

SESSION FIVE // Resurrection as Something New

A native to Croatia and not unfamiliar to war, violence, and ethnic hatred, Miroslav Volf, is a theologian who seeks to bring the reality of the Trinity to all aspects of life. In this film, Volf tells a story about his Father, a concentration camp prisoner, who was forced to survive on 200 calories a day. Can resurrection come even from these horrible experiences?

Watch the Film *Something New with Miroslav Volf*

<http://www.theworkofthepeople.com/something-new>

Going Deeper

1. To the question, “What breaks your heart?” Volf answers, “Hungry mouths” and relates a story of his father who was a part of a three-month death march before entering a concentration camp.¹³ His father’s suffering profoundly shaped Volf’s view of the world.

How is understanding hunger and suffering an important part of the Christian experience?

2. To the question, “What did Jesus do on the cross that we cannot do for ourselves?” Volf responds that he learned the answer from his father and from the Old Testament character, Job. Volf then asks, “How do you discover from within the pit of your own existence” that “you are a beloved child of God and that all will be forgiven and all will be well”?

How can we learn of God’s love and forgiveness even in the midst of suffering, as Job did?

¹³ Volf’s father was imprisoned and tortured in a communist concentration camp in the former Yugoslavia.

3. Volf then asks, “How do you hope for something new” and not be “caught in the cause and effect mechanism?” This mechanism is one where one responds to violence with violence.

How can Christians escape the cycle of violence and poverty in the world? How the cross and the resurrection help us to answer this question?

Reflection

It is easy to become cynical in a world where death and decay is the norm. Following popular media does not help to show a world that is one filled with experiences of the resurrected, and many times Christians participate in practices that seem to deny the resurrection rather than to celebrate the resurrection. At least twice a week I drive by a field of neatly rowed white crosses in an unfenced field in Huntsville, Texas, on my drive back to Houston (I take a different route to work than from work). These graves are the graves of those who died in Huntsville State Prison. They are prisoners who have died by natural means, from prison violence, or by execution. On this drive, I cannot but help to think about the unjustified execution of Jesus and the injustice that took place. The narrative in the Gospel of showed that Jesus was clearly innocent of any charges, at least political changes by the state. However, the crowd still insisted on the state mandated death penalty of the cross. Violence seemed like the only solution.¹⁴

The law of retaliation, or *lex talionis*, was never meant to authorize violence, only to limit it. “Eye for an eye” was intended to prevent extreme retaliation. If a person took your eye, whether intentional or not, the law only *limited* you from taking more than just an eye. In other words, one could not retaliate, in this case, and cut off an arm or kill the other person’s wife. However, many people, including Christians, have interpreted this law to give credence to continued violence in the name of justice. Violence toward the enemy is never warranted because this traps humanity in an endless cycle of violence. Those who know of an abusive home also know that most people who are abused themselves become the perpetrators of abuse. Violence begets violence. How does it stop?

In order to live healthy lives, victims of abuse must learn forgiveness and reconciliation. This does not mean that they submit themselves to continued abuse or seek to come back to the abuser (sometimes this will continue violence), but it means that the victims must at least reconcile what has happened to them, learn to live with this history. Jesus shows us on the cross the end of violence. In the words of Miroslav Volf:

¹⁴ Matthew 27: 19–23

By suffering violence as an innocent victim, he took upon himself the aggression of the persecutors. He broke the vicious cycle of violence by absorbing it, taking it upon himself. He refused to be sucked into the automatism of revenge.¹⁵

Jesus took the violence upon himself, not desiring harm to himself, but desiring for the cycle of violence to end. At the same time Jesus forgave his persecutors. Forgiveness not only came in the form of non-retaliation, forgiveness came in the form of returning to the world that was cruel to Jesus. A life resurrected is a life infused in forgiveness. It is a life outside of the tomb, not one that is still hanging on the cross or buried in the tomb.

How can you live this life of infused with forgiveness? How can you start to move out of the tomb? This might start by forgiving others who have harmed or offended you and return evil with kindness. Sometimes, it is not a good idea to confront the perpetrators of harm, because they have not understood the consequences and an attempt could continue to breed more violence. However, forgiveness can be the acknowledgement that you are letting go of anger, resentment, and the need for retaliation. We limit the possibilities of our lives when we do not break the cycle of sin and violence. However, when we forgive, we open our lives to other possibilities. Outside the tomb is a world of hope. It is a world of future possibilities, and a God who waits to help your heart open up them.

Further Reading

Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996)

Gregory Anderson Love, *Love, Violence, and the Cross: How the Nonviolent God Saves us through the Cross of Christ* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Pub, 2010)

¹⁵ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 291-292.