

COMPLEX SIMPLICITY
[written in oral form]

The week before last, I was driving back from dropping Leslie off at the Toronto airport. About half way back, I decided to turn the radio on; I was expecting to listen to CBC. Instead, the radio was tuned to 99.5, and surprisingly I was hearing a sermon from someone with a very southern accent.

He was saying, "Only Christians go to heaven. Only those who are Saved by the washing from the blood of Jesus...", then there was a moment of static, followed by Bob Marley singing. ~~~~~

I thought Oh good, I won't have to listen to a sermon.

I heard Marley sing:

" But my hand was made strong By the hand of the Almighty.

We forward in this generation Triumphantly.

Won't you help to sing...." Then back to the preacher, who shockingly said, "Jesus' life and teachings mean Nothing except to prove that he was the unblemished lamb for the slaughter."

During my gasp, Marley jumped back singing,

" Emancipate yourself from mental slavery,

None but ourselves can free our mind."

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This radio signal oscillation was becoming entertaining.

The preacher responded with a rant about hell,... and then finally the reggae rhythm prevailed with:

"Cause all I ever had, Redemption songs. All I ever had,

Redemption songs

These songs of freedom Songs of freedom."

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Both messages were about salvation / about redemption,...Yet they were very different,...indeed.

The preacher adamantly declared that salvation is an **event**, a payment to God for our sins..... that it's yes or no..... black and white... In or out.saved or lost. It was a purchase, not a life.

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Marley presented a different tune,.....and I can imagine the Isaiah song sung with a reggae beat.

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The Isaiah passage is a story, an Old Testament parable likely presented in the form of a song.

Like all good stories, it is intended to be "owned" or personalized in order to cause us to consider who or what or where we are,..... and to inspire change.

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The Story is of a farmer who does everything right.

The soil is properly prepared;

carefully selected seeds are used, and he nurtures and protects his crop.

In addition, verse six points out that his crop did receive adequate rain. The farmer did everything right and, the weather was not an issue.

However, when it comes time to harvest, he discovers that his crop, in this case grapes, produced only bitter and “stinking” fruit, a more accurate way of saying “wild.”

He then asks for “judgment” petitioning, “am I the farmer to blame” or “is it the plants who have failed?”

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The answer is blatant: the plants. For some strange reason they have chosen not to respond to all that has been done for them.

They yielded “wild” and worthless fruit, and the judgment is severe.

The plants will be totally destroyed.

Then, there is the “kicker” at the end / the flushing out of the message where in verse seven it explains-- for the crop was God’s children.

God expected justice, but instead saw bloodshed.

God expected to harvest righteousness, but heard the cry of the exploited.

A very poignant message! ~~~~~

God has done all that God can do, and how have we responded?

God has done all that God can do.

What are our fruits?

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We don't like to ponder about the wrath of God. Our 21 century God is a gentle, understanding and benevolent God.

Yet, perhaps we'd be wise to contemplate a bigger image.....

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Nevertheless,....this passage is intended to motivate/ inspire us do to better / to grow.....To live redeeming lives.... to NOT be as worthless, bitter fruit. And,.....let the wrath aspect jingle in the back of our thoughts..... Or,...we can reframe it as the natural result of living destructive, selfish lives.

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In addition, take note that a grape plant does not instantly produce wonderfully sweet fruit. It takes lots of help.....and... it takes time.

Salvation / Redemptive living is a process.

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The Hebrews 11 passage also confirms that salvation is a process. It presents the challenges and the hard work of the “journey of faith”. Also, this passage shows that salvation can be different for each person.

Salvation, it is a process; It can be hard; It isn't instant and it varies for each person.

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Since these days, we live forever and never face a harvest, let me explain what "salvation" means for those unfamiliar with church talk.

It means faithful living. It means living as God intends for us to live. It means being / living like Jesus.

It is doing Justice and living righteously to and for all.

In simple terms: it is life-giving living. It's growing verses dying as a human.

That's simple,.....but growing / real living is can be difficult.

Moreover, we can't do it alone, and thank God.....for God's help and direction.

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Redemptive living/ salvation is simple. It is living a life that bears good fruit.... in the broadest sense.

Yet,.....in all honesty, life is hard and complicated, and for some reason, we think life shouldn't be so difficult.

So, we tend to be attracted to the quick fix: the miracle drug, the easy path to weight loss...or a lottery win.... or a one stop-heal-all salvation zap from God.

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The first Mennonite church I pastored was a downtown store front church.

Once a month we sponsored a coffee house where all people were welcome and no one was judged and condemned. It was meant to be a gift / an oasis and a safe place where God might be discovered.

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The coffee house attracted a lot of youth on the fringe. They were young people nobody else wanted. Sometimes, good church folks, from traditional churches, would visit and were surprised that there was no overt preaching with calls to repent and be saved.

On one occasion, a visiting church man insisted that all those “kids” were lost, and that he wanted to get up and tell them about the “simple plan of salvation.”

I responded, "Okay, but first talk to them individually, and get to know them and their story."

I pointed out a number of them to him, by name, and shared some of what was going on in their lives, and how they were struggling and coping with difficult things.

I encouraged him to go and talk with them.

As he hesitantly contemplated my request, a young girl about 17 went up to the stage and began to sing a song that she said she had written.

I leaned over and told the man that she has been coming here regularly for the last two years, guitar in hand, **but** this is the first time she has gotten up to perform.

Life had been hard for her, she was beaten down and had no self confidence.

I said to him, “But now look at her; she is singing her own song.

We are witnessing the early steps of her salvation!”

He said nothing in reply, and when the song was over he was gone.

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Sometimes,.....it is hard to grasp,...when we see that things aren't so simple.

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Salvation / redemptive living is complex, and we are Not in control, nor is God. We humans make choices, and there are consequences to those choices,

.....And, to be sure, we do not like to hear about consequences.

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Moreover, it is selfish and self-centred to think salvation living is just about "Me" or is an **individual** journey with God.

Redemptive living / life-giving living is much, much bigger than that,.... and so are the consequences of destructive, selfish living.

Isaiah pointed out that bloodshed is the consequence of injustice, and the cries from people come from being abused and exploited.

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Across the globe,.....people are crying.....and so is the planet.

Salvation is the right word. We need to be living salvation.

Everyone body needs to.

This message has never been more relevant. The mission of the church has never been more relevant and essential.

Frustration, Fear and anger is overcoming more and more people.

Injustices, exploitation and income disparity is increasing.

We....all people need to heed God's call to live righteously and to do justice.....as Jesus did,.....with grace.... always with grace.

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This past week, a Canadian was killed for threatening to be a terrorist

It was said that he was a hurt, angry young man who was radicalized.

It's easy to blame others....by saying he was radicalized.

I think terrorism is more about being marginalized,... demoralized and dehumanized.

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It's time,.....it's past time,....for us the church to truly live out salvation,.....AND.... to proclaim salvation, too.

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We must empower the weak, and work hard for equality.

We must let go of our power and entitlement.

We must stop our government from selling weapons to tyrants.

We must live for peace.

We must be on the living/giving side of the equation, and not on the receiving and hoarding side.

It's complex, so do/be what God is calling you to be.

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God has shown us the way...through Jesus.....and through the prophets.

God has nourished us.....cultivated the ground.....and provided all we need in order to bear fruit.

It is time to risk / to sing out.....our song.....to give of ourselves... in all we do.

The fruit gives.....so all may live.