

I read this from the newspaper: A father held up a convenient store with his 9 year-old daughter standing next to himself. He and his daughter were taped by the security camera. One may question the intelligence of the man for bringing a daughter to an armed robbery, and letting her witness everything. Indeed, one may worry what kind of emotional trauma and influence such an experience would leave on the girl.

But the story the clerk told reveals what motivated the man to pull the robbery: his marriage failed, he lost his job, his daughter needed to survive, and she needed the medical care. The man was teary-eyed, and he stayed around for a while, telling the clerk his personal life story. Obviously, his world collapsed around him, and he was desperate.

It is different for everyone, but every one has a certain sense of what his or her life should consist of. Bernie Madoff's brother,

Peter, whom a college student sued for having defrauded him, has convinced a judge to allow him to tap from the frozen assets the monthly expense of \$10,000 for a "reasonable" living. For the robber-father of our story, maybe a paying job and a stable marriage is all that he would need.

Some people just go out and hurt others, just because they can and they want to, while others are driven to hurt others, in order to survive. Whether it was for Madoff or for this desperate father, there is a common thread that connects these two: their worlds as they perceived failed to support them.

The glaring difference is that, while one man's world failed as the due consequence of his own premeditated criminal activity to hurt others, the other man's world failed, way before he ever imagined that he would turn out to be an armed robber. The irony is that while the one who committed premeditated crime gets \$10,000 living expense from

the asset he accumulated by defrauding others, the desperate one is on the lam, even though he did not harm anyone physically. The irony is that the criminal driven by greed is being pampered, while the other criminal driven by poverty and desperation is completely abandoned by everyone.

That is the injustice of a society run by plutocrats: those who steal millions from others through white collar crimes are gently dealt with, while those who commit an armed robbery for petty cash get the harshest treatment.

The concept of justice presupposes the equitable application of leniency and the balanced sentence of the due punishment. When the judicial institution fails to meet these conditions, we experience injustice, even though the proceedings might have been perfectly legal, and in accordance with the due process of the law.

This point was keenly captured by the High Priests who appealed to the judiciary authority of the Roman prefect. The High Priests had to rely on the Roman judiciary power to have Jesus executed, since they had no power to execute a person. They perceived Jesus as the competition to their monopolized grip on the religious life in Israel. Jesus challenged the authority and teachings of the High Priests and the Pharisees and Scribes. The cross was the answer to their problem: it will eliminate the thorn in the flesh at once and for all. They realized that they could do it all in the perfect legality, and through the due process of the law.

From the Roman point of the view, the cross was a fitting punishment for those who upset the stability of the occupied land. The Roman Empire was only interested in the taxes that it could levy from the occupied land. The Romans largely allowed the local autonomy in the occupied territories, just for that reason. The normalcy was

St. Andrew's UMC
April 5th, 2009
Mark 15:25-41
"Let the Messiah Come Down"

crucial to the stable economy and the uninterrupted revenues. The cross was designed to serve as a deterrent/threat against anyone who planned to rise against the Roman rule, or so-called Pax Romana, the Roman Peace. Any one who committed a crime that was deemed counter to the ideology of Pax Romana deserved the punishment of the cross.

The story of Cross is a story of huge failures. Besides the legal aspect I have covered, it is a story that reveals failures in multiple aspects.

The leader of a movement had been captured and killed. His disciples all abandoned their leader and fled, forgetting what they have bellowed only hours ago:

Peter said to him, "Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you." And so said all the disciples (Mt. 26:35).

The Gospel accounts agree that the only ones who did not

abandon Jesus were the women disciples, who had supplied the financial means to the mission and ministry of Jesus. They are found at the scene of the cross. Those men who were always at the forefront of everything were the ones who high-tailed, at the very time they needed to prove their mettle.

There was a chasm of understanding between the disciples and their leader. The disciples viewed following their leader as career advancement. The proof is in their argument among themselves, as their leader approached Jerusalem: they argued who among themselves was the greatest. They were so engrossed in their own selfish motivations that what Jesus had been telling them failed to register: that he was expected to be killed by the conspiracy of those who were in charge. It appears that the disciples had been holding one another in check, so that no one of them would take advantage and advance beyond the rest.

That check and balance seemed have been broken, when John and James propelled themselves with the special request to Jesus. The Zebedee brothers wanted Jesus to put them on the right and the left of Jesus, in the closest advisory positions to the soon-to-be the King of the Jews. The rest of the disciples became furious, when they realized they had been taken by the brothers' pre-emptive maneuver (Mt. 20:20-24; Mk. 10:35-41). The disciples were a bunch of ambitious people who found their chances to success by hitching a ride on the wagon that Jesus drove.

A number of scholars contend that Jesus had the death wish, for he pressed on to Jerusalem, knowing that he would be killed. We find the textual evidence, however, that it was not all that simple. Although Jesus was fully willing to stand his ground for what he perceived as God's calling, the bitter cup was not what he wanted to drink from. We see him praying this the night before he was crucified:

"Abba, Father, all things are possible to thee; remove this **cup** from me; yet not what I will, but what thou wilt."

It is obvious that he wanted to avoid the bitter cup. What is obvious from this prayer is that his overwhelming sense of responsibility to God's calling overcame the temptation of bailing out. No, Jesus did not look forward to dying on the cross.

Another sentence that he uttered on the cross reveals that he did wish for a different outcome. It would not have been spoken by someone who looked forward to the martyrdom on the cross:

"Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"-- which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Hardly, they are the words of the one who had been looking forward to the martyrdom. The readers are led to suspect that Jesus was personally looking forward to anything but dying on the cross.

From the onlookers' point of view, Jesus failed absolutely. One day, Jesus rode on the giddy wave of the popular support, and triumphantly entered Jerusalem; before the week was over, the hope and excitement of the new messianic era died absolutely, too. Whatever the good news Jesus might have preached, whatever the miracle he might have performed, they did not matter at all to the onlookers who derided him, saying:

"Aha! You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, come down from the cross and save yourself!"

There was no miracle this time.

Who else failed? From the view point of Jesus, God the Father failed absolutely. God had equipped Jesus with the extraordinary power and ability, as he began his ministry. He was tested for 40 days in the wilderness before he set out for the mission. At the end of the 40 days, he thwarted the challenges of the devil himself. He healed

the sick, fed the hungry, and raised the dead.

Jesus had been obedient to God's calling so far, and now he realized that God the Father had left him hanging to dry, literally. Why couldn't God send an angel to save him from the cross, as God did Isaac from Abraham? Why was God silent, when Jesus needed God the most? What is it like to realize that even God had abandoned you?

The silence of God was especially unbearable to Jesus, because God declared in at least two occasions that Jesus was God's beloved Son—one at the baptism at the river Jordan, the other on the mountaintop, where Jesus transfigured. Why didn't God do something?

Is our God an almighty God? Would an almighty God just watch and allow his only Son to be murdered on the cross like a common criminal? Would you have stayed silent, when a mob took your child, sentenced your

St. Andrew's UMC
April 5th, 2009
Mark 15:25-41
"Let the Messiah Come Down"

child to death, and nailed your child on the cross?

This is the dilemma for the almighty God. If God exerted God's almighty power and saved Jesus from the cross, on one hand, there would have been no salvation. If God demonstrated God's almighty power on the cross, then, who is going to be the sacrificial lamb that takes away the sins of the world? If everyone whom God called to do the job expected to be bailed out at the last moment, how many messiah-candidates must God interview, before God finds the one naïve enough to bear the cross and walk into his own death?

If God accepted, on the other hand, the derision, anger, and the accusation of betrayal—and the label as a failure of a God who abandoned His own Son, and became the impotent God—then Jesus would die, but the salvation of the humanity would take place. Which option should God choose?

God abandoned Jesus, because God chose us. God chose to be the failure, and be not the almighty God, so that we might have life and have it abundantly. Who knew, the messiah's job description included dying on the cross?

Sometimes, we find our selves questioning God. What is God doing for me? Why is this happening to me?

When there is a sports game, we see some players pray. Are they praying to God, so that they would win? If there is laying off going on, do we pray that we would not get the pink slip? If that is the case, what should God do for the other team, for those who do get the pink slip?

What should God do, if we ask God to give us the break? Does God let others lose the game and lose their jobs, so we would take home the trophy and keep the jobs? If that is how loving and just God should behave on our behalf, what are we witnessing to others about our God?

St. Andrew's UMC
April 5th, 2009
Mark 15:25-41
"Let the Messiah Come Down"

We are basically witnessing to others, then, that God is ours, and they should not expect much from our God. Wouldn't that make our God very much powerless and unjust to others? Who would like to believe in such a God, or love such a God? Should Jesus have risked God's reputation, just to save his own skin?

Is our God almighty and gracious, as long as things are alright for us? If so, then it is we, not God, who have a problem. We make God an impotent God for the rest of the humanity by witnessing to others that God should give us the special treatment, and let them wallow in mud.

God chose to become powerless, to be a failure on the cross, because God chose us over Jesus. If God had not abandoned Jesus on the cross, we would not have gathered here today. Is it a coincidence that Apostle Paul testifies to us this?

"For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong (2 Cor. 12:10)."

God chooses not to compete against things that make us strong. We do not need God, when we are strong, just as the healthy do not need the physician. God's power is manifest, when we are weak. Through our weakness, God manifests God's power, and shows us the vision. When the world around us seems to crumble down, when everything seems to fail, what is when God's power comes to the full manifestation.

God chose to abandon God's own son, even if it would kill him, so that we might live. And the true messiah would choose to stay on the cross, even if it would kill him, so that we might have life, and have it abundantly.