

Tragic Victory

Sermon Scripture: Luke 23:33-43

Rode in Jerusalem in victory----but then was crucified

Jesus died. It was a small event. Just another execution, a diversion for the people, entertainment for an afternoon

He died and nothing changed. It was a minute victory for Roman rulers -- one suspected revolutionary was dead. It was a small victory for the religious establishment -- one dicey leader died. But It was a sizable tragedy for his followers.

At the time,---his death was barely a blip, quite forgettable, quite unremarkable, quite unexceptional. Certainly not what sociologists might describe as a generational defining moment.

Carl Manheim, one such sociologist, argues that generations can be shaped by a singular event that becomes the ruling metaphor for their approach to life. "Depression era children grew up wary of being wasteful," he says. "The baby boomers came of age in a time of great prosperity, but also great uncertainty in witnessing the assassinations of Martin Luther King and JFK and then the Vietnam war.

By contrast, Generation X, roughly those between 29 and 40 years of age, had no defining moment." **If they remember---They do now. We all do.**

There have been numerous defining moments in our national history. Each event was personal in impact. Think of:

- * The sinking of the Titanic
- * Pearl Harbor
- * Hiroshima
- * The assassination of JFK
- The Challenger explosion
- *Columbine

What is the defining moment for people in United States today??

*tragedy of 9/11

Tragic deaths always leave scars that are profoundly personal. Sadie Sylvester loved her professional life as a clothing designer in New York City in the 1930s. She married and raised her family there. In her '80s, living in her family's old homestead on Sylvester Cove, she recalled aloud the story of her eldest brother, born in that house and lost in the muddy trenches at the frozen front in France, in the year 1917

She said I was little then. But I remember him and how he loved me; how he'd swing me around and around, and I'd scream for joy; and how he said he'd come home to me. I was his favorite and he was mine. Momma said the mustard gas got him. His hands were too cold. He didn't get his mask on in time."

After all those years -- after marriage, after children, after a career -- what defined her life, was her brother's death in The Great War, way back when.

The brutal deaths of World War I shaped a generation.

A few years later, on December 7, 1941, the Rev. Fred Robie, found his defining moment. Young Fred was a sailor on the day the Japanese flew in to sink our Pacific naval fleet. He had not been aboard the Arizona, but his ship had also been hit. He expressed vividly the horror of being aboard the flaming and sinking vessel as bullets flew and bombs roared.

Fred described being caught below deck: feeling disoriented as the ship took on water where he stood, fire coming from above and the smoke stealing his breath. His buddy lay dead at his feet as the young sailor struggled in the darkness to escape; fear and adrenaline propelling him to the surface.

It was indeed a day that lives in infamy, and from then on, that generation of Americans was forged into a new people

Decades later, shortly after President Kennedy was murdered, telephones rang in schools across our nation. Classes were canceled. School children were sent home. Machine shops closed. Gas stations stopped pumping. Shops and markets drew their curtains.

Mothers stopped working. Architects laid down pencils. Lawyers put down pens. Doctors stopped doctoring. Clergy opened churches for prayer. Citizens in mourning went to their homes, turned on their black-and-white sets to watch and try to understand the assassination of JFK.

This was a sudden end of a new beginning. Our nation grieved for our president. That one November day shaped a generation.

JFK, his brother Bobby and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. --all killed. The Civil Rights Movement, the Vietnam War, defined a generation, leaving it splintered, fractured and alienated.

On September 18, 2001, an elderly woman named Mrs. Kestenbaum went to her post office in Cape Elizabeth and found a package from her dear son, Howard Kestenbaum. The package was a gift to his mother. It was a jar of golden honey and a note that read, "May your New Year be sweet. Love, Howie."

On September 11, 2001, in the morning, on his way to his job at the World Trade Center, Howie Kestenbaum had stopped at his post office to mail her present. Howie died that morning, in a tower, one death among all the rest.

So now in this generation, we are all re-defined, we are all reshaped, we are all re-formed into a united citizenry, a new people. Shaped by this and the wars in the mid-east.

Manheim was right. Generations can be shaped by a defining moment or event.

I shared these events to ask a question----So what of Jesus' generation?

When Jesus died, his generation wasn't defined. When Jesus died, except for some women at the foot of the cross, no one mourned. No one knew this death was exceptional. There was no press report. No news briefing. No shocked nation. Few took notice of another Jew's execution.

He did change the course of history,-----that we now realize. But at the time, who knew? Who cared?

The disciples didn't know. They had fled and returned to their former occupations, hauling nets, collecting taxes, pounding nails, trying to forget, trying to blend in, trying to hide.

Religious leaders didn't know. Many rejoiced that an agitating rabble-rouser was eliminated. They were anxious to get on with Passover.

The political leaders didn't know. They just wanted to get rid of that troublemaker and keep peace in an unimportant Roman province. "Keep the peace" equaled "keep their jobs."

The people didn't know. They were thoroughly disillusioned.

The soldiers didn't know. They gambled for his clothes.

The thief beside him didn't know. He taunted Jesus as he hung dying on the cross.

So ----why did Jesus die??? Do you know??

I have thought about it and come up with some reasons why Jesus surely died.

He died so we could sit on padded pews.

He died so we could complain about how long it takes for a worship service in which to worship Him

He died so we could complain about how long the Choir sings---we or we sing song or the preacher preaches.

He died so we could complain about our taxes ---wow that hit home!

He died so we could just do what **we** want to do-----

Jesus died so we could worship Him on Sunday and do what we want the rest of the week

Jesus died for the trivialities of life

Or-----did He die so that we might receive forgiveness for our sin---and find new life in both the here and now and for eternity.

**Or-----did he die so that we could share His Good News of forgiveness and new life with those around us----
-no matter the cost---even if it takes rearranging our life---or looking through the eyes of Jesus and see the
hurting people around us----- --whatever.**

Do we know? Do we understand choosing the cross can be for us the defining moment of not only our spiritual lives but of our everyday lives?

Have we encountered Christ in a way that affirms that Jesus was not just a good man, not just someone who showed us how to love one another, **but as the Savior who died on this day**, Good Friday, in a specific time and place, died for the sins of the world?

It was a tragedy. He died that day. Yes, he did, and his death was a terrible tragedy, **but it was also a magnificent victory.** It was a Tragic Victory that, over the centuries, has become pivotal, formative and earth changing for all those who believe.

People need the Lord----- when will we realize that people need the Lord----when will we realize that we must give our lives-----

Is the Death and Resurrection of Jesus the defining moment of your life?? Why not??

In his rising, through his holy transformation, he became our only hope that life is more than flesh and bone. Jesus Christ, through death and resurrection, becomes our open channel, our willing vehicle, our ransom, who can and will lead us home to God, if and only if, we are willing. Unless we open our hearts, souls, minds and lives to Christ, his great victory will remain but a tragedy ... not for him, but for us.

⁷I once thought all these things were so very important, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. ⁸Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the priceless gain of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I may have Christ ⁹and become one with him. I no longer count on my own goodness or my ability to obey God's law, but I trust Christ to save me. For God's way of making us right with himself depends on faith. ¹⁰As a result, I can really know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I can learn what it means to suffer with him, sharing in his death, ¹¹so that, somehow, I can experience the resurrection from the dead!

Next Time You Think You're So Smart, Try Walking on Water"

Children's Story

Hold up an electronic kitchen timer, and show the children how it works. Let the digital display count down from one minute to 45 seconds, and then stop the clock. Suggest that such a timer could be used to help cook an egg, or to time a homework assignment, or to provide a countdown for a rocket! Ask the children if the timer gives them enough time to tell God that they are sorry for a mistake they have made. Sure! Challenge them silently to say "sorry" to God for something they have done wrong, and have them do this while you run the timer from 45 to 30. Then tell them the story of the thief on the cross, and how he used the little time he had (run the timer from 30 to 15 as you speak) to say that he had committed a crime and was being punished for it, but that Jesus had done nothing wrong, and that he hoped Jesus would remember him when he entered his kingdom (Luke 23:41-42). Stop the clock

the children if his words were too late. No! Start the clock again, and run it from 15 to zero while you tell them that Jesus promised to forgive the man, saying "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise" (v. 43). Let the children know that it is never too late to say you are sorry and to receive forgiveness