

## **How are we saved?**

More than any other week of the year, this coming week—Holy Week—calls on us to reflect on our experience of salvation through Jesus Christ. But how exactly does Jesus' death and resurrection save us? That's a question worth asking. So many books have been written on that one question that they could fill a library. I won't even try to give you a complete answer here. Instead, I'll simply give you a few points to ponder.

One traditional way of explaining it goes something like this: Through our sins, we have broken off our covenant with God. We are no longer worthy to enter Heaven. We have a debt so large that no quantity of virtuous acts will ever pay it off. We are doomed. So God decides to pay the debt for us. God assumes the debt through Jesus' taking our sins upon himself and dying for those sins. In doing so, our debt is paid off and we can now go to Heaven. And because Jesus is divine, death could not defeat him. Instead, he defeated death, rose from the dead and ultimately ascended into Heaven.

While this narrative has many elements that are true, it also has a lot of theological problems. For example, if God wanted to free us from our debt, why didn't God just write it off? And why would God choose to be paid in such a gruesome and horrific way? What loving father would demand that his son be tortured and assassinated in order to pay for sins he didn't commit? I'm not sure that I would want to meet such a God in Heaven or anywhere else!

So, here's an alternative approach: God chooses to save us from suffering and death by joining us in the midst of it.

Imagine that two lovers are walking home hand-in-hand after a fancy dinner party. The guy slips and falls into a mud pit. And the woman does a crazy thing: She dives headlong into his arms! He is shocked and asks incredulously, "Why did you jump in here? Now, you're all full of mud!" And she replies, "I jumped in here because you were here." Then she burst into laughter as she traces a muddy smiley-face on his cheek.

When I imagine Jesus suffering and dying for me, I imagine God, my beloved, jumping into my own personal mud pit of sin, suffering and death. Why? Just because I'm there and that's what crazy lovers do. And once Jesus is there, nothing seems so tragic anymore. And I remember that it all started with God playing in the mud, breathing life into it, looking at it and saying, "It is good."

This way of looking at salvation does not answer all the questions. In fact, it hardly answers any of them. But I'm content to live without all of the answers and I'm comforted simply by thinking of the one thing I'm absolutely sure of: Christ lived, suffered, died and rose again all out of absurd love for me. That's all I really need to know.

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