What's Your Church's Domain?

by Juan Miguel Pacheco, Oregon Conference

As you may know, the "domain" is the code that goes after the period in a webpage address-i.e. .net, .org, .com, etc. The purpose of this code is to identify the nature or personality of the organization. For example, if we talk about the government, it's .gov; a non-profit would be .org. The purpose of the organization is reflected in the domain.

Use your imagination: what domain would your church have, if we had to put one according to its mission, personality, or nature?

Churchname.TV
These churches exist for the purpose of performance. Every hair is in place, every line is rehearsed. While there is nothing wrong with high-quality programming, the programs can become the center, and community outreach relegated.

Churchname.ORG
These churches focus primarily on protecting the organization and name to which they belong. In other words, the name is everything. They are not involved or corrupted by anything that is not sanctioned, funded, or promoted by the organization.

Churchname.MIL
These are dominant churches, with a high emphasis on discipline and conformity, like a military regimen. People with different ideas, methods or lifestyles are not welcome. They sever ties immediately with any recruits who fail.

Churchname.EDU
These are churches where the passion is expounding on the latest theological trend, book, or emerging theory. They enjoy a deep exegetical study, which at times reflects very little on the real life their members are experiencing.

**Churchname.COM**
Although the real meaning is "commercial", I suggest that we use it instead to mean "community". Churchname.COM churches have an outward focus. They dare to look outside their walls. They hold three guiding principles:

- **Community** - they start with "them" in mind. They seek to understand who belongs to the community that surrounds them. They ask themselves the following:
  - a. What are their needs?
  - b. What are their dreams?
  - c. What are their hurts?

- They are organized not merely to keep the programs going, or to stay occupied, but they discover and use their gifts to serve.

- Mission is the bridge that connects the community with the organization. They are not just interested in making healthy sinners: they strive to make a connection between spiritual and felt needs.

What is your domain name?

**Media**

There are 6,000 churches in the North American Division of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. Every congregation has a story. If you stay at a church long enough you can watch the drama unfold. Recently the NAD Church Resource Center embedded film makers in Hollywood, Rocklin, and Oakland. Each stayed over a year. For all three the task was difficult not because there wasn't a story but because there were too many wonderful stories to tell. Listen to Kevin Ekvall as he tells of what it was like to document the Sunset Oaks Seventh-day Adventist Church in Rocklin, California.

If you haven't yet see the entire Stained Glass series you can watch all of the episodes online at the Stained Glass website. Here are the three churches:

- **Sunset Oaks**
- **Hollywood Boulevard**
- **Oakland Grand Avenue**

If you prefer to watch them on DVD they can be purchased online:

- **Sunset Oaks**
- **Hollywood Boulevard**
- **Oakland Grand Avenue**

**Reading for Pastors**

Haven't had enough from Monte Sahlin at *Faith in Context* lately. But Monte's back with a couple of great pieces:

- **"I believe in a forgiving God."** Quote: "Is it just me or has this attitude become more pronounced in recent decades? The sins for which a person has a weakness are seen as something that God easily forgives. The sins for which other people have a weakness are blown up as terrible, dangerous and things that God cannot easily forgive."

- **Does Congress have a right to investigate a religion?** Quote: "Jesus never approved of the Crusades. They were sin in His eyes. I am sure that God's heart has been broken by the long, bloody history of conflict between those who claim these faiths. He does not approve of investigating Muslims in America today, so far as I can see."

Why **atheist Ricky Gervais thinks he's a better Christian than some Christians**. You won't agree with all of this, but it is worth reading and thinking about as an example of post-modern thinking. Quote: "If I could change one thing for a better world, it would be for all mankind to adhere to this little gem: 'Let he who is without sin cast the first stone.' I assure you, no more stones would ever be thrown." **Alert! A few bad words and very challenging ideas! If you're not ready for that, don't go here!**

From the Christian Post, **Eryn Sun responds to Gervais**.

**Visual summary of a book by Will Mancini, Church Unique.** I especially like this one: pastors are copycats!

From a Crosswalk.com survey: **the biggest reason people are leaving church**.

According to Twitter, **what did people give up for Lent?**

A **brilliant writer, Tom Kapanka on cross words**: cross words spoken to the One on the cross, and those spoken from the cross.
To the Point

Not by painful struggles or wearisome toil, not by gift or sacrifice, is righteousness obtained; but it is freely given to every soul who hungers and thirsts to receive it.

- Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing, p. 18

The soul that is yielded to Christ becomes His own fortress, which He holds in a revolted world, and He intends that no authority shall be known in it except His own. A soul thus kept in possession by the heavenly agencies is impregnable to the assaults of Satan.

- Desire of Ages, p. 324

None are so sinful that they cannot find strength, purity, and righteousness in Jesus, who died for them.

- Steps to Christ, p. 35

Often our plans fail that God's plans for us may succeed.

- Help in Daily Living, p. 6

Know and believe the love that God has to us, and you are secure; that love is a fortress impregnable to all the delusions and assaults of Satan.

- Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing, p. 119

The closer you come to Jesus, the more faulty you will appear in your own eyes; for your vision will be clearer, and your imperfections will be seen in broad and distinct contrast to His perfect nature.

- Steps to Christ, p. 44

God never leads His children otherwise than they would choose to be led, if they could see the end from the beginning and discern the glory of the purpose which they are fulfilling as co-workers with Him.

- Help in Daily Living, p. 11

God takes men as they are... They are not chosen because they are perfect, but notwithstanding their imperfections, that through the knowledge and practice of the truth, through the grace of Christ, they may become transformed into His image.

- Desire of Ages, p. 294

The last rays of merciful light, the last message of mercy to be given to the world, is a revelation of His character of love. The children of God are to manifest His glory. In their own life and character they are to reveal what the grace of God has done for them.

- Christ's Object Lessons, p. 415

Our heavenly Father has a thousand ways to provide for us of which we know nothing. Those who accept the one principle of making the service of God supreme will find perplexities vanish and a plain path before their feet.

- Help in Daily Living, p. 13

News, Ideas & Reminders

- Ron Clouzet and Tim Standish have put together what sounds like a challenging and informative program on creation. More information here.

- Humor: Is this sort of like speaking in tongues?

- Controversy: Pray for pay?

- Previous resource links:
  - Andrews Study Bible
  - Branded Faith, by Rajkumar Dixit
  - Matt Gamble, VagaBond servant ministry
  - The Hope of Survivors, ministry to victims of pastoral sexual abuse
  - iFollow website
  - Dissertation on house churches from Milton Adams
  - NAD NewsPoints (formerly Friday Fax): by email, or on a web page.
  - A way to block time-wasting web sites

Got a tool, resource, site, article, idea or seminar that you like a lot? Share it with us at BestPractices@ameritech.net.

Upcoming NAD Events

Do you have an event you'd like to invite NAD pastors to? Send details to BestPractices@Ameritech.net.

present evidence you'll not want to miss in this preparatory event of NET 2011-Prophecies Decoded. For more information, email: Bernadine.Delafield@nad.adventist.org

Community Services Sabbath. May 7, 2011, North American Division. Check with Adventist Community Services for information. Phone: 301-680-6438. For more information, email: Sung.Kwon@nad.adventist.org


Non-Profit Leadership Certification - Basic. May 15, 2011 - May 19, 2011, Northeastern Conference, 11550 Merrick Boulevard, Jamaica, NY 11434. Nonprofit Leadership Certification Program provides the latest strategies and professional skills to successfully lead a nonprofit operation in the 21st century. It focuses on nonprofit management, community development and Biblical principles of social ministry. Fee: $150 ($99 early-bird through Feb 1, 2011) through April 28, 2011. Phone: 301-680-6438. For more information, email: wynelle.stevens@nad.adventist.org

ASAM - Adventist Single Adult Ministries Sabbath. May 21, 2011, Division Wide. Check with ASAM (Adventist Single Adult Ministries) website for information. For more information, email: ahicks@nadasam.com


Best Practices is a Vervent publication of NAD CHURCH RESOURCE CENTER. Editor: Loren Seibold, Ohio Conference. E-mail: Best Practices. You are free to republish pieces from Best Practices in your own newsletter or blog, with attribution to the Best Practices newsletter and the author of the piece.
A holiday message from Ricky Gervais: 'Why I'm a good Christian'

By Ricky Gervais | 14 April 11

Last Christmas I wrote a little essay entitled: "A Holiday Message from Ricky Gervais: Why I'm an atheist."

The Wall Street Journal ran it, and it caused quite a stir. I was even asked to answer some of the comments.

So for Easter I thought I'd do another one. Here it is.

A Holiday Message from Ricky Gervais: Why I'm a good Christian

The title of this one is a little misleading, or at least cryptic. I am of course not a good Christian in the sense that I believe that Jesus was half man, half God, but I do believe I am a good Christian compared to a lot of Christians.

It's not that I don't believe that the teachings of Jesus wouldn't make this a better world if they were followed. It's just that they are rarely followed. Gandhi summed it up really. He said, "I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ." I have always felt this way, even when I believed in God, and in a weird way I feel I am still a pretty good "Christian" who doesn't believe in God.

So many Christians think that because they believe in the right God, they are automatically good and have a one-way ticket to everlasting life. Dare I say it but I suspect this is their main reason for believing. I've heard so many "believers" say, "Well, since there is no way of being sure whether there is a God or not, it's better to believe in God than not, because that way, if you're wrong it doesn't matter and if you're right you get everlasting life." Win:win.

This is of course Pascal's Wager, which assumes that God if he exists would reward blind faith above logic and living a good life as an atheist.

To the Christians/ God by the way, it's just as bad to believe in the wrong God as no God at all. The idea of other Gods is of course ridiculous to Christians. Supernatural poppycock. As if there was ever a Zeus; stupid, ancient, unenlightened superstition. And even if there are other Gods (which of course there aren't) then the Christians' God is the best. Hardest, smartest...just better. He would laugh at Zeus and call him a Greek bender. (I doubt that God is racist and homophobic but the Bible isn't clear. Some bits go on about love and equality and others say you shouldn't trust certain types and that laying down with a
others say you shouldn’t trust certain types and that laying down with a man as you would with a woman is punishable by death and is a bit sick and evil.)

So remember. If you are gay you are “Bumming for Satan” basically. (That would make quite a good T-shirt.)

Jesus was a man. (And if you forget all that rubbish about being half God, and believe the non-supernatural acts accredited to him, he was a man whose wise words many other men would still follow.) His message was usually one of forgiveness and kindness.

These are wonderful virtues, but I have seen them discarded by many so-called God-fearers when it suits them. They cherry pick from their “rulebook” basically. I have seen such cruelty and prejudice performed in the name of Christianity (and many other religions for that matter) that it makes me wonder if there has been a bit too much selective reading and reinterpretation of the doctrines.

God or not, if I could change one thing for a better world, it would be for all mankind to adhere to this little gem: “Let he who is without sin cast the first stone.” I assure you, no more stones would ever be thrown.

So maybe we should go back to basics to find out where it all got confused...

The Ten Commandments

The Ten Commandments are found in the Bible’s Old Testament; Exodus, Chapter 20. They were given directly by God to the people of Israel at Mount Sinai after He had delivered them from slavery in Egypt:

“And God spoke all these words, saying: ‘I am the LORD your God.’”

So let’s take the test. How many of these have you broken?

ONE

“You shall have no other gods before Me.”

I definitely do not. Excellent. I get one point.

TWO

“You shall not make for yourself a carved image -- any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.”

This basically means don’t make or worship a religious statue or bow to it thinking that it’s holy. Tick. Another point to me.

THREE

“You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.”

I never do. But let me explain something. Most people think that The Third Commandment means that they shouldn’t use his name as a swear word, e.g. shouting, “Oh God!” when they stub their toe instead of, “Oh Fuck!”

This is not the case (although I love the idea that God would rather them shout “Fuck” than “God”. That makes him cool in my book. But no.)

The commandment could equally be, “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vanity,” e.g. when your enemy is hurt or defeated saying, “that’s God’s wrath,” or when you win an award saying, “thank God.”

This is using his name in vanity. It’s suggesting that you KNOW that God helped you win that award because you deserved it more, or because he was on your side. It’s always tickled me that God would have a favourite actor at The Golden Globes.

Anyway I get another point. I think most non-atheists will lose a point here.

FOUR

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.”

Before we score this we need to discover what it really means when God commands us to keep the Sabbath day holy. In understanding our answer,
and the true intent of God's word, it doesn't matter what day of the week we celebrate the Sabbath. There were no calendars when God created the heavens and the earth so we don't know what day he started and ended. Don't let the "day" become more important than the 'intent'.

If we look at the portion of The Ten Commandments which refers to this, Exodus 20:8-11, it seems to be very specific;

8 "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. 9 "Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. 10 "For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and made it holy. 11 "The Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

According to the Bible, God commanded us to keep it holy. But what does that really mean? Work is basically referring to that which we do to earn a living, or in working around the house, or any labour we participate in daily. So, if we never worked at all would that mean every day was holy? No. This absolutely is not being holy. In various places in the Bible we are told of our need to work, for in our work we honour God. So...basically you have to work for the equivalent of six days a week with a day off.

I do this. I get another point.

FIVE

"Honour your father and your mother."

I think I get a point if anyone does with this one.

SIX

"You shall not murder."

Nope. Tick.

SEVEN

"You shall not commit adultery."

Nope. Tick.

EIGHT

"You shall not steal."

Nope. Tick.

NINE

"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour."

Nope. Tick.

TEN

"You shall not covet your neighbour's house; you shall not covet your neighbour's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbour's."

Nope. Tick. Another point for me.

Not bad for an atheist.

I make that 10 out of 10.

How did you do?

Even if this doesn't prove I am a good Christian it does prove that the Bible is a bit inconsistent, open to interpretation, and a little intolerant.

This is not peculiar to Christianity to be fair. And I like to be fair. Because unlike ALL religions, as an atheist, I treat ALL religions equally.
Are atheists better Christians than Christians are today? Famous comedian and English actor Ricky Gervais likes to think so.

Posting a holiday message for Easter entitled "Why I'm A Good Christian" in The Wall Street Journal, Gervais, a professing atheist, revealed that he is a "good Christian" compared to a lot of Christians.

To prove his point, he outlined the Ten Commandments and analyzed how he faired against each law. Giving himself a 10 out of 10 – passing all counts of murder, idolatry, and blasphemy – Gervais considered his perfect score "not bad for an atheist."

The thrust of his message, however, was not focused on his own tallied "goodness," but rather the lack of goodness in Christians today.

"It's not that I don't believe that the teachings of Jesus wouldn't make this a better world if they were followed," the 49-year-old actor stated. "It's just that they are rarely followed."

Agreeing with Gandhi’s words – "I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians" – Gervais admitted that he too held this opinion of Christianity even when he used to believe in God as a child.

"Jesus was a man. His message was usually one of forgiveness and kindness. These are wonderful virtues but I have seen them discarded by many so-called God-fearers when it suits them."

"They cherry pick from their 'rulebook' basically," he added. "I have seen such cruelty and prejudice performed in the name of Christianity (and many other religions for that matter) that it makes me wonder if there has been a bit too much selective reading and reinterpretation of the doctrines."

Preaching what seemed like a resounding message towards Christians today, Gervais echoed Gandhi’s words: “Your Christians are so unlike your Christ.”

Dr. Robert Johnston, professor of theology and culture at Fuller Theological Seminary responded to Gervais’ message, stating that sadly, he was correct.

"Many non-Christians in their conduct are better people than Christians," Johnston told The Christian Post. "[But] perhaps, though I’m sure he knows it, Ricky has chosen to be reductive in defining Christianity as an ethic rather than a relationship with God that includes ethic but is much broader and wider than that."

"Having said that," he continued, "we need to with James, affirm with Ricky that faith without works is dead to the degree that we are guilty of his assessment of us. If to the degree that he is right, that he is a better person in how he lives within the human community, then for many who name the name of Jesus, it's a call for us to repent and follow Jesus."

In agreement with Gervais’ point that part of the message of Jesus was about kindness and forgiveness, the professor stated, "If in the world we live in, Christians are increasingly being perceived as unkind, unforgiving, intolerant, and legalistic, and to the degree that this is true, we have failed to be followers of Jesus."

"Ricky Gervais probably has a truth that you and I don’t want to recognize."

Addressing the issue of why Christians were increasingly straying from the image of Christ like Gervais highlighted, the Fuller professor stated, "Christians have always continued to be sinners. We are new people and yet we wait our final redemption, so this is not a new question."

"I think that unfortunately, in some quarters today, as the culture no longer reflects our understanding or a particular understanding of Christian values, we think it is our obligation to force everyone to agree with our position."

"Jesus did not do that. Nor did the New Testament writers," Johnston stressed. "And so the task is to recognize that we live in a pluralistic context, [and] the task for us is to model the way of Jesus and to proclaim the truth and beauty and goodness that Jesus embodied and taught."

But to proclaim is something different than to seek to legislate or seek to impose our standards on others, he noted.

So is it right for Gervais and many others like him to judge Christians and those who profess to follow Christ?
Johnston replied, “I think Christians have unfortunately positioned themselves too often as the judge of other people and their actions. We are simply getting what we have given.”

“In that sense, Ricky’s article though tongue and cheek and obviously meant to be provocative and written by a humorist, is nevertheless the occasion for Christians to say ‘I’m sorry that we have modeled for you a legalism rather than show you the compelling power of Jesus’ love.’”

“If our Gospel is heard as judgmental, intolerant and exclusive, then we have a problem and the finger needs to be pointed back at us,” Johnston emphasized to CP.

Not wanting to judge Gervais’ own beliefs and his 10 out of 10 commandment score, the Fuller professor did, however, mention that perhaps the English actor would also like to read the Beatitudes, in which Jesus radicalized the meaning of the Ten Commandments “in a way that brings humility to all of us.”

“He might want to rethink some of his tally scores,” Johnston disclosed.

“But I’m not in the business of judging Ricky … I think we need to have a generous spirit and to the degree that he’s calling all of us to take more seriously the external expression of our faith.”

“His challenge can be a good reminder … a sermon to come in surprising places.”

Deeming Gervais as perhaps God’s own spokesman, Johnston told CP how God sometimes used unbelievers to reprimand His people and bring them back to His purpose.

Advising all believers “to be extravagant in grace” while proclaiming God’s truth, Johnston explained how Christians could appropriately balance both truth and grace.

“When you communicate with your children, you need to be both honest and forthright as to what is expected. And you need to be extravagant in putting it within the context of your love and grace and acceptance and good will. Children know when you do that, and when you don’t.”

“It’s evident and to the degree you simply become over concerned with truth, you lose your ability to be heard. And what is true in regards to our children is true in regards to our conversation with others as well,” he resolved.

“However much we disagree, it can only be in the context of radical extravagance and personal acceptance if we’re to be Christ-like.”

Whether or not Gervais’ observations are completely valid or not, ironically he and many others continue to remind Christians what Christianity should really look like.

Perhaps just like the actor stated in his Easter Holiday Message, “maybe we should all go back to the basics to find out where it all got confused.”

Eryn Sun
Christian Post Correspondent

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RICHMOND, VA—With a rising number of churchgoers abandoning the pews every year, popular Christian web destination, Crosswalk.com, conducted an online survey to determine the primary factors in church defection. The survey's most striking revelation: 34% of people who attend church leave because of a lack of personal connections there.

One participant who voiced his discouragement with his church body said, "There is no depth in relationships. People did not have time to be friends to other members." The same disappointment is shared by other respondents: 18% have abandoned a church because they felt unwelcome, and 16% stated their reason as an inability to connect with others.

"A welcoming community makes it a positive experience for the entire congregation and visitors," says Stephen McGarvey, Executive Editorial Director of Salem Web Network, operator of Crosswalk.com. "If it fails to provide that environment, churchgoers will feel less attached and more likely to quit and look elsewhere."

Both an approachable congregation and the ability to fellowship with others are deciding factors in survey respondents' decision to remain with a particular church body: 53% agree that the primary reason they currently attend a place of worship is because of the friendships they've established.

Tom Perrault, senior vice president of Salem Web Network, confirmed that leveraging the largest Christian audience on the Web for useful data is something the company plans to do more of. "SWN's goals include providing not only the best content and services to Christians online around the world, but insights into this audience that might help our partners in ministry," Perrault said.

In addition to friendships and relationships with others in their congregation, the survey results reveal that other aspects of church advertisement

advertisement

advertisement
leadership and theological differences.

About Salem Communications and Salem Web Network:

Salem Communications Corporation is the largest commercial U.S. radio broadcasting company that provides programming targeted at audiences interested in Christian and family-themed radio content, as measured by the number of stations and audience coverage. Upon completion of all announced transactions, the company will own and/or operate a national portfolio of 95 radio stations in 37 markets, including 59 stations in 22 of the top 25 markets. Salem also programs the Family Talk™ Christian-themed talk format on XM Radio, channel 170, and on SIRIUS, channel 161.

Salem owns Salem Radio Network, a national radio network that syndicates talk, news and music programming to approximately 2,000 affiliated radio stations and Salem Media Representatives, a national media advertising sales firm with offices across the country.

In addition to its radio broadcast business, Salem owns a non-broadcast media division. Salem Web Network is a provider of online Christian and conservative-themed content and streaming and includes websites such as Christian faith focused Christianity.com, Questions and Answers about Jesus Christ at Jesus.org, Christian living focused Crosswalk.com®, online Bible at BibleStudyTools.com, and Christian radio ministries online at conservative news leader Townhall.com® and conservative political blog HotAir.com, providing conservative commentary, news and blogging. Salem Publishing™ circulates Christian and conservative magazines such as Homecoming® The Magazine, YouthWorker Journal™, The Singing News, FaithTalk Magazine, Preaching and Townhall Magazine™. Xulon Press™ is a provider of self publishing services targeting the Christian audience. FaithTalk Magazine, Preaching and Townhall Magazine™. Xulon Press™ is a provider of self publishing services targeting the Christian audience.

Add to Digg Bookmark with del.icio.us Add to Newsvine
Social network sites and chocolate topped the list again.

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**What People Gave Up for Lent, According to Twitter**

Editor's note: For the past three years, Stephen Smith has used Twitter’s API to take a snapshot of what people say they are giving up for Lent. Each year, the list is a mix of the sincere and the sarcastic, the earnest and the anti-religious. But each year, it results in a fascinating look at American spirituality—especially with the recurrent themes of people tweeting how they plan to give up social networking for the 40 day season of fasting.

Congratulations, I guess, go this year to Charlie Sheen, who came in at both #23 and, with “tiger blood,” at #90. Justin Bieber is up several spots this year, so he hasn’t quite crested yet. The next-highest celebrity, who didn’t make the top 100, is British boy band One Direction.

“Trophies,” at #69, refers to the English soccer club Arsenal’s recent defeat, or something.

The later start to Lent this year means that “snow” doesn’t appear on the list—last year, it was #48. Myspace hangs on at #99, dropping 48 places.

This list draws from 85,000 tweets from March 7-10, 2011, and excludes retweets.

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<th>Rank</th>
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<th>Count</th>
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Cross Words

Years ago, I had a much older friend, a long-retired teacher in his late seventies who took pride in his mastery of the English language. Every morning at breakfast, he perused the morning paper circling random spelling errors and typos with glee between spoonfuls of oatmeal.

This proof-reading was a warm up of sorts for what awaited him on the final page: the daily crossword puzzle. On most mornings, it was child’s play, and he hastily filled its blanks while sipping warm coffee. In no time, he downed the last cold inch of brew, plunked the cup to the table as if it were an empty shot glass in some old-west saloon, and he rose victorious from his seat, ready to face the hazards of his day.

On rare occasions, however, he drew a blank on a crossword answer and felt trapped at the table. It was only a puzzle, but in the order of his world and sequence of his day, leaving the breakfast table without conquering the word-grid was tantamount to losing his keys before stepping out of his parked car, an embarrassment he had suffered increasingly with age.

Years later, I was a pallbearer at his funeral, and these memories brought a faint smile even as the weight of his casket strained my grip.

Me. I’m not a big fan of crossword puzzles. If I happen to have time on my hands at an airport or in waiting room, I may dabble at some random unfinished puzzle, but I can drop it mid-way as effortlessly as cutting short a telemarketer’s phone call during dinner.

CROSSWORDS have been on my mind during this season of Lent—but not in the sense that I have thus far shared. I have been meditating on the brief bits of dialogue in the gospels from the day of Christ’s crucifixion, particularly the stark contrast between the cross words Christ heard that day and the meek words Christ spoke from the cross.

Below I have highlighted some of the cross words Christ endured in the hours before his death, followed by the words he spoke from the CROSS.

Cross Words Christ Endured That Day:

Matthew 26:65-67
Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, “He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, now you have...
heard the blasphemy. 66 What do you think?"

“He is worthy of death,” they answered.

Matthew 27:28-30

Then they spit in his face and struck him with their fists. Others slapped him 68 and said, “Prophesy to us, Messiah. Who hit you?”

Mark 15:7-15

“Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?” asked Pilate, knowing it was out of self-interest that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas instead.

“What shall I do, then, with the one you call the king of the Jews?”

But the whole crowd shouted, “Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us!” (Barabbas had been thrown into prison for an insurrection in the city, and for murder.) Wanting to release Jesus, Pilate appealed to them again. But they kept shouting, “Crucify him! Crucify him!”

Luke 23:1-5 and 18-20

Then the whole assembly rose and led him off to Pilate. And they began to accuse him, saying, “We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Messiah, a king.” But they insisted, “He stirs up the people all over Judea by his teaching. He started in Galilee and has come all the way here.”

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John 19:19-22

Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek. The chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate, “Do not write ‘The King of the Jews,’ but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews.” Pilate answered, “What I have written, I have written.”

**Words Spoken From The Cross That Day**

Using the accounts from all four of the Gospels, there are traditionally seven short utterances spoken by Christ from the cross. It is assumed that they are short because of the difficulty of breathing while being crucified.

7. Reunion.

Luke 23:34
Then Jesus said, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do".
This first saying of Jesus on the cross is traditionally called "The Word of Forgiveness".

Luke 23:43
And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise".
This saying is traditionally called "The Word of Salvation".[14]
According to Luke's Gospel, Jesus was crucified between two thieves, one of whom supports Jesus' innocence and asks him to remember him when he comes into his kingdom.

John 19:26-27
Jesus saw his own mother, and the disciple standing near whom he loved, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold your son". Then he said to the disciple, "Behold your mother". And from that hour, he took his mother into his family.
This statement is traditionally called "The Word of Relationship" and in it Jesus entrusts Mary, his mother, into the care of a disciple.

Matthew 27:46
Around the ninth hour, Jesus shouted in a loud voice, saying "Eli Eli lama sabachthani?" which is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" see also Mark 15:34.
This saying is traditionally called "The Word of Abandonment" and is the only saying that appears in more than one Gospel. This saying is given in Aramaic with a translation (originally in Greek) after it. This phrase is the opening line of Psalm 22.

John 19:28
He said, "I thirst".
This statement is traditionally called "The Word of Distress" and is sometimes compared and contrasted with the encounter of Jesus with the Samaritan Woman at the Well in John 4:4-26.

John 19:30
Jesus said, "It is finished".
This statement is traditionally called "The Word of Triumph" and is theologically interpreted as the announcement of the end of the earthly life of Jesus, in anticipation for the Resurrection.

Luke 23:46
And speaking in a loud voice, Jesus said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit".
This saying, which is an announcement and not a request, is traditionally called "The Word of Reunion."

I trust whenever you hear the term "crossword" again, you think not only of a puzzle but of the most puzzling truth since the beginning of time: that Christ endured the wrath of God and man for us and even in those hours when spit and hate and cross words were being hurled at him, only love was spoken from the cross in return as the worthy lamb was slain.
But that was Friday. Today is Sunday. He is risen! He is risen indeed!

Happy Easter

11,472
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