



When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. (Luke 23:33)

We have arrived at Holy Week. It is time to turn our undivided attention to the suffering and crucified Christ, and seek its meaning for us and for the world. Most of us have been taught the notion that Jesus “died for our sins.” In theological circles it’s called substitutionary atonement, the theory that Christ, by his own sacrificial choice, was punished in the place of sinners, thus satisfying the demands of justice so that God could forgive our sins.

In his thought provoking book *The Universal Christ*, Franciscan priest Richard Rohr posits a very different understanding, one that might resonate with us if we give it due diligence. And so today’s devotional is a series of quotes from Rohr’s chapter entitled *Why Did Jesus Die?* I offer them as a way for you to reflect more deeply on the meaning of Jesus’ death, and perhaps see something besides a vision of sacrificial atonement. I confess this devotion is geared toward those who “think the faith” rather than “feel” it. It’s a lot to ponder. I might suggest that you keep it in front of you throughout this week, choosing one or two quotes to reflect upon each day.

Pastor Chuck

“In the Franciscan school, God did not need to be paid in order to love and forgive God’s own creation for its failures. Love cannot be bought by some ‘necessary sacrifice’; if it could, it would not and could not work its transformative effects. Try loving your spouse or children that way, and see where it gets you.”

“Notions of sacrifice keep us in the retributive justice framework and outside of the essential Gospel of grace and undeserved love. This is major for understanding the Gospel.”

“In identifying the first and most helpful meaning of Jesus’ death, my premise is that:

- It is not God who is violent. We are.
- It is not that God demands suffering of humans. We do.
- God does not need or want suffering - neither in Jesus nor in us.”

“The Divine Mind transforms all human suffering by identifying completely with the human predicament and standing in full solidarity with it from beginning to end. This is the real meaning of the crucifixion. The cross is not a singular event. It’s a statement from God that *reality has a cruciform pattern.*”

“Jesus agreed to carry the mystery of universal suffering. He allowed it to change him (‘Resurrection’) and, it is to be hoped, so that we would be freed from the endless cycle of projecting our pain elsewhere or remaining trapped inside of it.”

“A Christian is invited, not required to accept and live the cruciform shape of all reality. It is not a duty or even a requirement as much as a *free vocation.*”

“What then does it mean to follow Jesus? I believe that we are invited to gaze upon the image of the crucified Jesus to soften our hearts toward all suffering, to help us see how we ourselves have been ‘bitten’ by hatred and violence, and to know that God’s heart has always been softened toward us. In turning our gaze to this divine truth - in dropping our many modes of scapegoating and self-justification - we gain compassion toward ourselves and all others who suffer.”

“God is the ultimate nonviolent one, so we dare not accept any theory of salvation that is based on violence, exclusion, social pressure, or moral coercion. When we do, these are legitimated as a proper way of life. *God saves by loving and including, not by excluding or punishing.*”