

SESSION FOUR // Resurrection as Life

The shadow of death covered Burundi on October 25, 1993, one of the worst days of the Burundi Civil War. At the same time, Maggy Barankitse was providing food and shelter to 25 children at her school, *Maison Shalom* (House of Peace). In an act of vengeance, a group of Tutsi came into the town of Ruyigi to hunt down Hutus who were hiding in the town's Catholic diocese buildings. Because Maggy was Tutsi, the mob spared her life, although they bound her in a chair, stripped her of all her clothing, and slaughtered over 70 of her friends in front of her. Barankitse, who has been honored with numerous awards for her humanitarian work, talks about how in the hopelessness of death, life still wins.

Watch the film *Life Wins with Marguerite "Maggy" Barankitse*
<http://www.theworkofthepeople.com/life-wins>

Going Deeper

1. Barankitse begins by saying, "I think life always takes the last word." "It is always life that wins, never death," she adds. Barankitse shares that 60 people from her family and 72 of her friends were massacred in the Burundi civil war.

How can Barankitse say, "life wins," in the midst of this death and violence?

What is the hope of the gospel that overcomes death?

2. Barankitse says that she has "other eyes" that come from these experiences. Her children's shelter, *Maison Shalom*, was birthed from the perspective that "We are able to put the candle among the darkness." For Barankitse, even a small light will expel the darkness.

How can we develop an alternative perspective against violence? In other words, how can we move beyond "an eye for an eye" justice?

3. Barankitse shares, "My problem was not about victims. I opened it for killers, because I want to stop them from killing." She adds, "Because victims have no problems in [their] conscience; everyone has compassion and pity for them. But for the criminal, nobody [has compassion for them]. God gave his Son for them also."

How do we often think of perpetrators of violence? How might we develop this attitude toward our enemies?

4. “Does love go that far?” Barankitse responds, “Of course. If there was love, why must God be on the cross? He came for our sin. He came not just because he wanted to be on the cross...He showed that [he] was the winner, and we are the winners.”

How does God reveal God’s love to us? How is this love demonstrated to us both in the biblical witnesses and in our own experiences?

Reflection

The twentieth century has seen more mass killings than any all of history combined. Increasingly, humans have suffered violence at the hands of their own governments and from their own ethnic sisters and brothers. Genocide and mass killings account for much of the violence done to humans. The propensity to do violence to another human being, rather than to find ways of reconciliation, is indicative of our fear of the future and the possibility of living in a world not under our immediate control.

The violence of the cross is the symbol of cruelty toward, the “other,” the “different,” the one who confronts and challenges our humanity. It is a symbol of the genocide in Europe during the Third Reich, of Rwanda, Cambodia, and in almost every part of the world. On a smaller, and yet still horrific scale, every two weeks there is a report of mass killings in the United States.¹¹ As I write this many people are preparing for the feast day of Archbishop Oscar Romero who was assassinated for speaking out against the corruption of the government in El Salvador. Romero’s death came a year into a civil war that lasted another twelve years and claimed the lives of more than 75,000 people.

Jesus’s resurrection confronts the violence of the cross. It was to disarm and unveil this violence in order to show that the cross cannot be the last image for Christians. The Christ story did not end on Friday, but was made complete on Sunday and this continues through the lives of those who follow Christ. What the cross continues to do is remind us of the violence against the innocent victim that continues to happen in the world. This is why the Apostle Paul often talks about “the message of the Cross.” This message is one that speaks about God’s use of violence in a way that confounded human understanding. The reason for violence is very clear; it attempts to control life by putting an end to the

¹¹ See the FBI unclassified report, “A Study of Active Shooter Incidents in the United States between 2000 and 2013,” <http://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/2014/september/fbi-releases-study-on-active-shooter-incidents/pdfs/a-study-of-active-shooter-incidents-in-the-u.s.-between-2000-and-2013>. See also, the website: “Behind the Bloodshed: The Untold Story of America’s Mass Killings: <http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/nation/mass-killings/index.html#title>

possibility of life. It sees life as a threat to power. The resurrection, however, shows us that power can come through weakness, and that life cannot be stifled.

In the book of Revelation, John of Patmos, describes the image of the resurrected Christ as startling human violence:

Look! He is coming with the clouds;
every eye will see him,
even those who pierced him;
and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail.¹²

This is the image of the Son of Man who comes back to face those who have victimized him. However, to take the portrayal of violence in Revelation to be literal would also do an injustice and violence to the book. Otherwise, the cycle of violence would never end. The confrontation by the Son of Man is not to punish those who killed him, but to do away with the evil and sin in the world by showing that the strategy of violence does not work. Rather there is a “violence of love,” in Oscar Romero’s words, a kind of love that unravels and pierces our hearts.

The resurrection makes real love of the enemy. It brings the enemy close and seeks the redemption of the enemy. However, it also shows how injustice, violence, and hatred are defeated by God’s presence and love. If the cross reminds us of the limitations of violence, the only things that power can achieve, then the resurrection says that death is not the only possibility. This is why those who do violence to others also find a violent end to their own lives. Nothingness begets nothingness. This is the limitation that the cross shows us. The resurrection gives us hope by turning us toward a possibility of restoration, now incompletely, and in the future, made perfect. The resurrection reorients the world toward a new possibility, a new hope.

How has the resurrection confronted violence in your life? How can it help heal and forgive? How can it show the limitations of the perpetrator’s power? If we reflect on the ones who have wronged us, we will see that they are the ones who are to be pitied and not us. For, they are the ones who only saw darkness and despair in their lives, not knowing a way out of that, other than to wrong another.

During a time when I struggled with forgiving someone who had done me wrong, I heard the testimony of a poet and actor, Antonia Lassar, who shared her experience of rape during the time she was a college student. She said that during a worship service God made it clear to her that the person who raped her was even more hurt than her and needed forgiveness, because only a person who was that wounded could do such a thing. This revelation did not excuse the act or did it lighten the severity of the trauma and

¹² Revelation 1:7

devastation, but it allowed her to move forward. She spoke of it as “post traumatic growth.”

The resurrection helps us to move out of the traumas in our lives, that often gets us stuck in the cycle of violence. It helps us move to a better place, a place where God’s love waits for us, a place where we can grow again.

Further Reading

Oscar A. Romero, *The Violence of Love*, Compiled and trans. by James R. Brockman, S. J. (Farmington, PA: Plough Publishing House, 2007).