

**March 8, 2015**

**Third Sunday of Lent**

**For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom,  
and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength (1 Cor. 1:22)**

*For as long as I live, I will not let suffering be normal.  
I will not let this be something I just accept.*

Last week, we looked at the crisis in the Middle East, especially with ISIS, from the perspective of our Christian Faith - that violence alone cannot achieve justice and peace, that what go into the Middle East with is what we will leave there. This is a difficult topic, tragic. How do we face it? Is peace possible through the non-violence of the Cross?

**Kayla Mueller**

I read an article this past week in the National Catholic Reporter by Jamie Manson titled: “*Kayla Mueller’s Encounter with a Suffering God*,” which I would like to share with you. As you recall, she is the young woman who was killed recently by Islamic fundamentalists. This is an excerpt from that article.

“By 26, Kayla Mueller had already worked with humanitarian aid groups in northern India, Israel and Palestine and at an HIV/AIDS clinic and a women's shelter at night at home.

“In 2012, she traveled to the Syrian-Turkish border to work with ‘Support to Life’ and other humanitarian organizations. Her local Arizona newspaper chronicled her work with Syrian children describing her playing, painting and drawing with them in refugee camps, and recounts an incident where she was able to reunite a man with a six year-old family member after a bombing. ‘*For as long as I live, I will not let this suffering be normal. I will not let this be something we just accept*,’ Mueller told the reporter at the time. In August 2013, two months after that article was published, Mueller was kidnapped as she was catching a bus to Turkey after leaving a hospital in Aleppo.

“By the time of her death by Islamic fundamentalists, Mueller was able to grasp an understanding of God deeper than most people do during their lifetimes. This became clear from a letter she wrote to her father on his birthday in 2011: ‘*I find God in the suffering eyes reflected in mine. If this is how you are revealed to me, this is how I will forever seek you. I will always seek God. Some people find God in church . Some people find God in nature. Some people find God in love. I find the God in suffering. I've known for some time what my life's work is, using my hands as tools to relieve suffering.*’

“Mueller demonstrated that she truly understood the Gospel that Jesus was trying to preach to all of us. From what little we know of her life in captivity, it is clear she tried to practice one of Jesus’ most challenging teachings: ‘*Love your enemies.*’ She did not treat her captors with

hostility. The Guardian reports that Mueller in fact ‘*tried to teach her guards crafts, including origami.*’ In a letter she wrote to her family from prison in August 2013, she shows not a shred of bias or hate. Any resentment she harbors seems directed at herself for the pain she has caused her family. ‘*I will never ask you to forgive me as I do not deserve forgiveness,*’ she wrote.

“If anyone had a reason to curse fate, it would have been Mueller. But she does not complain or wallow in self-pity. Instead, she is entirely self giving. ‘*If you could say I have suffered at all through this whole experience, it is only in knowing how much suffering I have put you all through. I have come to a place in experience where, in every sense of the word, I have surrendered myself to our Creator because literally there is no one else. By God, by your prayers I have felt tenderly cradled in free-fall. I have been shown in darkness, light. I have learned that even in prison, one can be free. I am grateful. I have come to see that there is good in every situation, sometimes we just have to look for it.*’

Mueller’s faith speaks to people disaffected by Christianity, who are wearied by the unseemly connections between religion and politics, and are even wearier of the narrow, divisive understanding of God peddled by so many churches. Who cannot help but be inspired by her radical encounter with a suffering God.”

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This is the Gospel, this is the meaning of Christ on the Cross. Christianity is not about security and safety, it is about finding God in the midst of discomfort and fear. The Cross of Christ tells that suffering is not the end of the story. Christ on the Cross carries the pain of all humanity, and when we join our suffering to his, we are participating in the very saving work of God.

Author Jamie Manson writes: ‘*A perverse form of Christianity has recently emerged in American culture: a Christianity that glorifies God and guns, that incites the hatred of Muslims, that sees wealth and power as signs of God's blessing. Mueller’s understanding of God is a much-needed antidote to these aberrations.*’

**The Compass**

Christ on the Cross is our Compass on how to stop the violence:

- † by avoiding strategies of domination
- † by extending Christ’s compassion and forgiveness to all, offering a future full of hope
- † by working together with the Middle-East countries for the peace and development of the entire region

This seems impossible, ending violence by non-violence:

† but so was the Cross of Christ - until Jesus embraced it

† but so was the Cross of Christ - until Ghandi embraced it

† but so was the Cross of Christ - until Martin Luther King embraced it

† but so was the Cross of Christ - until Kayla Mueller embraced it

† but so is the Cross of Christ - until we embrace it

The Gospel says and history shows that Christ's way of the Cross is the only way to peace. Force won't get us there; simply sitting back and praying alone won't do it. We can only arrive at peace when we encounter our Suffering God from within suffering. Then we will find that participating in the suffering love of God is the only way to justice and peace. Let us not be afraid of Christ on the Cross.

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