

Lent and the Commercial for Ft. Lauderdale, FL

Here we are one week away from *Holy Week*;

Arguably the most important and most sacred time of the year for Christians.

It is that week when we remember and re-enact the final week of Jesus' life.

Palm Sunday when we remember Jesus' going to Jerusalem to stand toe to toe with the religious and political forces of his day placing his vision of the Kingdom of God alongside the Roman Empire's vision of kingdom; God's peace alongside Pax Romana.

Maundy Thursday when Jesus celebrated the Passover with his disciples. That shared meal becoming the sacrament of the Lord's Supper for Christians.

Good Friday when Jesus was executed by the Roman authorities.

All leading up to the celebration of *Easter*.

For as important and meaningful as those days are, I approach them cautiously.

Not because what took place during that week or what those events mean for us today are not important, but because, in my opinion, the language we commonly use in talking about those events and about what they mean is often misused or misunderstood.

We talk about Jesus dying for our sins...for your sins and mine.

We talk about the idea that for you and me to be accepted by God or loved by God, God required the sacrifice of an innocent victim – Jesus.

We talk about Jesus *giving his life for us*.

Underneath that way of thinking lays what scholars identify as *the myth of redemptive violence*; the premise that violence or another's sacrifice is somehow necessary for our salvation.

All of which is the understanding with which I grew up.

And, which is still deeply ingrained in the language and imagery of not only Holy Week, but the larger Christian message. And, an understanding which, I have come to believe, is a misreading and a misunderstanding of the Biblical witness, and of who Jesus was...and is.

And, so I am careful.

And, yet...

I do have an understanding of and a belief in Jesus *giving his life for us*.

Or, better yet...Jesus giving his life *to us*.

Not so much as a sacrifice in the way it usually talked about in Christian circles;

But, he gave his life for us in a way similar to the way a parent gives her or his life for their child.

In raising children, there are sacrifices yes...

But not because our children are bad and somehow in need of redemption, but our sacrifices are out of love, and in terms of time and dreams and the hopes we have for our children and for the future. We give *life* to our children and I understand Jesus giving his life for us and to us in this way.

And, I understand *Jesus giving his life for us* in the way you give something of your life for another.

The part of yourself you give when you listen to a friend.

The time you give when you teach a child.

The strength you give when you help another with food.

The hope you give when you rebuild a home.

The witness you give when you practice generosity.

The vision you give when you stand alongside those who are, too often left standing alone.

Jesus gave his life for us and to us in that way, as well.

His life...

His understanding of God...

His dream of God's Kingdom come...

His vision of community and neighbor and who is included in the circle of God's love.

All of that which was so much a part of what he taught and how he lived;
All of which was so wrapped up in his life and being.
This is the *life* he gave...
The *life* he offered to those who would take it.
And today, if we allow it and make room for it and believe that it might be so...
It becomes or can become a part of your life and mine.
Helping to make us both more human and more holy.
So we might not only live our lives, but give our lives;
And, pass on Jesus' life...
To another.
That is what I understand the meaning of Holy Week to be about.

And, if that is so...
And, I am right...
Then this is where Lent meets the commercial for Ft. Lauderdale, FL.
Maybe you have seen it.
The commercial highlights the reasons business and individuals should relocate to Ft. Lauderdale.
Several airports in the area.
Easy access to commercial shipping ports.
Beautiful weather.
Responsible government.
Low taxes.
And, it ends with this...
A local business person looking directly at the camera; directly at you and me and saying:
"After all, it's not what you make, it's what you keep."
Really???
To the extent that commercials like this are professionally researched and produced, that tag line is not a mistake or a *"throw away" line*, but reflects an attitude and way of thinking that is at play at least in the lives of those for whom the commercial is intended if not in the larger culture, as well.
But for those of us in the Christian community...
Whose responsibility it is to allow the witness of the Bible and the words of Jesus to be a lens through which we see our lives and the larger communities and culture in which we live that attitude and way of thinking raises questions.
On one side is this:
After all, it is not what you make, it is what you keep.
And, on the other side is this...
Those who save their lives will lose it, and those who give their lives away will save them.

And so, a week away from Holy Week we are left to decide...
Which of those two is true?
Which of those two will shape who we are and how we live?