

Good Friday Sermon 2024-

It turns out that loving, nonviolent, forgiving, healing and radically inclusive Messiahs, like Jesus are bad for business for law and order empires. When the emperor claims to be the embodiment of God, any other Messiah threatens the legitimacy of the emperor and the empire. Many claimed to be the Messiah in those days. Brutally predictable, the empire leaned in to its favoured tactic one legally sanctioned by the empire— for dealing with rivals. Cruel public executions; notably crucifixions. Capital punishment for the sake of deterrence would be the modern description.

Messiahs are also bad for business for some among the religious establishment too. Some of the religious leadership gained wealth and status by going along with the empire. You don't want to be guilty by association and hassled by the empire if someone from your ranks begins claiming to be a Messiah. At best, you lose out on any lucrative arrangement with Rome. At worse, you get frog marched to the crucifixion gallows yourself.

What happens to a religious structure when a Messiah calling for radical reform shows up and the people start paying attention? Nearly all of Jesus' debates were with some insiders and religious leaders. He wasn't out to replace a religion or start a new one. He wanted people to return to the roots of their religion—liberation so that we are free to love God and neighbour and aren't boxed in to illusions where we believe we need to exploit others or even destroy them for the sake of our own survival—you know kind of like empires and other human systems tend to do?

Even pawns in the system get swept up in the drama. Urban folk from Jerusalem would resent the back water Galileans and happily call for one to be executed. Some who ardently trust in some combination of empire and religious power to ensure their lives are half decent might want any destabilizing influence like a Messiah dealt with too.

In the end it seems nearly universal that it's a hard NO for Jesus, the Messiah. Brutal and seemingly final, it really isn't final.

In the end God speaks the final rebuttal...No to the ways of empire. No to systems that enslave us in inhumane systems and ways of being. God's No is also a definitive YES—a yes to humanity, a yes to love, and a yes to the restoration of the whole of creation that God so loves.