

FREEDOM IS POSSIBLE

Getting to the cause of war and freeing us from that

Millions of people have died in wars because freedom was a cause worth dying for. It was to Jesus too, but the freedom he died for was quite different to the freedom we die for. We kill and die in war to get rid of a temporary enemy, but he died to free us permanently from the worst enemy we've got.

I'm glad someone did, because it doesn't matter how many enemies we successfully kill off in war, new enemies always rise to replace them, and the whole wretched cycle of war continues. What we really need is to be free of what's causing us to become enemies in the first place.

Well, Jesus tells us what the cause is. It's our own nature, this infernal combustion engine inside our own heads belching out a continual stream of the most unsavoury pollutants known to man.

Jesus was embarrassingly accurate in his description of a typical human mind at work, in how it clunks out "obscurities, lusts, thefts, murders, adulteries, greed, depravity, deceptive dealings, carousing, mean looks, slander, arrogance, foolishness - all these are vomit from the heart. There is the source of your pollution (Mark 7:21-23, from The Message translation)."

No wonder we're continually at war, with junk like that steadily trickling from our delightful little minds. Some minds spill out more swill than others, but push my buttons and I can be pretty nasty myself.

I also realize I'm not alone, I have lots of company, because all around me I see a "stinking accumulation of mental and emotional garbage; frenzied and joyless grabs for happiness; trinket gods; magic-show religion; paranoid loneliness; cutthroat competition; all-consuming-yet-never-satisfied wants; a brutal temper; an impotence to love and be loved; divided homes and divided lives; small-minded and lopsided pursuits; the vicious habit of depersonalizing everyone into a rival; uncontrolled and uncontrollable addictions; ugly parodies of community: I could go on (Galatians 5:19-21, The Message)."

Paul "could go on," too, because the human mind supplies plenty of raw material. Is that end of the story, then, that this is the way we are and there's nothing we can do about it?

Not so, Paul writes, because "God went for the jugular when he sent his own Son. In his Son, Jesus, he personally took on the human condition, entered the disordered mess of struggling humanity in order to set it right once and for all (Romans 8:3)."

God supplied the antidote. He did for us what we couldn't do for ourselves; he dealt with human nature. He did it through Jesus, who came to this Earth with the same mind we've got but he never reacted like we do. And why was that? What stopped his smokestack from pouring out the same garbage ours does?

Simply put, he had help. "During his time here on Earth he often cried out for help, to God who was able to deliver him from death. And because of his trust in God, his cries for help were heard (Hebrews 5:7)." Jesus resisted the rubbish his own mind came up with, because he had the ever-present help of a greater mind than his (John 8:29).

But that's exactly the kind of help that God offers us. "You, my friends, were called to be free," Paul writes, because "those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the old nature with its passions and desires (Galatians 5:13, 24)." Just like his Father helped him, Jesus now helps us nail our rotten thoughts to the wall before they get the chance to be expressed, too.

And therein lies our solution. With Jesus helping us just like his Father helped him, we too can defeat the worst enemy we've got and be free of the rubbish that causes us humans to become enemies in the first place.

And it's ours simply for the asking (Hebrews 4:16).