the United States we are still blaming others, we are still choosing sides and killing. We are still refusing to believe that God loves us all equally and that we are all one, straight, gay and transgender; black, white and Asian, Anglo and Latinex, Democrat, Republican and independent; male, female and non-binary. Jesus did not die for one race or for one group. Jesus died for all of us.

In Jesus’ death and resurrection God took sin, turned it on its head and used it in our favor because through his death and resurrection Jesus the Christ has redeemed the world. We remember the horror of that last week in Jesus life and we know that it is grace – it is gift because God used it to bring salvation.

¹ Rohr, *Falling Upwards* p.60

We want to divide our lives into the good bits and the bad bits. We give thanks for the good bits and pray to be delivered from the bad bits. And yet somehow it is all grace, it is all gift. The bad bits are gift too because God turns sin on its head and uses it in our favor.

I don't know how that works. I am groping around in the dark here.

I want to have a clear system that tells me why Jesus died and whether taking on himself the sin of the world was literal or symbolic and how that works. A system that tells me what was on God's mind and whether that was intended from the start or whether the incarnation was God's doing but the crucifixion ours and what would have happened if humanity had made a different choice and this terrible death had never happened.

I want that system and when I was 18 I thought I had it all sorted, but it's a bit like Newtonian physics – the mechanical principles of the universe only go so far – beyond there is a whole world that Newton could not have imagined. Now I get glimpses of how it is that God is creating this cosmos and within it there is a small planet, and on that small planet there is a species who think they are the center of the universe. And maybe they are because God the Creator chose to become one of them and to experience and expose their violence and sin. And then God chose to use that, to turn it on its head and use it in our favor – in short to bring salvation or healing – the redemption of the cosmos.

As I said, I get glimpses and those glimpses bring me awe and joy. Today, as together we wonder that the people who sang hosanna could so soon yell crucify, and as we see the agonizing death of the Messiah, I share with you this glimpse: “salvation is sin turned on its head and used in our favor” and as a result even the bad bits of our lives are grace.