

“Inhumanity is impractical”
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“The Last Word”
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It was one of those books you wish you had read sooner. Published in 2014, author Daniel James Brown chronicled in “The Boys in the Boat” the crew team from the University of Washington who won the gold medal in the 1936 Olympics hosted by Germany. These depression era boys labored as farmers, loggers, jack-hammering rock to build the Coulee Dam. They defeated the Ivy League teams, then went on to defeat the best crew teams Europe could muster. They did so even when the German Olympic committee cheated in the medal race to give the Germans and Italians the lane advantage along with a deliberately confused start. Hitler, watching Germany lose from his privileged balcony, didn’t see the humor in it. This Olympics was supposed to showcase German, Aryan, superiority. Jesse Owens made Hitler grumpy too. Sweeter, the USA coxswain was Jewish.

What happened to Hitler nine years later? What happened to Mussolini? What about Stalin? When we look back and see the truth, what were their legacies? Answer: failure, miserable failure after failure, sadly after causing wasteful misery, especially upon the innocents. Nero. Mao. We can predict Putin’s fate (and his jesters). This is the way of evil. It will infest and afflict the world with pain and travail, requiring us to stand against it, but it never lasts. “Tempested but not overcome” [Julian of Norwich].

The same is true with all evils. Colonialism. Imperialism. Racism. Fascism. Terrorism. Even those Seven Deadly Sins don’t stand a chance. Dante’s “Purgatorio” describes how the Seven Deadly Sins are perverted and distorted versions of love. We see Bad Love in me-first Pride, Envy seeks things outside to satisfy, and Wrath reveals in its rage weakness and fear. Sloth (apathetic indifference) and Avarice (this desire for material things) are Inadequate Love. Gluttony filling emptiness and Lust seeking needy pleasure are Immoderate Love. Ascending through purgatory’s purification toward the revealing and cleansing light of paradise, they become redeemed, true humanity is restored, Bad Love becomes transformed into Good Love, Inadequate Love becomes Enough Love, and Immoderate Love becomes Magnified Love.

We Protestants offer a fundamentally different understanding of Purgatory. We hint at this in our funeral services because we don’t pray for the dead. The dead don’t need our prayers. Those of us who mourn need them. So for us, purgatory isn’t some religious doctrine of what happens after we die. Purgatory isn’t a place or a state of being like some bus station after death where we wait around for our ticket. Purgatory is right now, a present process of conviction, repentance, and renunciation bringing us toward human fulfillment.

For us Christians, this is what Easter means. We delight in bunnies, chocolate, lilies, posh frocks, and sunrise services. Wife and I prefer lamb over ham. Easter also means far more than a sentimental view that heaven is a reward for individual piety. Jesus didn’t get crucified simply to make us feel good about ourselves. Quite the contrary. Consider what brought him to Easter’s dawn. Herod. Pilate. A corrupt aristocracy. Pharisees. Hypocrisy. Violence. Betrayal. Lawlessness. Greed. Exploitation. Domination. Ignorance. Propaganda. Hateful retribution. Fear. These sins manufacture crosses. The cross demonstrates human existence stripped naked of divine essence. These were the forces at work trying to suppress in Jesus what they could never suppress, then and now. Inhumanity is impractical. Even the

ugly cross becomes a symbol of divine faith, hope, and love. Evil, sinfulness, death never will have the last word. Easter triumphs. Jesus didn't resurrect himself. He was raised.

We who are religious realize there are skeptics who dismiss belief in resurrection. We also realize how some believers argue for a physical resurrection. Other Christians suggest a bodily resurrection, informed by the interpretation that the Greek word for body doesn't mean flesh, it means a person's essence, their personality, their soul. Believe what you will, but even if you're skeptical, you still can appreciate the spiritual symbolism of Easter, how, despite their efforts, those who do evil (in the name of their good) fail. They're as impotent as a stone blocking a tomb.

Author Brown glimpsed what made those eight oarsmen and their coxswain special. Each discovered the secret: "It has to matter to you whether the other fellow in the boat wins the race, not whether you do."

After all these years, the message of faith is beginning to make sense. We do not live for ourselves.

Please tell me, which is better? Life without Easter or life with Easter?