The Suffocation of Hope

The 2025 Writings

1.1.25

Sojourner,

This past year, I've watched men die. I n fact, I feel like I've regularly watched parts of myself slowly die in the process. What you hold in your hands is not a polished collection of essays, it is the blood and breath of a year spent at the edges of justice, where law meets conscience and the cold machinery of punishment collides with the unrelenting call of mercy and grace. These words poured out of me because they had to. They're my witness.

2025 has been a year of nitrogen and resistance, of watching Alabama perfect new methods of killing while the church largely looked away. It has been a year of standing with Steven Nelson, Anthony Wainwright and Anthony Boyd as they were murdered on gurneys, of crying out for people on death row throughout the nation, of holding space for the condemned and the forgotten. But it has also been a year of profound theological reflection…of wrestling with universalism, of theologically examining the very existence of execution chambers, of insisting that Love will have the final word. In these pages, you will find Advent meditations alongside eyewitness accounts of horror. You will find prayers for the dying and manifestos for the living. You will find my rage and my hope, often in the same breath.

I offer this collection to you as a gift. Not because these writings are easy or comfortable, but because I believe you're ready to receive them. The work of hope is not for the faint of heart…it demands that we look directly at what our society does in our name and refuse to turn away. My prayer is that these words might kindle something in you: a righteous anger, a stubborn compassion, a commitment to stand with the least of these. Take what serves you. Argue with what doesn't. Throw away what is useless to you. But whatever you do, don't give up the faith.

With stubborn hope,

The Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood

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1.2.25

We paint…therefore we're free. : On Painting, from Death Row

*Steven Nelson is a prisoner on death row in Texas. The Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood serves as his spiritual advisor. This piece flows out of a conversation that Dr. Hood had with Nelson on meditation

Painting is both a medium and a gateway. Energy flows through the brush onto the canvas. Emotions pour out to make the shapes of our lives. No matter what we produce looks like, it is a part of us. We are creating a glimpse of something that cannot be constructed in the exact same way ever again. The brush becomes akin to the very breathe of the creator, the catalyst for creation. The destination always changes and morphs with everyone who dares to engage that which is created. We too are always changed by how we create. Symbiotic growth is happening constantly, amorphously and passionately right before us, in us and beyond us. We are the ebbs and flows of the strokes and colors. We are both the creation and the creator. We are the movement of time and space.

Paint is a vehicle of course. We are the driver. The painter is required to think and do. Though their movements don't have to be slow or even methodical, they do have to be intentional. No matter how the paint gets to the canvas, your mind must construct the movement that gets it there. Each application is important. Each color matters. There is language in the outcome of such choices. Both precision and fluidity create a symphony of creativity. We are transported to somewhere else because we have dared to create something else. Both the destination of the work itself and the future of the interpretation are influenced and launched by what we do.

Where are we going? When you first start to create, you have no idea. Our most carefully laid out plans can never predict

everything that will appear. Lines are not exact. Colors are not clear. Images look different than we anticipated. There are all sorts of places of unpredictability that we might arrive at. Painting emulates life in this way. When we dare to create or live our lives, we can never fully anticipate what we will find. However, we learn to appreciate the creation because we are the creator and the creation is growing in and through us. There is no possible way to separate the painter from the painting.

Inspiration is usually assumed to come from somewhere else. The painter however knows different. Painting is a means of revelation. Primarily, the revelation of the self. Even if one encounters something inspiring, it still must fester within the painter before it can be utilized to create. Ultimately, we are always the source of our art, the revelation of our being.

Intimacy is transformative. We recognize that we are one with the other. The painter connects with the viewer of the painting. Sometimes the result is one of awe. Sometimes the work is one of disdain. No matter what the reaction, there is always some level of intimacy in the created reaction. The work of the painter consistently breaks down walls or gets in our heads. Once the painting is seen, there is no possible way to unsee it or stop it.

Paint is a means of fluid escape. Prison bars cannot hold the creation in. We paint…therefore we're free.

1.3.25

Strange Expectations: Reflections from Advent

The First Sunday of Advent

Luke 21:25-28, 34-36

"And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

"But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap. For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth. But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."

Wow. This shit is scary. I mean…these passages read like something straight out of a horror movie. Straighten up! Stay awake! Escape! God…the Son of Man does not sound like anyone that I'd want to hang out with. I want to run in the opposite direction.

What do we do with passages like this? Are they meant to cause us to live in fear? Are they intended to literally scare the hell out of us? Sometimes I wonder if the author didn't just sneak them in so that we would pay attention.

Growing up, our youth leaders regularly talked about the end of the world. They would use all sorts of tactics to scare us into doing what they wanted us to. Is that what we see here? Is Jesus trying to scare the hell out of us?

Maybe discussion of the storm helps us to know that the storm has passed? Sometimes the only way to know that you are on the other side is to tell where you have been. Maybe we are hearing where people were before Jesus came? Hell, I don't know. I just know that whatever is being talked about here, I don't want any part of it.

Grief is sort of like this. You speak of it…but you don't really want any part of it. The best way to talk about it is in the past tense.

Then again, maybe this passage is about justice. When God makes all things right, we want to make sure that those who have done evil get theirs. Of course, we want this…until we realize that them getting theirs means that we will get ours.

Maybe the purpose of the passage is to teach us not to look too harshly upon others?

Truth be known, I don't know. I trust God far more than any passage of scripture. I put my faith in the Love that never ends. Of course, God is Love. God never ends.

Love is making all things right. Of that, we do not have to be afraid. Indeed, there is no fear in Love…perfect Love casts out all fear.

So, stay awake so that you might feel the complexity, profundity and immensity of God's love.

The horror is not the end. Love wins.

Forget anything that doesn't create in you a knowledge that you are Loved…the very Beloved Son of Man. I trust that we will judge others as we would wish to be judged. Maybe that's how we make the judgment a little more manageable.

The Second Sunday of Advent

Luke 3:1-6

Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judaea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Ituraea and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene,

Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness.

And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins;

As it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth;

And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

Hell. The great construction that the church has used throughout time and space to keep the people in the pews in line. Of course, hell is any moment that we are separated from God. It seems to me that the only thing that ideas of hell have accomplished is to keep people separated from God. Fear is a great separator. There is no fear in Love. There is no fear in God.

Have you ever heard a minister brag about how many people got baptized? I used to hear that shit all the time. It's sort of like someone telling you how big the fish they caught was. The numbers are always a little exaggerated.

When we begin to create lines as to who is in and who is out… When we begin to brag about what we've accomplished… When we begin to talk about numbers… Things always start to sound a little silly.

What makes us think that we get to decide who gets to be baptized? It seems to me that the waters John the Baptist was wading in were open to all? I guess that's why Jesus felt so comfortable just walking up.

Have you ever met someone that loves talking about who's going to hell…and thinks that they're in that number…thinks that they're going to hell? Don't happen. We tend to think that God hates the same people that we do. God doesn't hate. The waters are open. So many just need to bathe.

Justice work illustrates this principle as well. Sometimes those who most loudly call for justice are the biggest perpetuators of injustice. We love to draw lines…but we don't realize that we are most often drawing a prison around our self to wall us in from God's people.

We don't need any more directions. Jesus shows us the way to the water. We are cleansed in order to clean…to set the world to right. We are a part of the clean-up crew not the destruction crew. We should be making things better not worse.

We should be making connections in love…because love is the only connection that lasts.

It's easy to demonize, damn and other the world…it's harder to see your place in it.

We are the crooked that is being made straight. We are the valley being lifted. We are the mountains being made low. We are the rough being made smooth.

Softly and tenderly, Jesus is showing us our place in the world… beyond our lines and into Christ's hope.

We belong to each other. Let us join together and rebuild our world.

In the economy of God…the in is out and the out is in. Stop creating lines. Look to the out and make a way in. Look to the in and make a way out. Start listening to the voice in the wilderness that is leading us all home…to that place where all…and I believe it means all…flesh will see the salvation of God.

May all that divides from God and each other melt away.

Confirmation not condemnation.

Third Sunday of Advent

Luke 3:10-18

And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then?

He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise.

Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do?

And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you.

And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages.

And as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not;

John answered, saying unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire:

Whose fan is in his hand, and he will throughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable.

And many other things in his exhortation preached he unto the people.

The Word of God washes away our sins. Too often we think that we have to do something or be something. We forget that it is the Word of God that washes away our sins. It is the very Word. We are also told that the Word will not come back void. The Word pursues us and the Word will find us. The Word is Love.

In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God and the Word was God.

In the beginning was the Gospel, the Gospel was with God and the Gospel was God.

It is the Gospel that saves.

We forget sometimes.

We spend too many days thinking that we're not doing enough. We spend too many days thinking that we're not saying the right

things. We spend too many days wondering whether we are believing the right things.

The Gospel is enough.

John the Baptist talks about a whole bunch of things. Yet he forgets the Gospel. It's not about what you do. It's not about what you say. It's about the Gospel.

The Gospel is about God's presence with us…a God who will never leave us nor forsake us. The Gospel is enough.

We create our hells. We can extinguish them. The Gospel is enough.

God is always sitting there waiting on us to come home. The Gospel is about the wait of love. Love that is true love always waits. Love is enough to bust through the greatest of obstacles.

The Love of God is the Gospel.

The Gospel is enough.

The Gospel always wins.

The Gospel will reconcile all to love.

Fourth Sunday of Advent

Luke 1:39-45

And Mary arose in those days, and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Juda;

And entered into the house of Zacharias, and saluted Elisabeth.

And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost:

And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb.

And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?

For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy.

And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord.

Light consumes much of what we spend our lives searching for. We don't want to be in the dark. We want to be enlightened. We want to keep the light on. We want to know the light of life. Light is something we so desperately want to keep around.

Perhaps the most important juxtaposition to light that we can know is how we feel the light. Our Gospel reading today is about feeling the light. When Elisabeth heard Mary…the baby let out a big kick. The kick is the forerunner of the light. The kick was something that could be felt. The kick is the affirmation of light's presence.

We all need a good kick in our souls this morning. Am I right? Elisabeth started speaking all kinds of power because she had enough sense to follow the kick…to follow the light…to know the light.

I get depressed from time to time. I feel like I don't have much to give. I feel stuck. I can't see the light. Then, I remember.

Light doesn’t come from the outside. Light comes from within. We are made in the Image of God. God is within us. We have to pay attention to the kick that is in us too. The kick is the light. Can y’all feel it? That kick is the kick in the ass that we need to get up and keep going.

Light comes from within. Light comes to us. So let us not dismay. The baby still kicks within us all. The light is still speaking. Nothing can extinguish it. Nothing can extinguish the light.

We are made by the light to become the light so that we might live in the light forever.

1.5.25

The Epiphany of the Lord

Matthew 2:1-12

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem,

Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.

When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born.

And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet,

And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.

Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared.

And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.

When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.

When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense and myrrh.

And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.

Everybody was… Greatly troubled. Stunned. Flipping their shit. The reactions of Herod and the people of Jerusalem say a great deal about where they were before the wise men arrived. I can only imagine how shocking it was when these wise men arrived in all of their glory. Everybody wanted to know what was up… especially Herod. They had a great deal at stake. So often we cling to what we have that we miss the magic. Something magical was afoot and all Herod and the people of Jerusalem could think about is how they could protect what they had and protect themselves from what was to come.

The message of the Christ is not about collecting and protecting. Too often we function like these folks. We're worried that somebody is going to show up and take our stuff. We are called to give away everything that we have. These folks in Jerusalem weren't prepared to give anything up, especially Herod. It seems to me that there would have been at least a few people who would have wanted to travel with the wise men to meet the Christ. Unfortunately, everybody (including Herod) were too worried about their shit…so worried about their shit that they lost their shit and missed the Christ.

The wise men feel a little dumb for not realizing that they were getting played by Herod. It shouldn't have taken a dream to realize that power will do anything to protect power. The evil that was rampant in Jerusalem was the evil of a selfishness that would do anything to not have to give anything up.

The wise men kept following the star. Have you ever believed so much in something that you would be willing to follow the sign to the ends of the earth? These folks believed in the Christ even though they'd never seen or met the Christ. Maybe that is what we are called to…believing without having seen or met. Faith is a difficult thing for all of us. I know there are times that I believe more strongly than others. I want proof. I guess we all do. This passage teaches us that faith is sometimes a star. We don't always know what we will find…but we do know how to pick out the star.

There is great beauty found when the wise men meet the Christ. Falling all over themselves and the like. But it seems to me that the magic of this story is that the wise men left home in the first place.

1.11.25

Poetry is freedom. Poetry is our freedom. : On Poetry, from Death Row

*Steven Nelson is a prisoner on death row in Texas. The Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood serves as his spiritual advisor. This piece flows out of a conversation that Dr. Hood had with Nelson on poetry

The description of thoughts set free are the undergirding of poetry. If we restrain the mind, we cannot describe the beauty of what we find. Beauty by its' very nature is defined by freedom. If one cannot be free physically, then they must discover ways to be free in the constitution of their soul. Words provide description of the fullness of somewhere else. Then again, describing the fullness of one's circumstance is the first step in the transcendent journey to somewhere else. Maybe the best way to say it is that poetry is an unstoppable force that busts through the walls of all perceived or real impediment that might hold us back.

What is there beyond what is? Everything. We stay grounded because we choose to believe that the poetic has no power. The only way to claim our freedom is to choose to believe that our thoughts can never be imprisoned. Poetry is the force of freedom. We all have freedom within us. We all can be free.

Why do we think that only the gifted can be free? Creativity is not a scarce entity. The will to utilize it is. Indeed, we are all poets. We all have the ability. Why do we hold back? It seems

that prison has a way of stripping everything from you until all you have is your fundamental being. Then, you realize that your being is all that you need. Poetry flows from being. When we describe reality, we are revealing essence. The construction of poetry is nothing more than the stripping of the false self. The trading of the mirage of our perceptions for the reality that is the beauty of truth and essence.

Poetry is so much more than words. Poetry is freedom. Poetry is our freedom. Are we courageous enough to be free?

There are many poets behind bars. There seem to be a great deal fewer in the free world.

1.11.25

The Baptism of the Lord or The Lunacy of Greatness

*Based on a homily delivered at St. Oscar Romero Old Catholic Church in Little Rock, Arkansas

Luke 3:15-16, 21-22

And as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not;

John answered, saying unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire:

Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened,

And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased.

Is it John…is he the Christ? Oppression, marginalization and injustice reigned…I guess you could say that the people were lower than low…of course they were desperate for the Christ. When you are starving, everybody who comes to you with food in their hand looks like a savior. John brought food and the people were starving. But I think it's important to remember that just because somebody gives you a taste of something…it doesn't mean that they've brought the main course. Indeed, sometimes we get so ready for something that we are willing to jump at anything. But something might be nothing and anything ain't everything. We mustn't allow our hunger to dictate the truth. John was not the Christ.

In our present reality, we must figure out what truth is. Too often we see partial measures as total victories. Jesus has come to redeem everything…not some things…everything. We mustn't settle for anything besides total justice…total love…total healing. To settle for anything less than totality is to settle for nothing. Jesus does not partially love us. Jesus loves us completely. If we are to be like Christ, we must never settle for partial. John was not the Christ.

There are many who claim that a new complete and total political era of reformation has arrived. We are told that we have elected a leader who might make us great again. Great is not a proper theological category of measurement. Indeed, the message of Jesus is about being small…humble…meek. John knew that he must become lesser…and explicitly said so. In this moment, followers of Jesus must bind themselves to the least of these not the most of these. To do anything else is to walk away from Christ.

The story ends…perhaps begins is more like it…with the voice of heaven declaring that Jesus is the one. There are so many people out there claiming to be the Christ…or at the very least something akin to it. In such an era, we must look to John for guidance. When the real Christ shows up…when the person of Jesus is available…we must get out of the way. When the dove was coming down, John got out of the way. John became lesser so that Christ…this nobody from Nazareth named Jesus…might become the greatest of them all.

We can't follow Jesus and give our lives to "Make(ing) America Great Again." Indeed, the message of Jesus is to humble ourselves…so that all things might be lifted up…so that love might transform all things. Don't get distracted. Don't fall for partial. Don't get confused. Love is the only thing worth giving your life to.

1.19.25

Water = Wine / aka Wine Fest

John 2:1-11

And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there:

And both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage.

And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine.

Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come.

His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.

And there were set there six waterpots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece.

Jesus saith unto them, Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the brim.

And he saith unto them, Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast. And they bare it.

When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it was: (but the servants which drew the water knew;) the governor of the feast called the bridegroom,

And saith unto him, Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now.

This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him.

This story blows the shit out of anyone who thinks that it is a sin to drink. The folks gathered at the wedding were already drunk when the wine ran out. The truth is that Jesus became somewhat of a bartender. Then again, in many places he might have lost his license for overserving the folks asking for more wine. Not only was the wine that Jesus brought forth of good quality…it was of the best quality. The commentary on the state of the party and the state of the wine makes clear that this was a party of seismic proportions. Jesus didn't slow things down…he fueled them.

I've always thought it strange that alcohol fueled the first miracle of Jesus. Part of the reason for my juxtaposition is that I always associated alcohol as something that is outside of the church. I think many others do too. This passage helps us understand that Jesus engaged alcohol in a very different manner than most of the church does today.

What does the wine have to do with anything? There is a symbolism here that shouldn't be missed. On the night before Jesus was crucified, he lifted a cup of wine and declared it to be his blood. On the cross, Jesus gives his blood for the world. Cups of blood and wine are at the epicenter of the Jesus tradition. The blood is the fuel by which we follow Jesus. The blood is the super serum. When it appeared that all the wine (blood) had run out, Jesus had plenty more to give. Such is the beauty of the love of God. Nothing can exhaust the blood. Nothing can exhaust how

far Jesus is willing to come to meet us. It is the blood that makes all things right. It is the blood that keeps the party going… forever. Pass the wine!

1.26.25

On the Nature of a Call or On Eating Sh**

Luke 1:1-4

Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us,

Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word;

It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus,

That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed.

Luke 4:14-21

And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: and there went out a fame of him through all the region round about.

And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all.

And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read.

And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written,

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised,

To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.

And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him.

And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.

In the modern age, the idea of a ‘calling’ is an almost impossible concept to understand. Besides the fact that most people don’t believe in much more than themselves, there is a real struggle with any sort of particularity at all. People think that their entire life is supposed to be about making money. Have you ever heard someone say that they have a calling to be a payday lender? What about a venture capitalist? Or maybe even the executive of a predatory health insurance company? I could go on and on, but I think you get the point. Most people are in it to get paid. There is no ‘calling’ when the sole objective is to get paid.

Unfortunately, the idea of ‘calling’ is nothing more than something that a few superstitious people embrace. Jesus didn’t feel that way at all.

In Nazareth, Jesus went into the synagogue and opened one of the most well-known scriptures of the time and loudly declared his ‘calling.’ He did not come to save the pious or the paid. Jesus came to save the poor, heal the brokenhearted, release for the captives, recovery of sight to the blind and to set at liberty all who have been abused. Nowhere in his ‘calling’ did Jesus talk about making money or gaining influence. Jesus is claiming who he is. The ‘calling’ of God is about embracing who God has created you to be the first place…not making or doing anything.

One of the misleading ideas I hear bantered about all of the time is that people are making money and gaining influence so that they might use such things to help other people. The problem is that rarely do I meet people who are actually doing such work. Most of the time, I just see such people collecting bigger houses and nicer cars. The idea of ‘calling’ is not about collecting…it is about being. We are all called to be something. If such a ‘calling’ does not align with the ‘calling’ of Jesus then such a ‘calling’ is bullshit.

In the passage, Jesus doesn’t hesitate to claim his calling. If we are truly connected to him, we won’t either.

Over the last few days, my family and I have received an outpouring of hate and death threats from those who are very

angry that I denounced Donald Trump and his dehumanizing policies. In a fiery sermon, I unapologetically declared, “May God damn Donald Trump if he enacts these evil policies, and May God damn us if we allow it to happen.” To those who have spewed hate and threatened the lives of my family and I, I unequivocally say,

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised,

To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.

These words are the measure of a ‘calling.’ I make no apologies for following Jesus. I make no apologies for following my ‘calling.’ If you don’t like it, eat shit.

1.28.25

Jesus Is Trans: Remembering Shade Schuler's Life and Death

Jesus is Transgender

Less than a hundred feet from residences, local authorities discovered the murdered and badly decomposed body of a transgender woman of color. The Dallas Police Department put out a detailed description of the body and asked for help. For weeks, no one had seemed to know who this woman was. Finally, when the woman was identified as 22-year-old Ms. Shade Schuler, I realized she'd been forgotten. Nobody seemed to care that a crime of hate had struck her down.

In the twilight of that August 2015 evening, the heat was excruciating. With every breath, I sweated through my shirt. The jokes of children filled the air. I laughed too. When we stepped onto the hidden gravel road, things got real. I knew we were on holy ground. No one spoke much. Everyone just seemed to be concentrating on the next step. The smell lingered. The heat didn't stop. I worried that the bread and chalice would slip out of my hands. The screech startled me. Perhaps, the bird was warning us that we were nearing the point of no return. I assumed it was an old fire pit. When I saw the black spot was in the shape of a body, I knew better.

This Is My Body

Rev. Carmarion Anderson-Harvey* and I led the group in a variety of prayers and then lifted up the elements to the heavens. "This is my body." "This is my blood." The presence of God was

unmistakable. It was electric. We remembered the oppression that Schuler faced in life, the horrific way she died and the beautiful resurrection in Christ that we knew she'd experienced in death. As each of us bent down to touch the spot, everything seemed to stop and Jesus softly whispered, "What you have done to the least of these you have done to me…" Looking at that empty spot on the ground, I believed the words as much as I ever had.

The inaugural address of President Donald Trump was certainly not short on bluster. But, one moment in particular stood out to me, "As of today, it will henceforth be the official policy of the United States government that there are only two genders, male and female."* In addition to these words, Trump has immediately signed numerous executive orders targeting the Transgender community that will have detrimental effect on everything from passports to the military to prisons to countless other juxtapositions.*

You Have Done To Me

I couldn't help but think about Ms. Shade Schuler. Reckless statements of erasure only give permission for oppression. Undoubtedly, there was someone who told Schuler's murderer similar things. Indeed, the actions of the Schuler's murderer and Trump's executive actions of metaphorical murder today are not all that different, they both seek to disenfranchise and destroy.

Jesus said, "What you have done to the least of these you have done to me." Those who are oppressed, marginalized, put down and left out are the least of these Christ spoke of. Today, based on both statements and actions, President Trump has left no doubt that the Transgender community is now at the epicenter of abuse. Jesus is incarnate in the least of these. So, from this moment forth, let there be no doubt, Jesus is Transgender.

*a Trans woman who presently serves as the Alabama State Director with the Human Rights Campaign

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3.27.25

Shawna Forde: From Minuteman to Convict to Prison Saint

Following Jesus is a dangerous business. Often, one is taken to places they could have never imagined. I recently went to such a place. You see, Shawna Forde was the organizer and leader of Minutemen American Defense, which patrolled Arizona's border with Mexico. Forde and a variety of others participated in such activity with a firm belief that their actions were keeping people safe from the consequences of drug trafficking and human smuggling. Back in the 2000s, I remember regularly hearing about all sorts of groups taking part in these border patrol activities. Then as I do now, I thought it was a really terrible idea. Unregulated groups trying to regulate the general public most often quickly collapse into violence. In Forde's situation, that is exactly what happened. Though it is clear that Forde never murdered anyone (based on all accounts), her associates were responsible for the 2009 murder of Raul Flores, Jr. and Brisenia Ylianna Flores, a father and young daughter. Gina Gonzalez, the wife and mother, was also shot but survived. Based on a flawed argument that Forde was the mastermind of the situation, prosecutors were able to secure a death sentence against her. Fast forward to the present, in my work with people on death rows across the country I am constantly encountering people who are connected to all sorts of horrible things. Jesus guides the way. That's how I met Forde. Honestly, I expected her to be a monster. She's not. Forde spends her days creating new programming and trying to teach other inmates various life skills. The lives of people all around her are astronomically improved simply based on her steady presence. In our conversations, Forde has made it clear that she wants me to be one thing, her spiritual advisor. Such a designation means that she has trusted me to be there for her. I would have never thought that either one of us would be in such a situation. We come from radically different political

spaces. Then again, following Jesus is a dangerous business. We are often brought to the places that we least expect. I'm thankful for Shawna Forde and I will do all that I can to advocate for the continuation and growth of the beautiful life that she now lives.

3.27.25

Jason Stephens, Robert Sparrow III & a Hot Car Accident

Hyperthermia is a deadly condition that occurs when an individual's body temperature rises to levels beyond normal due to excessive heat. Basically, the body produces more heat than it dissipates. I was a child the first time I ever heard of such a condition. One of the local community organizations was conducting a training to warn kids and their parents about the dangers of hot cars. I remember thinking that hyperthermia was the same thing as hypothermia. Of course, I quickly realized that hypothermia is the opposite, meaning that it's a deadly condition when the temperature of an individual drops too fast due to excessive cold. One could easily be forgiven for getting the two closely worded conditions confused. I digress. The bottom line is that hot car deaths are such a deadly phenomenon for kids that there are all sorts of trainings and public service announcements to prevent them. Unfortunately, such deaths are still very common. Most of the time parents or guardians or those charged with supervision of a child are punished with the weight of the horror of their actions, often coupled with minor charges. Occasionally, more serious charges are pursued depending on the level of negligence. With that said, I have never found a case in which someone has been punished with the death penalty for a hot car death. That is, until now.

Far from his first involvement in criminal activity, Jason Stephenson went to the home of Robert Sparrow, Jr. on June 2, 1997 to buy drugs and was joined by a number of accomplices. The situation escalated quickly. Stephenson proceeded to lead the robbery of everyone in the house, ultimately nine in total. One of the hostages was 3-year-old Robert Sparrow III. Once

Stephenson and his accomplices got all that they could, they left in the hostages vehicles, with Stephenson taking a green Kia. In order to keep the hostages from following him, Stephenson took 3-year-old Robert with him and threatened that he would harm the child if they followed him. He told the hostages that he would leave Robert in a safe place. Less than one mile away, Stephenson ditched the car and the child. Over six hours later, the car was found with Robert Sparrow III dead inside. Multiple experts testified that the child died of hyperthermia or hot car death. Though the circumstances were far from being the worst of the worst type of murder or manslaughter, Stephenson was convicted at trial and given the death penalty.

While the circumstances are certainly different than most accidental hot car deaths, Jason Stephenson clearly did not mean to kill Robert Sparrow III. The incident was careless and stupid but not intentional. So, why is Stephenson on death row with people who have mutilated and massacred a whole host of people? Our society recognizes that accidental hot car deaths happen all the time. So, why are we so determined to kill Stephenson? The death penalty is so arbitrary, especially in Florida.

4.26.25

Michael Bane: An Innocent Man on Death Row in Tennessee

On November 19, 1988, police found the body of Royce D. Frazier, age 60, lying in a bathtub full of water in his home near Memphis, Tennessee. It was assumed that the body had been there for a few days. Frazier had been gagged; a plastic bag had been placed over his head; and an electrical cord was tied around his neck. A plunger had been placed over his face apparently to keep his head submerged. Frazier's house had been ransacked: several lamps and ashtrays had been overturned and numerous items were scattered in disarray.

Brutal details don't give law enforcement the right to create their own facts. In the case of Michael Bane, that's exactly what happened. Sensationalism was at the core of the evidence that law enforcement manufactured against Bane. Indeed, there are two reasons why Michael Bane sits on death row, because of the brutal jealousy of Donna Lovett and the sensational lies of her son Brian.

Bane was arrested in bizarre fashion.

In the early morning hours of November 19, 1988, Donna Lovett made a call from a phone booth outside the Walker Motor Court, a motel in Ripley, Tennessee. She knew Michael was inside one of the rooms with another woman.

Lauderdale County Sheriff, Milford “Pop” Durham, recalled:

I got a call from a woman that told me that her boyfriend was at a motel room with

another woman. And I told her, well, you know, there’s not a lot I can do about

that. I don’t know of any crime that he’s committing. And she said, well, I can tell

you something that you will be interested in. Said, he and I, about two or three

days ago, went to Memphis or went to Frayser and went to a man’s house, killed.

After the Memphis Police Department confirmed that there was a dead body exactly where Donna Lovett specified, Pop Durham arrested Michael Bane; he was charged with the robbery and murder of Royce Frazier.

Donna Lovett was so jealous that she was willing to implicate herself and go to prison to bust up Bane and this other woman.

Teresa Goforth, a co-worker of Bane and Donna Lovett at J.P.W. Enterprises, testified that two were dating and that Lovett was

extremely jealous. About one week before the murder, Donna Lovett told Goforth that “if she couldn’t have Bane, then no one would and that she would see him locked away so far he would never get out.”

Alicia Shadell Gray, Bane’s cousin, likewise testified that Donna Lovett was very possessive and jealous. Three weeks before the murder, Gray heard Lovett say, “If I can’t have Michael, no woman would have Michael, and I’ll see us both behind bars.” Donna Lovett attempted suicide later that day at Gray’s home by overdosing on pills, and Bane had to take her to the emergency room.

Donne Lovett was a very sick person. So sick, that she lied about Michael Bane so that nobody else could have him.

The primary witness against Bane at trial was Donna Lovett’s son, Brian.

Brian Lovett (16 years old) said that his mother Donna Lovett and Michael Bane had discussed a plan to rob Royce Frazier before he was killed. He said the plan was for Donna Lovett to visit Frazier, whom she knew, and render him unconscious by putting eye drops in his beer. Bane would then enter Frazier’s home and carry out the robbery with Donna Lovett. Brian also said that he and Bane discussed choking or stabbing the victim. Furthermore, Brian claimed to have witnessed and experienced Donna Lovett and Bane experiment with rendering someone unconscious with beer containing eye drops.

On the afternoon of November 17, 1988, Brian said Donna Lovett was dropped off alone at Frazier's house. Later, Brian said that he was with Bane when they went to pick his mother back up. According to Brian, Bane went in the house and later came back out with his mother and a bunch of Frazier's property. He said that Bane had blood on him and that his mother was upset. Brian also said that Bane had bragged about cutting the victims nuts off.

At trial, Brian testified that his sister had committed suicide several months before the killing of the victim and that he himself had attempted suicide on two occasions before November 17, 1988. He admitted that he had been treated at Charter Lakeside and Memphis Mental Health Institute and that he also had a history of using cocaine, speed, marijuana, and alcohol. Lovett also admitted that he had made conflicting statements about the murder.

The entire case against Bane was centered around the testimony of Brian Lovett. He was a very sick and troubled man who had every reason to lie. Even according to Brian's own narrative, Donna Lovett was a murderer, who had Frazier's property and was very upset after the claimed incident. How could her role ever be minimized? Brian had to create a fantastical narrative to make it happen. He had to implicate Bane. Determined to protect his mother from the harsh consequences she was facing, Lovett was prepared to say whatever needed to be said. His foil was his brother Thomas Lovett, who repeatedly declared in sworn statements that he was with his brother and that none of his claims ever happened. Then again, Brian didn't do himself any favors when he kept mixing up all the stories himself. Lastly,

why would anyone with even rudimentary intelligence brag to a child about a murder…especially someone as sick as Brian was? Bane didn't. Brian was a liar and Bane is innocent. Thomas also knew his brother was a liar the whole time.

Bane's innocence is also bolstered by two statements made after trial.

While he was in prison, Donna Lovett wrote Michael Bane a letter indicating that Brian lied and was coerced by the prosecution.

Later, a woman named Elicha Gray, declared in a sworn statement that Brian Lovett told her that his mother had agreed to plead guilty in exchange for a sentence of 35 years and that he did not want to see an innocent man go to prison. He said he planned to write an affidavit stating that Bane had no part in the offense.

By both his mother's admission and his own, Brian lied.

Before he was able to construct the necessary affidavit, he was warned that he would be perjuring himself and could be sent to prison. Of course, Brian never said another word.

Brian also told authorities that he had looked in Frazier's window and saw Bane holding a knife to the victim's groin area while Donna Lovett placed a bag over the victim's head. Dr. Jerry Francisco, Shelby Counter Medical Examiner, testified that there were no injuries to Frazier's groin at all.

Brian also said that Bane had claimed he sliced Frazier's nuts off, Dr. Francisco said there were no injuries to Frazier's nuts.

So where did Brian Lovett get all of that from?

Shifting details are always the clearest indication that someone is lying. Cocaine, speed marijuana and alcohol, depression from his sister's suicide and multiple stays at mental hospitals…does this sound like the person who is going to be able to give the clearest narrative? When he lied, he lied exactly how the police told him to, and even then he got the details confused and added exaggerations of his own. The details don't fit the evidence recovered or the testimony given.

Nearing four decades later…based on the jealousy of Donna Lovett and the lies of her son Brian…an innocent man still sits on death row awaiting execution. How can we ignore such injustice? Free Michael Bane.

4.28.25

Jonathan Stephenson: On the Execution of Due Process in TN

Surely, there should be a conviction in order to place a conviction on someone's record, right? Obviously, not in Tennessee. The story of Jonathan Stephenson is one of the stranger legal tales I have encountered. Due to a wild series of twists and turns, Tennessee is trying to execute someone who literally doesn't have a legal conviction on their record. This is not about the ins and outs of the case. This is about a legal process that has inexplicably left Stephenson devoid of any semblance of due process and sentenced to death without a legitimate underlying legal conviction.

This is how it happened…

Jonathan Stephenson was convicted (by a jury) of first-degree murder and conspiracy

to commit first-degree murder in 1990. The Jury imposed a sentence of death for the first-degree murder conviction and the trial court imposed a consecutive sentence of twenty-five (25) years for the conspiracy conviction. On direct appeal, the court affirmed both convictions, but remanded both of them for resentencing due to a fundamental error which occurred in the sentencing phase of trial. The error rendered the jury's verdict a nullity. On remand, the parties reached an agreement, (A plea Agreement) that involved the changing of Stephenson's pleas from not Guilty, to Guilty, which rendered the jury trial and

conviction itself a nullity. The guilty plea agreement came with the sentence of life without parole, for the first-degree murder guilty plea. A sentence of sixty (60) years to be served at sixty percent (%) and run consecutive to the first-degree murder sentence for the conspiracy to commit first-degree murder guilty plea along with the promise of never being faced with the Death Sentence again. In 1998, Stephenson, filed a Petition for State Habeas Corpus Relief. Stephenson alleged that his sentence of life without parole for his conviction of first-degree murder was illegal and void, because that particular sentence did not exist at the time the crime was committed. The Supreme Court of Tennessee agreed with Stephenson and on September 21, 2000, granted Stephenson's petition for Habeas Corpus Relief. There is no dispute the Tennessee Supreme Court had knowledge of the Plea Agreement in this case and was aware enough to assert Stephenson's separate conviction and sentence for Conspiracy to commit first-degree murder was not illegal nor void. A Mandate was issued to the Johnson County Circuit Court, to reinvest jurisdiction back to the "trial" court, (or in this case, the place where the habeas petition originated), and ordered the Circuit Court of Johnson County to carry out the Order of the Supreme Court. On the 5th day of December 2000, the Circuit Court of Johnson County, located at Mountain City Tennessee, issued its Final Judgment without an order of remand or transfer. The Department of Corrections correctly followed the Order of the Johnson County Circuit Court and removed the Murder from Stephenson's Record. Sentencing Sheets, showing the dismissal of Stephenson's murder conviction and sentence. Stephenson was notified, via Tennessee Department of Corrections Summary Sheet his conviction for first-degree murder and sentence of life without parole was back on his record and in force. Stephenson contacted the Sentencing Commission of the Tennessee Department of Corrections requesting the reason the murder conviction and life without parole sentence was reactivated, when the conviction and sentence had been ordered by the Court to be removed from Stephenson's record. The answer given to Stephenson was simply, "the D.A. calculated 'your' case."

Stephenson submits there should have been some kind of judgment of conviction in order to place a conviction on his record. Stephenson was then given a copy of the E-Mail, sent by then Assistant District Attorney James Dunn. In that E- Mail, (then assistant attorney – now District Attorney General James Dunn), fraudulently stated he was a DA from Johnson City. He also requested a detainer be placed upon Stephenson to hold him in custody…as he was going to resentence Stephenson for his murder conviction. It was because of this 'E-Mail,' the State through the Department of Corrections, placed a first-degree murder conviction on Stephenson's record.

Do we want to live in a country where someone can be executed even though they don't have legal conviction to back it up? This is some scary shit.

4.29.25

Misidentification=Injustice: The Texas Story of Tony Ford

Innocence Taken From Him

Tony Ford was just 18. On an evening in December of 1991, he picked up two brothers, Van and Victor Belton, and drove them to a nearby house. He waited in the truck while they went inside. The brothers broke in and got into a heated argument with an 18-year-old named Armando Murillo, his mother and two sisters were left unharmed. Tony knew they were there to settle a debt but had no idea the level of violence the Beltons intended. When they came back, he drove them home, thinking they'd just stolen some stuff as repayment. The next day, Tony was arrested without being told why. Earlier that day, Van had been caught after trying to hide in his loft, and his brother Victor and their dad were arrested trying to fight off the cops. When Tony found out about a capital murder charge, he was shocked; he had no idea anyone had been killed. He learned that Van shot Armando dead and threatened the women in the house. During his interrogation, Tony faced extreme verbal abuse and threats. Despite the pressure, he refused to have his innocence taken from him.

No Physical Evidence

Van Belton was in a tough spot, he could either pin the crime on Tony or rat out his brother, Victor. Of course, he chose to save his brother. Despite Van's accusations, Tony clung tightly to what he knew to be true, he hadn't done anything. Later, Armando's sisters were shown lineups to identify the shooter. Initially, Victor wasn't in the lineup, but Tony was. When the first sister fumbled her choice, detectives secretly and nefariously filled in the card to make it look like she'd identified Tony. When the second sister later identified Tony in a lineup, his face had already been all over the news. There was absolutely no physical

evidence tying Tony to the crime. The only evidence was the testimony of a man trying to save his brother, the manipulated testimony of Armando's sister and the media-influenced testimony of Armando's other sister.

He Was Found Guilty

In contrast, the evidence against the Beltons was overwhelming. Matching bullets were found. Bloody clothes were found. Incriminating statements were made. Shockingly, Victor faced no charges beyond obstructing the police. Tony was denied access to funding to assemble a proper defense, specifically, misidentification experts. When Tony was convicted, a court reporter overheard police officers expressing their disbelief that he was found guilty. The same reporter later stated in the same affidavit that he saw prosecutors outside the courtroom before the trial pointing at Tony and asking the Belton sisters if he "looked like the man from that night." After a long pause, the sisters could only respond with "Maybe." Still, Tony was convicted and sentenced to death.

Travesty of Justice

In December of 2005, Tony's execution was miraculously stayed by a state district judge named William Moody, pending new DNA testing. Since then, Tony's legal team has fought to get more advanced and conclusive testing on Victor Belton's improperly stored clothes. They've also fought to get judges to listen to eyewitness identification experts they've secured, who can explain how Tony was misidentified. This travesty of justice seems to be drawing close to another frightening moment, another execution date.

We cannot let Tony Ford be executed. He is innocent.

-The Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood

4.29.25

Lisa Jo Chamberlin: Hope for Life in Mississippi

On March 20, 2024, Lisa Jo Chamberlin participated in a gruesome murder. Fueled by drugs and rage, Lisa Jo's boyfriend Roger Gillett masterminded the killing of his cousin Vernon Hulett and Hulett's girlfriend Linda Heintzelman, due to their forcing Lisa Jo and Gillett to move out of their home, where they'd been for a few weeks. First, Gillett slashed the throat of Hulett and and beat him to death. Then, Gillett raped Heintzelman with a beer bottle, beat her repeatedly, stabbed her, suffocated her and killed her using a plastic bag over her head. Though Lisa Jo was not the mastermind behind it all, she participated, particularly by not doing everything she could to stop the carnage. Realizing what they'd done, Lisa Jo and Gillett knew they had to cover up what they'd just done. So, Lisa Jo helped Gillett chop up the bodies and stuff them in a freezer. Then, they loaded the body parts up and drove them to an abandoned farm in Kansas. For nine days, they were able to evade capture. Then, police got word of methamphetamine manufacturing on the farm. When they raided the place, they found the body parts and the couple were subsequently arrested. After sensational trials, Lisa Jo and Gillett were both convicted and each given two death sentences.

During Lisa Jo's sentencing phase and thereafter, it became clear that she'd been abused physically, emotionally and sexually her entire life. Her biological father abused her starting when she was a toddler. Her mother abused her after her biological father left. After her mother remarried, her stepfather started to abuse her. On multiple occasions during her childhood, she was sexually assaulted by her half-brother. When she was in fourth

grade, a teacher raped her. Desperate for love, she ended up marrying three different times and had a child with each one. Numerous partners abused and mistreated her. Of course, she turned to drugs to numb the pain. To say that Lisa Jo has had a rough life would be an understatement. Over and over again, nobody stepped in to help. The murders of Hulett and Heintzelman can be traced back to the repeated murder of Lisa Jo's soul and spirit throughout her life.

Despite it all, I have found Lisa Jo to be one of the kindest people that I've ever met. When you speak to her, her spirit simply radiates love. She desperately wants to make sure that everyone around her feels seen and loved. How could this be? Truth is always more complicated than headlines. It'd be easy to call Lisa Jo a monster. It's harder to look deeper. Unfortunately, we live in a society determined to throw away broken things. But if we take the time to engage, maybe we will find that that which we thought was broken just needed some space for repair. The sick deserve treatment not to be simply thrown away and left to die. Why do we ignore the abused?

On June 12, 2014, the Supreme Court of Mississippi vacated both of Roger Gillett's death sentences based on misinterpretations of the law in his sentencing phase. Then, on July 25, 2018, Gillett was resentenced to life in prison. That's right the mastermind of the murder of Hulett and Heintzelman will get to live out his life in prison, while Lisa Jo is still sentenced to death. How is any of this fair?

Sometimes, it's tough to make an argument against executing someone. Lisa Jo's crimes are heinous. But her situation is more

complicated than the gruesome details she was a part of. Then again, they all are.

Sometimes we must translate the scripture for our moment. Jesus commanded, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” How can we love Lisa Jo and execute her at the same time? Obviously, we can’t.

So, let there be life for Lisa Jo. Indeed, Jesus commands it.

-The Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood

5.1.25

The Execution Intervention Project: On the Cost of Defiance

Sensational headlines don't lead to deeper truths. Most of the time, they simply lead you far away from both the human and divine. If you want to know the truth, you've got to come close. This is an invitation.

The Execution Intervention Project is about bringing people close. I want people to know the cost of the death penalty, so that they might understand the cost of fighting it. For decades, I've financed and done this work alone. Recently, I realized that my determination to continue with such solitary efforts was very selfish and counterproductive to the folks on death row that I serve. I guess you could say that I got redeemed from all that and want to provide everybody that I work with as much spiritual support and advocacy as I possibly can.

There is no one better to partner with me in these efforts than our Executive Director, Hélène Noa Dubois. Together, we created a dynamic campaign for her husband Steven Nelson, just a few months ago. Unfortunately, the machinations of death were too strong. But God granted me the enormous privilege of accompanying them through those most perilous hours. I can assure you…Dubois deeply understands the high cost of the death penalty.

The bottom line is very simple. We need your help to shoulder the cost. For The Execution Intervention Project to continue offering interpersonal support, public theology, prophetic activism, and ministry accompaniment to the most vulnerable members of our society we need partners. So, whether your contribution is following the Facebook page, checking on the website and signing up for the newsletter or blessing us with

a reoccurring donation or some combination of it all, we need you. I refuse to believe that there is any cost that love cannot overcome.

-The Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood

5.5.25

The Loneliest Woman in Mississippi: Lisa Jo Chamberlin

Death Row, Mississippi-

Each morning, Lisa Jo Chamberlin wakes up alone in her tiny cell and waits for someone to notice her. There is no one to talk to. There is no one to interact with. The only hope that she has is that one of the guards will realize that she hasn't been let out to go to the dayroom yet. If she tries to get any attention, she will get written up. If it comes time for clemency, these write-ups could be the difference between life and death. So, she waits.

On the best days, Lisa Jo Chamberlin only gets out of her cell for two hours. During that time, she is expected to shower and make any phone calls she might want to. Then again, sometimes there is nobody to call. So, she sits. There is a yellow line on the floor that she cannot cross. As often as she can, she goes up to that line and tries to talk to people in other cells. Sometimes they respond and sometimes they don't. Often, all Lisa Jo has to keep her company is an old worn-out Bible.

Navigate the Solitude

On the weekend, Lisa Jo Chamberlin doesn't get any time outside of her cell. For two days, she is not allowed to shower, make any phone calls, stretch her legs or attempt to communicate with anyone. In these moments, silence can only be broken by the echoes bouncing off the walls.

Daily, Lisa Jo Chamberlin is largely closed off from all of humanity. Lisa Jo has less privileges than any other prisoner. The reason is simple, she is the only woman on death row in Mississippi. Unlike the men sentenced to death, there is nobody else that fits her restrictions. So, all Lisa Jo can do is navigate the

solitude as best she can. Sometimes, she is successful. Sometimes, she is not.

Lisa Jo Can Only Go Outside Alone

Haunted by her own thoughts and circumstance, Lisa Jo Chamberlin has experienced various psychotic breaks. How could you not? There is nobody to properly treat any psychiatric episodes. There is only Lisa Jo and her mind. The loneliness gnaws at her brain.

It's been a considerable amount of time since Lisa Jo Chamberlin went outside. She's been told the only day that she gets to go outside is on Wednesdays. But most of the time, there are not enough guards to facilitate Lisa Jo being outside. The reason is that the entire yard must be cleared. Lisa Jo can only go outside alone.

If Lisa Jo Chamberlin ever needs to go to the medical clinic, the prison is required to clear out the clinic. Lisa Jo can only be seen alone. If there is any medical crisis, there is no one to help her through it. She survives based on her own will to live.

Left Alone To Go Crazy

It's been years since Lisa Jo Chamberlin was allowed to attend any type of religious service. Lisa Jo is left to wrestle with her spirituality alone. Fellowship only exists with the occasional rodent to pass her way.

Let there be no doubt, Lisa Joe Chamberlin's crime was awful. However, ours is too. Day in and day out, the State of Mississippi tortures Lisa Jo. I often say that torture says far more about the torturer than the tortured. Lisa Jo Chamberlin shouldn't be left alone to go crazy. No one should.

If you feel led, join us in advocating for Lisa Jo Chamberlin to be upgraded from solitary confinement. Send a message to the Mississippi Department of Corrections here:

https://www.mdoc.ms.gov/contact/general-contact-form

5.11.25

Don’t Kill a Pastor: Save Greg Hunt

The Murder

In the early morning hours of August 2, 1988, Karen Lane was brutally murdered. I know nothing about her. Sadly, I may never. Judging from various online reports of the crime, not many other people know much about her either. For most, she is just a body. For me, I know that she had to be so much more. This is one of the great tragedies of the death penalty. In the rush to execute Greg Hunt for Lane’s murder, her identity is reduced to nothing more than just another reason to kill, a pound of flesh to be exchanged for another pound of flesh. The horror only continues.

Keep Watching

4

The Burden of the Past

One of the greatest fallacies of the human experience is to think that the past must define the future. Repeatedly, I have worked with persons on death row that have grown tremendously since the crimes that landed them there. Then again, occasionally I’ve encountered persons on death row that refuse to grow at all. Often, people are somewhere in the middle. Regardless of where people are, the past doesn’t define them. The present always means so much more. Why can’t people figure this out? The answer lies within. We are so burdened by our pasts that we don’t know how to ascribe freedom to others.

The Preacher

Loquacious is an understatement. During our first conversation, Greg Hunt preached at me for over an hour, only pausing when

he needed to hang up and reset the prison line. I didn't get to tell him that I was a priest until the end of the conversation. Of course, for someone like Greg that doesn't matter. For Greg, fruit, particularly fruit of the spirit, matters far more than titles. Each time I've tried to label him as anything other than a follower of Jesus, he has run in the opposite direction. "I'm not a priest. I'm not a pastor. I'm not a preacher." Greg wants nothing more than to know Jesus and make Jesus known. "I don't need no titles for that." While I don't share Greg's disdain for title, I do admire his determination to make himself lesser so that Jesus might forever be greater. Rarely, have I ever encountered such holiness. Such zealousness is rather shocking in a world of compromise. Make no mistake, we disagree consistently and passionately theologically, but I can't help but admire him.

The Death Row Church

Greg Hunt leads a small congregation, most clergy do. The only difference is that Greg's group gathers each week on death row. Each person that looks back at Greg has been to hell and back, most of the time because of their own actions. Of course, Greg is also in that number. Such a location makes him as effective as anyone in ministering to his brothers. The holiness that he brings to the group helps people find the courage to find their own holiness. He demands more than just survival. "God wants us to thrive wherever we are." Some of the illustrations that Greg uses have achieved legendary status. On one occasion, Greg took a Bible and threw it across the room to show the group that the Bible is nothing but a book without the power of Christ behind it. To say that the men have responded is an understatement. Throughout the hallways and cells, everyone looks to Greg for guidance whether they go to his service or not. That's of no consequence to Greg. "God meets us where we're at, brother. I'm ready to help these guys wherever they are."

The Mundane

If Greg Hunt is executed, most people won't even notice. Evil has a way of disguising itself as mundane. But I can tell you that there is a group of people who will never be the same, the men on death row in Alabama, especially those who attend his church. Whether or not we care says much more about us than it does about Greg.

5.13.25

Anthony Wainwright & Carmen Gayheart : From Horror to Grace

Anthony Wainwright : The Initial Encounter

Nobody wants to be prejudged. This is an eternal truth. When I encounter the condemned, I want to meet them where they are. Such was the case of Anthony Wainwright. I had no idea what he had been convicted of. Of course, when you meet somebody on death row, one can easily assume that you're not talking about bicycle theft. So, I think it's important to note that I got to know Anthony Wainwright before I'd ever heard of Carmen Gayheart.

Anthony Wainwright : The Seeker

God took on flesh. God walked among us. Why? So, that God could be present with us. The incarnation is most fully defined by one word…presence. We too are called to be defined by that word.

In the beginning, I worked very hard to be present for Anthony. It wasn't easy. We are very different. Anthony is much more reserved than I am. It was difficult to get him to open up. I'm sure he had his thoughts about me. Yet, we kept coming back. Over and over again, we discussed the difficult things. Slowly, God drew us closer.

Anthony Wainwright : The Redeemed Child of God

Then, it happened. One afternoon on the phone, Anthony asked if we could talk about Carmen Gayheart. I still had no idea who she

was. I soon found out. The narrative and the details came quickly. Of course, the real story is always much different from the legal story. There is no doubt in my mind that Anthony did not commit anything close to capital murder. But, one is never prepared to hear of even limited involvement in such a crime… especially from someone they've come to care about. I didn't say too much. I just listened. The pressure of carrying the horror of it all that had built for decades was spraying out all over the place. When he finished, the line paused. Sometimes, one must breathe for a few seconds before they can speak again.

"Do you want to be forgiven?" I asked slowly and with deep reverence for the moment at hand. Deep emotion mumbled on the other end of the line. Then, Anthony replied, "I'm just so sorry. Please forgive me." The world changed. When I heard his desperate words of repentance, I didn't hesitate, "I absolve you from your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

I didn't know all the details. I don't know all the details. I don't need to know. God's grace exists far beyond our need for details. The ones that question such grace don't think they need it. Anthony had no doubt of what he needed.

Anthony Wainwright : The End

Of course, I'm praying that Anthony won't be executed on June 10. He has so much left to offer the world. He is an unbelievable testament to the beauty of grace. But if he is, I will be there by his side. And if his life ends in those moments, eternity will draw close…and the first sight that he will see is Carmen Gayheart… welcoming him into a place where grace knows no end.

5.18.25

Anthony Wainwright did not Rape or Murder Carmen Gayheart

The Crime

In 1994, Anthony Wainwright and Richard Hamilton escaped from a prison in Newport, North Carolina, before stealing a Cadillac and burglarizing a home, where they stole two rifles. Upon arrival in Florida, the two men decided to steal another vehicle due to problems with the Cadillac. In Lake City, they pulled into a Winn-Dixie parking lot. They spotted Carmen Gayheart loading groceries into a Ford Bronco. Hamilton forced her into the Bronco at gunpoint and drove off, with Wainwright following in the Cadillac. They later abandoned the Cadillac and turned into a wooded area, where Richard Hamilton raped and murdered Carmen Gayheart.

The Man

For over three years, I have worked with Anthony Wainwright, as both his spiritual advisor and friend. One of the things he has always insisted is that he never raped Carmen Gayheart. Truth be told, I didn't believe him at first. Since I do this work all over the country, I am used to guys on death row trying to minimize their involvement in heinous crimes. Then, his attorneys shared a document with me about the DNA evidence in the case. This document was ultimately part of his appeals. I was left with no question that Wainwright did not rape anyone and his involvement in the actual murder was nonexistent.

The DNA

At Wainwright's trial, the expert testimony regarding DNA samples was unreliable, inaccurate, and misleading. The attorneys for both parties then repeated inaccuracies in their

arguments to the jury. Scientific testimony is complicated and sophisticated, and Mr. Wainwright's jury did not have the information necessary to sift through the experts' testimony and identify the errors.

There is no reliable scientific or DNA evidence that Mr. Wainwright participated in a sexual assault of the victim; further there is no reliable scientific or DNA evidence that ties Mr. Wainwright intimately to the victim in this case. The analysts, Pollock and DeGuglielmo specifically, inappropriately consulted with one another about their initial analyses, testified to matters that were not contained in their reports or notes, offered opinions that were not supported by statistics, and offered opinions that were not supported by reliable and verifiable testing. The attorneys then confused statistics that applied to Mr. Hamilton and argued to the jury that the statistics applied to Mr. Wainwright when there was no support for such.

Candy Zuleger*

Trinity DNA Solutions

*Former DNA Analyst for the State of Florida

The Atrocity

On June 10, Florida is trying to execute Anthony Wainwright to hold him responsible for the rape and murder of Carmen Gayheart. How can this be when there is absolutely nothing connecting him to the rape and murder of Carmen Gayheart? Before his own death, Richard Hamilton even signed an affidavit saying he was the main perpetrator. What's going on? Florida is rushing to atrocity based on partial evidence.

The Petitions

Sign the petitions:

Floridians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty's Petition to

Stay the Execution of Anthony Wainwright

Execution Intervention Project & Death Penalty Action's Petition to

Stop the Execution of Anthony Wainwright

5.19.25

Open Your Eyes Alabama: On the Execution of Greg Hunt

"Greg Hunt's Death Sentence: A Flawed Capital Murder Case"

"Never trust the government." It seems so obvious. So, why do so many blindly trust our criminal justice system? It's so dangerous. Now, someone is about to die because of it.

In a fit of jealousy, Greg Hunt murdered Karen Lane, after seeing her out with another man. It's a story that seems common throughout history, murder in the throes of passion. So much so, that the law distinguishes crimes of passion from capital murder. In order to pursue capital murder, there has to be an aggravating factor. In the case of the murder of Karen, the aggravating factor cited was sexual assault.

From the beginning, Greg Hunt never denied what he did. But, he did deny any assertion that he sexually assaulted Karen Lane. For counsel, Greg was appointed former prosecutors and a former judge. This often happens in capital cases. There are so few qualified lawyers to actually try the cases that the trials often become incestuous. Greg had no idea how close his lawyers were to the government. He just listened to their admonitions to "trust the process…"

The prosecutor's case was in trouble. Though Greg Hunt was originally charged with simple murder, this was not enough to feed the rage that was growing outside. Like many trials, the case was growing more and more political. So, the prosecutor decided to push for Greg to be indicted for capital murder. Using planted stories in the local press, the prosecutor accomplished his task. Eventually, Greg was indicted for capital murder based on the novel idea that Karen Lane was also sexually assaulted. The prosecutor raised the stakes even higher by claiming that Greg

abused Karen with a broom that was found lying on the kitchen floor.

Still worried about his case, the prosecutor recruited jail inmates to try to pull information out of Greg Hunt. The inmates would come up to Greg and attempt to ply him with all sorts of things. Each inmate had one objective, to secure evidence that Greg sexually assaulted Karen Lane. Statement after statement that the inmates produced later showed that they were unable to secure what the prosecutor wanted them to. When the court set the trial date, the prosecutor still had no evidence that a sexual assault ever took place. Again, there can be no death penalty without an aggravating circumstance.

"The Truth About the Broomstick and the Lack of Forensic Proof"

Seemingly out of nowhere, the prosecutor started to purport that Karen Lane had been sexually assaulted with a broom. The autopsy report states that a broom was found between Karen's legs. Then, both the stick and the body were wrapped in a sheet for transport. Before the police arrived, there had been multiple people in the kitchen with Karen's body before investigators arrived. Needless to say, the broom wasn't handled properly.

While there was a semen deposit found on the broom, the prosecutor had two problems. First, the DNA could not be directly linked to Greg Hunt. Since Karen Lane was out earlier with another man, that could have been the source, but that source was never tested or pursued. Second, the DNA expert for the prosecutor couldn't exactly state when the semen was deposited. To say that they were all over the place would be an understatement. One estimation was an hour before death. Another estimation was slightly before death. Yet, another estimation was after death. A semen deposit that took place after death is not sexual abuse. The expert said he found biological evidence on the broomstick. Then, he admitted that the broom

was transported with the body and that the biological evidence's placement on the broom could have come in transport. There was no direct irrefutable biological evidence. Then, the prosecutor called another expert to clean up the mess of the first expert. This expert claimed that they found cervical mucus on the broom. What nobody either knew or admitted at the time, was that Karen did not have a cervix, it was removed in a prior surgery. Even though the prosecutor continued to lie, their case was in trouble. No DNA / No Cervix = No evidence of sexual assault. = No capital murder. Greg's attorneys did nothing to capitalize on the prosecutor's consistent mistakes.

"Jailhouse Snitch Produces Incredible Claim"

Then, the prosecutor provided another surprise witness. There was a jailhouse snitch, who had only briefly been in the cell with Greg Hunt, that said he heard him bragging about assaulting Karen Lane with a broomstick. Around the same time, Greg's lawyers were able to produce multiple statements of inmates at the jail saying they were being pushed to extract information about Greg, some even said that they had just signed whatever the prosecutors gave them so that they could get out. It didn't matter how many inmate witnesses Greg's lawyers got disqualified, the state seemed to just keep finding another to say what they needed them to say. Who wouldn't testify falsely if they were facing years in prison and could get out? The prosecutor kept telling the jury that nobody got a deal. This has repeatedly been proven false, based on those who got out not long after the trial. These magical inmate statements ultimately saved the prosecutor's case…and got Greg sentenced to death.

"Horrible But Not Capital Murder"

The bottom line is this…Greg Hunt was drunk, high on cocaine and prescription pills and flew into a rage after seeing his girlfriend Karen Lane out with another man and killed her.

This is horrible…but it is not capital murder. Greg Hunt's actions do not constitute a crime in which a sentence of death is an option.

Greg Hunt's attorneys failed him. Any competent attorney would have been able to quickly debunk the sexual assault claims.

"This is an Injustice"

Once you are convicted of a capital crime and sentenced to death, you go through your first round of appeals. Then, you are on your own. There is no law library on death row. There is no money to hire an investigator. Procedural rules make filing any new claims impossible. Everything is slighted toward a system that is designed to prevent injustices from being challenged. There is no such thing as due process in capital cases. Greg Hunt was not tried fairly, he was not given a fair shot at his appeals and the state has all the power to manipulate the system any way that they want.

Greg Hunt murdered Karen Lane…but he did not sexually assault her…and therefore should not be scheduled to be executed on June 10.

Sign the petition:

https://actionnetwork.org/petitions/stop-the-execution-of-gregory-hunt-in-alabama

“Don’t Let Your Heart Be Troubled”

Don’t let your heart be troubled…easier said than done. Each step buried my heart deeper and deeper into my throat. Why was everyone being so nice? Love your neighbor…even when they are about to kill your friend. “They’re just doing their jobs.” I had to keep reminding myself. The brain has trouble maintaining nuance in the midst of murder. Then again, I couldn’t tell if my brain was still working or not. Steel door after steel door slammed shut. “How am I still walking?” The question festered as people kept on talking to me. “Why was everyone so chatty?” I guess people would rather talk than deal with what is. “Brain? Brain?” Thoughts failed with every step. “How in the hell am I going to be able to sustain myself for two hours?” The slogans painted on the walls brought me closer and closer to my own mortality. “Wake up!” One foot in front of the other. “Wake up!” I didn’t know how I was going to get through any of it. I was shutting down at the worst possible moment. I clinched my rosary as hard as I could. I could feel it piercing into my hand. The blood made me feel closer to the blood that could carry me through all of this. I stepped into the chapel for a brief moment. “Why do people keep on talking to me?” I wasn’t there for them. I wasn’t there to make them feel better about what they were about to do. I was there for Anthony Wainwright and Anthony Wainwright alone. But then again, hadn’t God called me to be there for everyone. How could that shit even be possible? It was like everyone was pulling at my flesh in every direction. When I closed my eyes, I saw something familiar…the cross of Christ on fire. It felt like I was on there with Christ burning too. “Are you ready?” What type of question was being asked of me? I didn’t know the answer. I just knew to turn around and answer… defiantly. The words wouldn’t come out. Then, “Yes.”

Stark white walls were closing in. The deeper we traveled the more lost I felt. There was so much steel. “Where are we going?” I had no idea. I couldn’t get an answer. I could barely remember where I’d come from. I’d never met so many stairs that seemed so much steeper than the last. Was I ascending or descending? It was a strange walk to a strange place. Then, we were there.

Grace: Love Beyond Our Wildest Imaginations

“Hey brother.” Anthony was in the very back of the cell. I was a little startled by his voice. It was as if I never expected to make it to him. I guess I thought we were just going to go around and around the prison for eternity. Quickly, Anthony sat down on the floor…touching the bars. Pulling up a chair, I leaned into the bars to be as close to him as I possibly could. “I love you brother.” “I love you too, very much.” I don’t know who said what first, I just know that loved was shared immediately and profoundly. I held onto his hands until I was told that I’d held on too long. “How is…?” Anthony wanted to know that those that he loved the most were ok. I guess we all do. Even when our demise is all but assured, we want to leave the world knowing that all will be well. “Are you going to survive this?” It was a strange question to ask. Even though Anthony’s demise was all but assured, he wanted to know if I was going to make it. Honestly, I wasn’t so sure. I couldn’t tell him that though. So, I deflected. “Who knows…I might have a heart attack and die before we ever get to the chamber.” At that point, it seemed like a real possibility. I could feel the damn thing about to explode. For a brief second, I wondered where we would go next. “I want you to make sure that you tell the world what we talk about. I don’t have one damn thing to hide. People need to know the bullshit that is being done here.” Then, it became clear.

We regret the things that we have done. We regret the things that we have left undone. Of course, this was a time to make sure that nothing was left undone. Carmen Gayheart. In those final few weeks, I'd heard the name so much. In our conversations, Anthony had repeatedly been clearer than clear, "I didn't rape or kill that woman." The nature of grace is that all is washed away. Of course, grace and repentance go together. I asked one final time, "Is there anything related to Carmen that you want to tell me?" "No…I shouldn't have been there…I'm sorry for the role that I played…but I did not rape or kill that woman." "Do you repent?" "I repent of everything." "Then, in the name of Jesus Christ…you are eternally forgiven." "Let's move on." I was praying that he would say that. "What does forgiveness look like in heaven? How far can grace take us?" No matter how tired I get. It seems that my imagination explodes when the subject of grace comes up. In fact, those are the times that I feel God the most. "In those final moments, you will sit under the glare of judgment. Row after row of people will sit there and be overjoyed that they are getting to witness your murder. They will think that they're there for Carmen…in reality…they will be there for themselves…to satisfy their own bloodlust. Of course, they will leave as empty as they arrived. But that is no matter, for you will be gone and I am convinced that the joy you will be experiencing will far surpass the vengeful hell that exists down here. Upon arrival, you will see family and friends. But there is one person who will shock the hell out of you. In the distance, you will see Carmen running toward you. Then in an explosive act of reconciliation, Carmen will wrap her arms around you and tell you how much she forgives you. That's the beauty of the grace of God." "Are you serious? That sounds like some Jeff Hood bullshit." We both laughed. "God loves you, Anthony. God leaves nobody behind. Nobody. The beauty of grace is beyond your wildest dreams." For a second, I watched him process. I could see the wheels turning in his head and the quick beating of his heart. Then, finally, "Do you really believe that?" "With all of my heart." "I do too." The heavens seemed to open upon that affirmation. Everything seemed different now. I reached out my

hand to grab his. We sat there for a minute. It all seemed to dissolve. We were transported to another place. There was nothing but us and grace. God allowed me to take my friend to a place that he'd never been before. Then, everything came back. "What was that?" "I'm not sure…but we have to keep going."

Eternal Love: Theology of Time

"What happens to the ones that I love?" The question always tugs at the ventricles of even the toughest hearts. Of course, I knew who he was talking about. In the past few years, Anthony Wainwright had met and married Sam. The two were inseparable. Even spending hours together in those final days. "I'm not sure that you'll ever spend a second without her." Immediately, Anthony's mind went to another moment in time. "Earlier today, I was sitting there with Sam…and something hit us both…literally at the same damn time. It was like an invisible bolt of lightning. It felt like I'd been electrocuted with peace. Like a peace that came from somewhere else. She felt that shit too. It was incredible." I didn't immediately respond. I wanted to sit with what he'd said for a second. Anthony wasn't having it. "So, what does that mean?" I answered his question with a question. "What do you hope that means?" Anthony paused. "That I will never be apart from Sam?" I could feel the longing in his voice. "What if I told you that I believe we will never know a time apart from those we love?" "How is that possible? Is this some more of that Jeff Hood magical words bullshit?" Deep inside, I felt something fester inside of me. I wanted to meet Anthony in his deepest longings. "Time is something that binds us here. Time does not bind us for eternity. So, perhaps the first person to meet you on the other side will be Sam herself?" "How is that possible if she doesn't die at the same time as me?" I didn't expect to go this deep. Anthony didn't hesitate. "If we

are no longer bound by time…then nothing is sequential anymore. Sam will be there when you arrive…because no matter when Same dies…that is where she was destined to go to begin with. She will be there with you on the other side." Let there be no doubt, I was straining to the maximum capacity of my theological understandings. In fact, it all seemed to be coming from somewhere else anyways. "Wow. So, the soul never knows a time apart from the people that the soul loves?" "Correct. How could heaven be heaven if everyone that we love is somewhere else?" "Shit Jeff. I hope you're right." From the radiance growing in his eyes, I could tell that his faith was increasing. I think mine was as well.

I don't know how long the silence lingered. I just know that everything was so heavy and seemed to be growing heavier by the second. It's a strange thing for death to stalk so closely. Anthony always felt like he had to lighten the mood. "You know what I'm going to tell God about you Jeff?" "What?" "That… you're a monumental asshole." We both collapsed in laughter. So much so, the guards grew uncomfortable at the levity of it all. It's strange when laughter visits you at strange times. Then again, l guess it was all strange and growing stranger.

Vengeance and Forgiveness

"Will these people ever forgive me?" Of course, I had no way of knowing. How could anyone know if anyone else truly forgives someone else? I do know that those connected to the case had been particularly nasty. I didn't tell Anthony that there were practically giddy people lining up with shirts, megaphones and streamers cheering on the executioners. I didn't, don't and never will understand such hate. "How could anyone get pleasure from someone being executed?" These were two different questions. I began at the top. "God is not going to force forgiveness on anyone. Forgiveness is a solitary affair. Such activity is between the individual and God. I don't know if these folks have the ability to forgive you. But…I think that says much more about

them than it does you." I let such words fester before I continued. "As to your second question, the only thing that could ever cause someone to get pleasure from the execution of another, is pure evil growing inside of them. God don't have nothing to do with vengeance. These folks are burning in a vengeful hell of their own creation. God is willing to help them escape…but right now…it seems that they don't want it. They'd rather just burn." I was pissed that we were even having to talk about such things. Surely, it's enough that Anthony was about to face the ultimate punishment for his crimes. "Remember…forgiveness is not on you. It's on them." "Ok." That was it. I guess the answers sufficed.

The end was drawing close. Anthony knew that when I left it would be time for the execution to begin. "I'm at peace. I'm ok. I just don't want to leave Sam." "Well, let's make sure that you don't." "Do you believe in the love of God?" "I do." "Do you believe that such love was incarnate in the person of Jesus?" "I do." "Do you believe that it was love that led Jesus to the cross? "I do." "Do you believe that love resurrected?" "I do." "Do you believe that love will never die?" "I do." "Well, it is upon your profession of faith that I can assure you that you will rest in the arms of love forever." "Wow. Something is happening to me." "It's called love Anthony. It grows most strongly when you have the courage to let it go." We sat there for a second. I could tell that he was processing it all. Then, he looked up, "Do you think that love is going to make all of this right?" "I have no doubt that God is drawing all things to love…to God's self…for God is love." A slight smile came upon his face, "So, I have nothing to worry about?" "Nothing." We were nearing the end. The guard loudly let us know, "5 minutes!"

Through the Valley of Death

What do you talk about with someone in the last few minutes of their lives? I didn't talk about anything. I just got him to repeat after me. "Even thou I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. Even thou I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil." We were putting each other in a trance. I rested my head on the bars. I placed my hand in his. We sat in suspended motion. "Even thou I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. Even thou I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil." "Time's up!" I could have sat there forever, but the guard wasn't having it. I put my hand up to demand a few more moments. Reaching through the bars, I touched his head and made the sign of the cross. "Anthony Wainwright, I bless you in the name of the God who loves you, the God who has redeemed you and the God who will hold you for all of eternity." Then, I felt something in my hand. It was a rosary that I had given him. "Hold on to this for me. I don't think I'm going to need it where I'm going." We both smiled. There was a tear in his eye. I couldn't stare too long. I still had a big job to do.

It was all a blur. I prayed. Nothing seemed to be getting through. I prayed. I was too close to death. I prayed. I walked down the hallway. I prayed. I couldn't understand why everyone was so cheerful. I prayed. Before I knew it, I was inside the chamber. I prayed. It all happened so quickly. I prayed. "I love you, Jeff." "I love you too, brother." I prayed. Touching his leg, I read all the scriptures that had been part of our journey. "Let not your heart be troubled…" "Faith, hope and love remain…but the greatest of these is love…" "…God will wash every tear from your eye…" "Death will be no more." "Even thou I walk through the valley of the shadow of death…" The words festered over and over. Then, they all started to mix together. I knew it was over. I prayed.

Before I knew it, I heard Anthony say, “I love you, Sam.” I prayed.

Though there were a few shakes here and there, the poison did its’ job. Anthony started to depart. He didn’t fight it. He just let go. I kept saying the same words repeatedly. I knew he could hear me. “Even thou I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. Even thou I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.” Finally, I took off my glasses and dared wipe my eyes. Then, I was finally able to see. The heavens opened. I watched the rest of the guys that I’d accompanied before usher Anthony into the light. In the distance, Sam and Carmen were waiting. For the first time all day, I was finally able to breathe. I got out of there as quickly as I could.

6.18.25

Eyewitness to the Final Hours of Anthony Wainwright

"Don't Let Your Heart Be Troubled"

Don't let your heart be troubled…easier said than done. Each step buried my heart deeper and deeper into my throat. Why was everyone being so nice? Love your neighbor…even when they are about to kill your friend. "They're just doing their jobs." I had to keep reminding myself. The brain has trouble maintaining nuance in the midst of murder. Then again, I couldn't tell if my brain was still working or not. Steel door after steel door slammed shut. "How am I still walking?" The question festered as people kept on talking to me. "Why was everyone so chatty?" I guess people would rather talk than deal with what is. "Brain? Brain?" Thoughts failed with every step. "How in the hell am I going to be able to sustain myself for two hours?" The slogans painted on the walls brought me closer and closer to my own mortality. "Wake up!" One foot in front of the other. "Wake up!" I didn't know how I was going to get through any of it. I was shutting down at the worst possible moment. I clinched my rosary as hard as I could. I could feel it piercing into my hand. The blood made me feel closer to the blood that could carry me through all of this. I stepped into the chapel for a brief moment. "Why do people keep on talking to me?" I wasn't there for them. I wasn't there to make them feel better about what they were about to do. I was there for Anthony Wainwright and Anthony Wainwright alone. But then again, hadn't God called me to be there for everyone. How could that shit even be possible? It was like everyone was pulling at my flesh in every direction. When I closed my eyes, I saw something familiar…the cross of Christ on fire. It felt like I was on there with Christ burning too. "Are you ready?" What type of question was being asked of me? I didn't

know the answer. I just knew to turn around and answer… defiantly. The words wouldn't come out. Then, "Yes."

Stark white walls were closing in. The deeper we traveled the more lost I felt. There was so much steel. "Where are we going?" I had no idea. I couldn't get an answer. I could barely remember where I'd come from. I'd never met so many stairs that seemed so much steeper than the last. Was I ascending or descending? It was a strange walk to a strange place. Then, we were there.

Grace: Love Beyond Our Wildest Imaginations

"Hey brother." Anthony was in the very back of the cell. I was a little startled by his voice. It was as if I never expected to make it to him. I guess I thought we were just going to go around and around the prison for eternity. Quickly, Anthony sat down on the floor…touching the bars. Pulling up a chair, I leaned into the bars to be as close to him as I possibly could. "I love you brother." "I love you too, very much." I don't know who said what first, I just know that loved was shared immediately and profoundly. I held onto his hands until I was told that I'd held on too long. "How is…?" Anthony wanted to know that those that he loved the most were ok. I guess we all do. Even when our demise is all but assured, we want to leave the world knowing that all will be well. "Are you going to survive this?" It was a strange question to ask. Even though Anthony's demise was all but assured, he wanted to know if I was going to make it. Honestly, I wasn't so sure. I couldn't tell him that though. So, I deflected. "Who knows…I might have a heart attack and die before we ever get to the chamber." At that point, it seemed like a real possibility. I could feel the damn thing about to explode. For

a brief second, I wondered where we would go next. “I want you to make sure that you tell the world what we talk about. I don’t have one damn thing to hide. People need to know the bullshit that is being done here.” Then, it became clear.

We regret the things that we have done. We regret the things that we have left undone. Of course, this was a time to make sure that nothing was left undone. Carmen Gayheart. In those final few weeks, I’d heard the name so much. In our conversations, Anthony had repeatedly been clearer than clear, “I didn’t rape or kill that woman.” The nature of grace is that all is washed away. Of course, grace and repentance go together. I asked one final time, “Is there anything related to Carmen that you want to tell me?” “No…I shouldn’t have been there…I’m sorry for the role that I played…but I did not rape or kill that woman.” “Do you repent?” “I repent of everything.” “Then, in the name of Jesus Christ…you are eternally forgiven.” “Let’s move on.” I was praying that he would say that. “What does forgiveness look like in heaven? How far can grace take us?” No matter how tired I get. It seems that my imagination explodes when the subject of grace comes up. In fact, those are the times that I feel God the most. “In those final moments, you will sit under the glare of judgment. Row after row of people will sit there and be overjoyed that they are getting to witness your murder. They will think that they’re there for Carmen…in reality…they will be there for themselves…to satisfy their own bloodlust. Of course, they will leave as empty as they arrived. But that is no matter, for you will be gone and I am convinced that the joy you will be experiencing will far surpass the vengeful hell that exists down here. Upon arrival, you will see family and friends. But there is one person who will shock the hell out of you. In the distance, you will see Carmen running toward you. Then in an explosive act of reconciliation, Carmen will wrap her arms around you and tell you how much she forgives you. That’s the beauty of the grace of God.” “Are you serious? That sounds like some Jeff Hood bullshit.” We both laughed. “God loves you, Anthony. God leaves nobody behind. Nobody. The beauty of grace is beyond

your wildest dreams." For a second, I watched him process. I could see the wheels turning in his head and the quick beating of his heart. Then, finally, "Do you really believe that?" "With all of my heart." "I do too." The heavens seemed to open upon that affirmation. Everything seemed different now. I reached out my hand to grab his. We sat there for a minute. It all seemed to dissolve. We were transported to another place. There was nothing but us and grace. God allowed me to take my friend to a place that he'd never been before. Then, everything came back. "What was that?" "I'm not sure…but we have to keep going."

Eternal Love: Theology of Time

"What happens to the ones that I love?" The question always tugs at the ventricles of even the toughest hearts. Of course, I knew who he was talking about. In the past few years, Anthony Wainwright had met and married Sam. The two were inseparable. Even spending hours together in those final days. "I'm not sure that you'll ever spend a second without her." Immediately, Anthony's mind went to another moment in time. "Earlier today, I was sitting there with Sam…and something hit us both…literally at the same damn time. It was like an invisible bolt of lightning. It felt like I'd been electrocuted with peace. Like a peace that came from somewhere else. She felt that shit too. It was incredible." I didn't immediately respond. I wanted to sit with what he'd said for a second. Anthony wasn't having it. "So, what does that mean?" I answered his question with a question. "What do you hope that means?" Anthony paused. "That I will never be apart from Sam?" I could feel the longing in his voice. "What if I told you that I believe we will never know a time apart from those we love?" "How is that possible? Is this some more of that Jeff Hood magical words bullshit?" Deep inside, I felt something fester inside of me. I wanted to

meet Anthony in his deepest longings. “Time is something that binds us here. Time does not bind us for eternity. So, perhaps the first person to meet you on the other side will be Sam herself?” “How is that possible if she doesn’t die at the same time as me?” I didn’t expect to go this deep. Anthony didn’t hesitate. “If we are no longer bound by time…then nothing is sequential anymore. Sam will be there when you arrive…because no matter when Same dies…that is where she was destined to go to begin with. She will be there with you on the other side.” Let there be no doubt, I was straining to the maximum capacity of my theological understandings. In fact, it all seemed to be coming from somewhere else anyways. “Wow. So, the soul never knows a time apart from the people that the soul loves?” “Correct. How could heaven be heaven if everyone that we love is somewhere else?” “Shit Jeff. I hope you’re right.” From the radiance growing in his eyes, I could tell that his faith was increasing. I think mine was as well.

I don’t know how long the silence lingered. I just know that everything was so heavy and seemed to be growing heavier by the second. It’s a strange thing for death to stalk so closely. Anthony always felt like he had to lighten the mood. “You know what I’m going to tell God about you Jeff?” “What?” “That… you’re a monumental asshole.” We both collapsed in laughter. So much so, the guards grew uncomfortable at the levity of it all. It’s strange when laughter visits you at strange times. Then again, l guess it was all strange and growing stranger.

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8.13.25

Nitrogen Executions in Arkansas

I've seen nitrogen kill.

January 25, 2024. Alabama. I was Kenneth Smith's priest. He was tied to a gurney. Mask slammed on his face. Switch thrown. And then…chaos…jerking…gasping…fighting for the air God gave him. The State called it "quick" and "relatively painless." I call it torture. I call it murder. I call it sin.

Isaiah warns: "Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees."

Now Arkansas wants in. Act 302 puts that same power in Governor Sanders' hands. I've worn that mask. I bought one to show people the horror. Felt the seal. Known the chill. It is not mercy. It is not humane. It is a death shroud built for suffocation.

This is not justice. It's a wild experiment. Cruelty baptized by law. A state sprinting toward horror.

Genesis says, "God… breathed into his nostrils the breath of life." Nitrogen hypoxia is a deliberate act to rip that holy breath away.

When this happens here, no one can plead ignorance. We will have chosen to drown a human being in invisible gas. And the blood will be on us. As Jesus said, "Whatever you did to the least of these, you did to me."

It shouldn't take Bible verses to keep us from gassing each other. But if scripture won't stop us, maybe shame will.

I pray for Governor Sanders…because she holds the soul of Arkansas in her hands, and the nitrogen gas is waiting.

Father Jeff Hood
North Little Rock, AR

8.19.25

The Breath of Life Does Not Belong to the State

I saw it with my own eyes. January 25, 2024. Alabama. Kenneth Smith was a soul under my care. They tied him down. I watched as the mask crushed onto his face. I heard the hiss. Then came the jerking. The gasping. The desperate fight for air.

Officials called it quick. They called it painless. They called it justice. Don't believe them. I was there. I saw it with my own eyes. What I witnessed was not quick. It was not painless. It was not justice. What I saw was torture. What I saw was murder.

And now Alabama prepares to do it again. On September 25, the state plans to kill Geoffrey West. Less than a month later… on October 23…it plans to kill Anthony Boyd. I sit with Anthony. I pray with him. I listen to his fears and his hopes. Unless something changes, I will once again stand in a chamber of death. Unless something changes, I will watch another human being suffocate at the hands of the State.

This is bigger than crime and punishment. The breath in our lungs is the most basic marker of life. Genesis 2 tells us, "The Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being." That first breath was not given by any court or politician. It was given by God. Every breath since has been holy. To take it away is not just killing. It is blasphemy.

Nitrogen hypoxia has been advertised as "peaceful." One would have to have shut off all senses to come to such a conclusion. I saw Kenneth Smith convulse. I saw his chest heave. I saw his body shake. I saw his face swell and contort. I saw the fluids build up inside the mask. I saw him fight for every single breath until his body couldn't fight anymore. If that is "peaceful," then words no longer have meaning.

No government has the moral right to do this. We can argue about laws, about punishment, about retribution, but at the end of the day, executions are a spectacle of cruelty. They show us a State drunk on power, pretending that by killing a person it can solve the deeper wounds of society. But killing does not heal. Killing does not deter. Killing does not restore. Killing only kills. Killing only teaches our young people that they can solve their problems by killing.

The Bible speaks again and again about breath as a gift. Ezekiel 37 describes God breathing into dry bones so they might live again. In John 20, the risen Jesus breathes on his disciples and says, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” Breath is life. Breath is possibility. Breath is future. What blasphemy, then, for the State to seize the very thing that ties us to God and to one another.

I will never forget Kenneth Smith’s gasps. They echo in my memory. And now Anthony Boyd faces the same fate. I will walk with him. I will be in that chamber if the State insists on going through with this. And if I must, I will once again bear witness to what too many people want to ignore: executions are not sterile. They are not orderly. They are not civilized. They are raw, messy, violent acts of domination…and in this case, suffocation.

There is a reason executions are hidden from public view. If people saw what I have seen, this system would collapse under its own shame. If people stood in that chamber, heard the struggle for breath, smelled the air, and watched the life drain out of another human being, they would know: this is not who we want to be.

The cross itself was a tool of suffocation. Crucifixion is a slow death by breath. Jesus died struggling to inhale. To follow him is to stand against every system that chokes life out of the vulnerable. To kill in the name of the State is to stand with Rome against Christ.

The question is not whether Anthony Boyd…or Geoffrey West, for that matter…have flaws or guilt. The question is whether we will allow our government to answer human brokenness with suffocation. The question is whether we will sit quietly while officials strap men down, force masks on their faces, and choke them in a spectacle in front of witnesses.

I have seen nitrogen kill. I will see it again unless something changes. And I will keep telling the truth: the breath of life does not belong to the State. It belongs to God. It belongs to us all. To steal it in this way is an outrage against humanity and against heaven.

We have to decide. Do we want to live in a society that answers violence with violence, cruelty with cruelty, death with death? Or do we want to live in a society that values life enough to say… enough is enough?

The answer is not complicated. We know what is right. It's time to end nitrogen executions. It is time to end executions altogether.

8.21.25

Facing Jim Jones & Jonestown: In Defense of Hopeful Writing

*This essay is a defense of my desire to wrestle with the horrors of Jim Jones and Jonestown…while still clinging to a hope for universal reconciliation…universal humanization.

Why Jonestown Should Still Haunts Us.

Jonestown haunts me. November 18, 1978. Over nine hundred souls lost in the Guyanese jungle under the command of Jim Jones. Let me be clear: Jim Jones was no prophet. He was no shepherd. He was a corrupter of God's work, a charlatan who masqueraded as a pastor while turning love into bondage, freedom into slavery, hope into despair. For most, Jonestown is shorthand for fanaticism. For most, it is reduced to a joke, "drinking the Kool-Aid." But I refuse that flattening. I refuse to let theology look away. To do so would be to abandon God's presence in the valley of death.

Seeking God in the Valley of Death

I have written. I have preached. I have descended into the ruins of Jonestown, not to excuse it, not to sensationalize it, but to seek God there. My writings, numerous books, articles, and even an extended collection of the sermons of Jim Jones to illustrate his development as both preacher and monster (many available for free on the Alternative Considerations of Jonestown & Peoples Temple website), are a search for God in the abyss…a search for hope in the hopeless. Jonestown is not merely a grotesque failure of religion. It's a place where sin and death is made raw. And yet, God's Spirit still hovers there, just as it did in the opening verses of Genesis…the beginning of time and space.

In Jonestown Theology: Lenten Explorations in the Valley of Death (2017), I descend into this darkness. I reject the simplistic, the facile, the comfortable moralizing. “These devotions should never be mistaken for an apologetic for Jim Jones or anything he stood for. This is a search for God.” I frame Jonestown within Lent, placing it within Christological solidarity. The cross cannot be understood apart from sites of horror. Jones’ violence, I write, “was consistently created until violence was complete.” Sin’s fullness revealed. Yet God was still present. Hope can never be annihilated.

Jim Jones as False Shepherd and Anti-Christ

Love was twisted into a weapon by Jones. He said, “without me, life has no meaning.” Survivors testified, “I was brainwashed into believing that I was worthless and that life had no meaning without him.” This is perverse Christology. Jones replaced God with himself. He made himself the exclusive mediator of meaning. He enslaved the soul. The sacramental promise of belonging, which should liberate, became chains. Jonestown is a warning…the incarnation misappropriated is idolatry…coerced love is demonic. When you miss this truth…you don’t know God at all.

The death tape reveals the corruption of Jones’ heart. “Even in the midst of death, Jones wants to kill more.” Pastoral vocation inverted. Shepherding becomes domination. Kenosis becomes consumption. He was the anti-pastor. As I’ve said, Jones was “the Judas who thought he was Jesus, the Anti-Christ who baptized in Kool-Aid instead of water.” Too harsh? No. Not harsh enough. Jones was monstrous. He was a tyrant. Yet, he remains a warning. Jonestown is not an anomaly, it’s temptation that still remains.

Resurrection After Jonestown

But Jonestown is not only death…it is also resurrection. In my The Resurrection of Jonestown (2019), I proclaim, "Our siblings from Jonestown are not dead. They are still marching with us… in our struggles against racism, sexism, homophobia, ableism, economic injustice." The Spirit still speaks the words of those who have been silenced. Like the martyrs beneath the altar in Revelation 6, the dead cry out for justice. I have said, "The blood of Jonestown is Eucharistic, it will not let us go." This is not rhetorical flourish. This is truth. Jonestown refuses to be a footnote. It demands remembrance…prophetic solidarity…deep struggle…a continued fight for the reconciliation of all things.

Wrestling with God in Horror

My trilogy (perhaps my most recognized works on Jones and Jonestown), The Slaughter of God (2018), Systematic Theology/Shit (2020), Five Visions of Jim Jones/Jonestown (2020), pushes this confrontation. In The Slaughter of God, I name Jones both "prolific oppressor" and "Anti-Christ." And I ask, "Is God absent in horror, or present in the darkness?" In Systematic Theology/Shit, I wrestle mystically with God's hiddenness. "The people of Jonestown were children of God. Can we finally treat them as such?" I question God's lack of engagement in stopping the tragedy. In Five Visions, I examine Jones through resurrection, healing, silence. Even he exists within God's eschaton (the eternal presence of hope)…let there be no doubt…his actions were monstrous, inhuman, demonic. But this trilogy refuses closure…it declares Jonestown to be a mirror that refuses to look away.

Dr. Rebecca Moore, writing in The University of Chicago Divinity School's publication Sightings, observes: "[Hood's writings] humanize all those present in Peoples Temple, including Jim Jones… while affirming that some sort of existential mystery continues to surround the Jonestown event." Where others analyze, I theologize. Where others avert their eyes, I sit. Turn your back on Jonestown and you've turned your

back on Golgotha too. To face it is to stare into the abyss and proclaim resurrection…to demand hope amidst hopelessness.

Humanization and Universal Reconciliation

Jonestown unsettles. It must. It calls us all to self-examination. It calls us all to the humanization of even the most monstrous amongst us. Theology that cannot descend into hell is not theology. Jim Jones and Jonestown tests whether God can be sought in the valley of death…whether there is a hope that transcends all hopelessness.

I do not excuse Jones. I do not excuse any of the evil that happened in Jonestown. I simply seek God where God seems most absent. My words about Jones and Jonestown are of course an apocalyptic strategy that seeks to pull people closer to a belief that hope is always possible…even for the monsters. If we give up hope for anyone…even the monsters…we've given up on humanity itself. There's nothing more divine than holding on to hope when every voice is telling you to let it go.

8.23.25

The Passion of Jesus According to Nitrogen

The Chamber

In the darkness of night, they brought him to the chamber. Where am I going? Why this place? The hallway was narrow, its walls cold and unyielding, stretching into a silence that pressed against him. God, are you with me? Do you see this? At the end stood a steel door, its surface reflecting the faint glow of the fluorescent lights. When it opened, the room inside was blinding in its sterility. White walls, polished floors, and the faint chemical sting of bleach tried in vain to disguise the odor of death. In the center, the gurney awaited. Behind it, a mask hung from a hook, black tubing curling like a serpent ready to strike. This is my final cross. Not wood, not nails, but this…metal and straps.

The Gurney

They pressed him down onto the gurney. Leather straps tightened across his wrists, chest, and ankles. No escape. It is finished. How quickly the world condemns love. He felt the weight of it pressing against his body, a finality that could not be undone. The charges were read aloud: disturber of order, enemy of the state. They say the same words to every prophet. They will not understand. They will not see.

The Mask Descends

The mask was brought forward. Blue rubber, black plastic tubing, clinical and unfeeling. I cannot breathe through this. God, stay with me. I am yours, hold me in this darkness. It covered his face, sealing him in. His heart pounded, a drum of fear and desperation.

The Hiss of Death

The knob was turned, and the hiss began. At first, it was just a sound, a low, steady exhalation. Then his body understood. His chest rose in desperate gasps. Nothing came. I can't… I can't… breathe. What is happening? Someone help me! He clawed at the air, the straps, the cold metal around him. His lungs burned. Why won't they stop? Why does no one move?

Mary's Cry

Mary was among the witnesses. She pressed her hands against the glass, nails biting into her skin. When she saw him thrash, when she heard the muffled sounds of his choking, she cried out with a voice that tore through the chamber: "My son! My son!" The guards averted their eyes, pretending her grief was noise, but it would not be silenced.

The Last Prayer

Inside the mask, his thoughts became fragmented, urgent, jagged: I'm on fire. My chest is on fire. Father, don't leave me. Why am I alone? His muscles convulsed violently against the restraints. It hurts… it hurts too much… I am breaking… My spirit cannot bear it.

Mary pounded the glass. "Give him air! Please!" Her sobs shook her whole body, but the hiss grew only steadier. Please… end it… Father, take me… I can't… I can't…

His vision blurred. Through the mist of panic and suffocation, he caught a glimpse of her face. Tears streaked down her cheeks, her eyes wide with agony. He wanted to speak, to assure her that he was present, still there, still watching her pain. I am here. I am here. Do not despair. I am with you. But the mask silenced him. Only his eyes could reach out.

The nitrogen hissed on, relentless. His muscles spasmed. His throat clawed at emptiness. Let it end… let it end now… my

body cannot contain this… I am on fire… I am being torn apart… Father, help me…

One final prayer tore through him: Into your hands, I commend my spirit. His chest rose in one last, desperate heave, a futile gasp for air that would never come. Then his body went still. His head slumped forward. His eyes froze open, staring into the indifferent light of the chamber.

Mary's cry filled the silence that followed. She pressed her forehead to the glass and whispered through tears, "My son… my son." Her grief was a mirror of the suffering that had been endured, powerless against the machinery of death.

The Aftermath

The mask continued to hiss, running long after his breath had ceased. When it was finally shut off, the straps were loosened. His body was carried away, motionless and final. Papers were signed. The mask was cleaned, sterilized, and returned to its hook, ready for the next life.

Outside, the crowd shifted uneasily. Some wiped their eyes, some nodded grimly, some slipped away silently, unable to bear the sight. One corrections officer, whispering what others feared to admit, said, "Surely this man was innocent. Surely this was the Son of God."

The Silence of Empire

And it was finished. The creator of all air had been denied even a final gasp. The savior had been suffocated…not by chance…not by accident…but by the hands of empire…by the cold logic of control…the cold logic of vengeance. The final witness was silence, punctuated only by grief and the unceasing hiss of a world unwilling to confront its own cruelty.

8.24.25

Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders, before you authorize a nitrogen execution, try the mask on.

Not for the cameras. Not as a stunt. Of course, without any nitrogen flowing. Just you, alone with your thoughts. Feel the mask bite into your cheeks. Let the mask press against your face. Sit. Breathe. Wait. Ask yourself…what hell am I about to unleash on Arkansas?

Nitrogen Execution Is Not Humane

Your advisors may call it "humane." Corrections officials may call it "efficient." But when the air that sustains life is stripped away, the body convulses, the chest heaves, and the soul is dragged through terror before silence comes. Death does not arrive politely. It comes in panic, in the frantic urge to draw breath, in the primal fear of drowning in a room full of oxygen you cannot reach.

In January of 2024, I served as Kenneth Smith's spiritual advisor during the first nitrogen execution…and I witnessed it all myself.

You cannot truly know what you are considering unless you have felt it for yourself. So before you authorize an execution by nitrogen, put on the mask. Tighten the straps. Feel it. Then decide if you can still call it humane.

Moral Responsibility and Scripture

Scripture says, "Do to others as you would have them do to you" (Luke 6:31). This isn't a suggestion for convenience. If you believe nitrogen suffocation is humane, prove it—not with words, but with your own body. Until you do, every comment or order you make will be an act of hypocrisy.

You might say, “But the condemned deserve it.” But Jesus said, “As you did it to one of the least of these, you did it to me” (Matthew 25:40). Every person strapped to the gurney, every chest straining for air, every terrified gaze…is Christ. You are not just suffocating a criminal…you are suffocating Christ himself.

If you would not dare suffocate Christ, don’t do it to anybody else. This is the message of Jesus.

Why Closure Cannot Come From Killing

Governor, I’m not asking you to abolish the death penalty today, though I would certainly welcome it. I’m asking you to take one step so simple, so obvious, that it should shame you not to attempt it. Put on the mask. Feel what it does. Then speak honestly about your experience.

If you recoil at the thought, you already know the truth: the mask is cruelty. The reassurances of your advisors are lies. What you are considering is not justice…it’s torture wrapped in bureaucratic words.

Arkansas is about to cross a horrific threshold in history. Your choice will be remembered. Long after headlines fade, long after political winds shift, generations will ask: “How could they have thought this was acceptable?” And your name will be at the top of all accounts.

Perhaps you believe you are upholding order. Perhaps you think victims’ families will find closure. True closure never comes from watching another human being die. It comes from mercy, from healing, from forgiveness that no courtroom can manufacture. Killing will not restore what was lost…it only spreads more death into a world already suffocating in it.

Imagine Your Loved One Strapped to that Gurney

Imagine the mask waiting on its hook. The straps. The witnesses in silent horror. The gas begins to flow. Now imagine it's someone you love. Could you watch them convulse, chest straining for air, eyes filling with terror, and call it justice?

If you cannot bear it for someone for yourself or someone you love, then you cannot demand it of another. That is what Christ commanded.

The Choice Before Arkansas

Governor, if you will not wear the mask, be honest enough to admit what you are doing is wrong. Say plainly that you are ordering others to endure what you would never accept yourself. Confess that you are willing to suffocate Christ because you lack the courage to choose mercy over vengeance.

We do not have to walk this path. You do not have to suffocate any Arkansans. There is still another way…life. Choose the path of Jesus before we cross a line that can never be uncrossed.

Because if you won't wear the mask, you already know what it means…no one should.

8.25.25

Alabama Will Execute Anthony Boyd at Its Own Spiritual Peril

The Horror of Nitrogen Gas Executions

On October 23, the State of Alabama intends to strap a mask to Anthony Boyd's face and suffocate him with nitrogen gas. I wish I could tell you this was going to be quick and painless. I can't. I've seen it. I was there when Kenneth Smith was killed this way. I watched him fight for breath. I watched his body convulse in panic. I watched him suffocate. It was not merciful. It was not clean. It was not humane. It was torture.

Scripture commands, "Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured" (Hebrews 13:3). I remember. I carry it with me. And now…as Alabama prepares to repeat the same horror…I cannot stay silent.

Anthony Boyd's Claim of Innocence

I know Anthony Boyd. I've prayed with him. I've listened to his fears. I've witnessed his hope.

Anthony has told me repeatedly that he is innocent of the crime for which he was sentenced to die. Court filings show he continues to challenge the nitrogen hypoxia method as cruel and unusual. His case is complicated, but the system has never been primarily about truth…it has too often been about finality.

Even if…you set his claim of innocence aside…the deeper truth remains. Anthony is a human being, made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). For decades, I've watched men on death row grow bitter. Anthony is different. He speaks of faith, of

ending executions, of life. His reflections come from humility, not rage. He is not the man the state condemned long ago.

The Terror of Nitrogen Hypoxia Executions

When officials speak of nitrogen hypoxia, they use clinical words. “Reducing oxygen.” “Involuntary movements.” But what it means is suffocation. The mask goes on, and panic sets in. Every fiber of the body screams to live. Horror. Terror. The most basic instinct God gave us…to survive…is crushed.

The prophet asks, “What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8). Torture is not justice. Suffocation is not mercy. Strapping down a human being and forcing gas into his lungs is not humility. It is pride dressed up as law.

Alabama’s History of Injustice

The Constitution forbids cruel and unusual punishment. But long before the Constitution, the Word of God said: “Learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow” (Isaiah 1:17). Justice is not vengeance. Justice is restoration.

We don’t just learn this in scripture. Look at the history of wrongful capital convictions in Alabama. Anthony Ray Hinton spent nearly 30 years on death row before his conviction was deemed unconstitutional and dismissed. Toforest Johnson, after more than 25 years behind bars, now has prosecutors calling for a new trial. Bo Cochran spent 19 years on Alabama’s death row before being exonerated. These cases are not exceptions… they’re warnings.

And Scripture also warns us: “For judgment will be without mercy to anyone who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment” (James 2:13). If we sow cruelty, we will reap it.

Justice, Mercy and the Death Penalty

This isn't only about law. It is about our humanity. Anthony is not perfect. None of us are. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). But he is more than his worst moment. He is a man of prayer, of faith, of persistence.

Not long ago, Anthony told me, "If they kill me, I just want people to know I kept the struggle." That has stayed with me. Taking his life will not heal wounds. It will not make us safer. It will not restore what was lost. It will only stain our hands. And remember the words of Jesus: "Let the one without sin cast the first stone" (John 8:7).

A Final Plea to Stop the Execution of Anthony Boyd

We can do better. We must do better.

You can do better. You must do better.

I ask Alabama to stop this execution. Stop the cruelty wrapped in procedure. See Anthony Boyd as what he is: a human being, a man who has lived decades behind bars, who still breathes the breath of God.

Jesus said, "I was in prison and you visited me…Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these, you did for me" (Matthew 25:36, 40). Killing Anthony is not justice. It is the opposite of everything Christ commands.

8.25.25

Pope Francis, The Death Penalty & The Radical Hope of Christ

Pope Francis: The Death Penalty is No Longer Admissible

When Pope Francis announced in 2018 that the death penalty is "inadmissible because it is an attack on the inviolability and dignity of the person" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2267), it was not a footnote in doctrine…it was a rupture. Centuries of Christian teaching carved out small spaces where executions could be tolerated. Francis slammed the door shut. He did so not because the world suddenly became gentler…but because the Gospel would not let Christians keep pretending that killing in the name of justice could ever be reconciled with following Christ.

The Proclamations of Pope Francis on the Death Penalty

From the beginning of his papacy, Francis pressed this point. Speaking to the International Association of Penal Law, he said that executions are "inadmissible, no matter how serious the crime committed." When he stood before the United States Congress…a chamber in a country addicted to executions…he again pleaded for abolition. He firmly declared his opposition to the death penalty in a letter to the International Commission Against the Death Penalty, repeated himself during the Jubilee for Prisoners and in Fratelli Tutti gave his most developed teaching…declaring the death penalty to always be unacceptable…and that the time had come for worldwide abolition.

Theological Foundations: God's Image & Human Dignity

The arguments Francis made were not technical…they were theological. Every human being… no matter what they've

done…bears the image of God. That image cannot be erased by crime, violence or sin. To execute someone is not simply to punish…it is to deny that God's image remains…it is to claim the state's right to erase what only God has authored. Which is why Francis so clearly called the death penalty, "contrary to the Gospel."

The Cross: Standing with the Executed Not the Executioners

Look again at the cross. Jesus was executed by the state…in the name of law and order. Roman authorities called it justice. Religious authorities called it necessary. But Christians call it salvation. To follow the Gospel is to side with the executed…not the executioners. Any defense of capital punishment makes peace with the very logic that killed Jesus.

Francis unmasked what executions really are…vengeance. They do not repair harm…they stage a ritual. The state sucks the life out of a person and calls the act righteous. But what is happening is a theater of evil. Executions are spectacles of domination. The condemned person is not killed for what they did so much as for what they represent…the inability of government to control its' citizens.

Christian theology has always insisted that the Cross is an affront to power. Crucifixion revealed the emptiness of empire's claim. Resurrection shattered it. To abolish the death penalty is not just to reform a legal system…it is to confess faith in the Resurrection…hope beyond the temporal constraints of existence. Indeed…if Christ is risen…then no executioner will ever be able to claim the last word.

The Church & Capital Punishment: Historic Complicity

And yet Francis' stance cut deeper…because it forced the Church to confront its own betrayals. For centuries… Popes blessed kings who wielded the sword. Bishops and religious leaders

cheered inquisitors who burned heretics. Priests stood silent as modern states carried out executions. Even into the twentieth century, most Christian teaching still allowed for executions, even the Catholic Catechism allowed for it in "rare" cases (CCC 2267… prior edition). To now declare the death penalty inadmissible is to admit that the Church itself had consistently been wrong…even complicit in crucifixion. The change was not cosmetic…it was penitential.

Pope Francis' Critics Within the Church

Of course, critics howled that Francis had broken with tradition…or even, with what the Bible teaches. But what they failed to recognize was that…the cross had already decided the matter… there is no Christian way to execute someone. To defend capital punishment is to stand with Pilate and the crowd. To tolerate it is to wash one's hands while the state kills another Christ (Matthew 25:36-40).

Make no mistake, belief in Christ has consequences. Francis made clear that the Church could not stay neutral in societies that kill. Bishops and other leaders who lobbied for executions placed themselves outside the Gospel. Christian politicians who signed death warrants, judges who sentenced people to die, prison staff who tightened straps on the condemned…all of them participate in the horrors of Golgotha. Abolition is not just a political option…it is discipleship.

The Fulfillment of Hope: Pope Francis' Theology on Capital Punishment

Herein lies the urgency. To follow Pope Francis on the death penalty is not about obedience to the teachings of a hierarchy…it is about obedience to the Gospel itself. Francis did not invent a new doctrine…he simply named what the Cross had already revealed. The state murdered Jesus in the name of law and order…and every execution since then has been a repetition of

the same lunacy. If we claim Christ crucified and risen, we cannot claim that the economy of God gives us the right to execute anyone…for the price of sin has already been paid.

Francis has died…but his teachings have not…and his absence sharpens their weight. Indeed…they remain a summons to hope. The Gospel he preached will never die. The world still kills… states still strap humans down in chambers of death…and the Church must still decide whether it stands with the executioner or with the executed.

Following Christ means refusing the logic of vengeance that dominates our politics. It means recognizing that the death penalty does not create safety…it creates more death. It means believing that even the most broken life still bears the mark of God. Abolition is not sentimentality…it's discipleship.

Toward Conversion: The Call of Pope Francis

The Church has long compromised with the powers of death. Francis called us back…away from complicity and toward conversion. The choice before us is clear. We can cling to the murderous inclinations of capital punishment…or we can stand at the foot of the cross with the crucified Christ. The future of the Church…and the relevance of the Gospel in the modern world… depends on which side we choose.

We must carry on Francis' fight. His death cannot mean the silencing of his teachings. If the Gospel has any meaning at all… then the only faithful path is abolition…anything less is betrayal.

8.26.25

The Eucharist, Executions and the Broken Body of Christ

The Eucharist: Body of a Prisoner

The Eucharist is not a polite ritual. It's the body of a man killed by the state. It's the blood of a prisoner poured out in public. Every time we come to the table…we are standing at an execution.

Executions as Betrayal of Christ

Yet most churches dare to celebrate this feast while remaining silent in the midst of executions today. They take into their mouths the body of a murdered God while ignoring the bodies strapped down on death row. They drink the blood of the condemned Christ while turning away as governments spill more blood in chambers of death. This is betrayal. It's Judas all over again.

Keep Watching

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The Cross Is Enough: Why We Cannot Kill Again

The state tells us executions are necessary. They say someone must die so the rest of us can live. They cover the killing with words like "justice" and "order." But the Eucharist says the opposite. The one true sacrifice has already been made. The cross is enough. Every execution after the cross is a denial of Christ.

The Eucharist vs. the State's False Sacrament

And here is the heart of the mystery…the Eucharist is not just a reminder of a prisoner. It is the prisoner. The bread is the body of

the incarcerated. The cup is the blood of the condemned. To eat the bread is to chew the flesh of a man dragged through the courts, mocked, chained and executed. To drink the cup is to swallow the blood of a convict spilled. The Eucharist is not clean. It is prison food. It is the body of the one on death row. It is Christ the filthy prisoner being consumed.

Every time we eat and drink while failing to fight executions today, we are devouring Christ even as we crucify him again. We are joining the mob. We are striking the nails ourselves.

The Eucharist leaves no room for the death penalty. In the bread and wine, Christ gives himself freely to all…even the vilest of offenders. At God's table no one is excluded. But executions exclude. They collectively say, "You are beyond forgiveness. You do not deserve to live." That is the opposite of communion…the opposite of Christ.

The Eucharist is the body of Christ shared with all. If we are one body, then every execution is a mutilation of Christ. When the state injects poison, it drives the nails again. When nitrogen suffocates a man, the lungs of Christ heave again for air. When the bullet hits the prisoner, the body of Christ bleeds out again.

Executions are a false sacrament. They're an anti-Eucharist. They're the state gathering the people, lifting up a victim and shedding blood in the name of "justice." It looks like liturgy… but it's actually a demonic adulation of death.

Communion or Execution: You Cannot Feast at Both Tables

The Eucharist forces a choice. You cannot eat at both tables. You cannot sip both cups. You cannot take the bread of life while tacitly blessing the bread of death. You cannot drink the blood of mercy while tacitly justifying the blood of vengeance. One feast is the feast of Christ. The other is the feast of the executioner.

The Eucharist ends the death penalty. If it doesn't, it's an empty ritual. If we eat the body and drink the blood of Christ and do nothing to stop executions, then we're communing with the executioner, not with Christ.

8.26.25

Stronger Than Murder: Mercy Must Replace the Death Penalty

Mercy and the Death Penalty

The Death Penalty Is About Us

The death penalty is not just about crime. It's not just about punishment. It's not just about the worst things people have ever done. The death penalty is about us. It's about our refusal of mercy. It's about our unwillingness to believe that love is stronger than death.

Keep Watching

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Every time we murder someone, we confess. We confess that mercy has a ceiling. We confess that our imagination for redemption ends where our fear begins. We confess the evil in our own hearts.

The Scandal of Mercy

Mercy has always terrified us. It's beautiful when it's cheap… when it costs nothing. But when mercy meets a murderer…when mercy embraces blood…when mercy stands in the chamber… mercy becomes scandalous. Mercy becomes unbearable.

And yet mercy is at the heart of the Gospel. Mercy is Jesus on the cross, refusing to curse his killers, shouting into the empire's face… Father, forgive them. Mercy is defiance of death… especially death at the hands of the state. Mercy is a declaration that only God gets the final word.

What the Death Penalty Pretends To Do

The death penalty pretends to heal…but it can't. The death penalty pretends to protect…but it only teaches us how to be better killers. The death penalty pretends to close wounds…but it rips them open wider. Mercy alone heals. Mercy alone protects. Mercy alone says…the story's not finished.

I've watched executions. I've breathed the air of the chamber. I've heard prayers choked out by chemicals and gas. I've seen the tears of mothers…from both sides…comingling in the same puddle on the floor. That's the truth the state will never admit… executions multiply grief. They don't end it…they multiply it.

The Power of Naming

People ask…But what about the monsters? I tell them the truth… if mercy's not for the monsters…then it's not mercy at all. Mercy is not a reward. Mercy is not for the deserving. Mercy is for the condemned. Mercy is for those we fear…those we hate…those we despise…those who sicken us…those we'd rather forget.

The death penalty says some people are trash. Mercy says no nobody is trash. The death penalty says the story is over. Mercy says God is still writing. The death penalty says…there is no more hope. Mercy says…hope is the only thing left.

Mercy vs. Justice

The prophets cried…Do justice, love mercy, walk humbly with your God. Notice, justice was never meant to stand alone. Justice without mercy is just vengeance blessed by legality. Justice is not justice without the promise of resurrection. Justice without mercy is the death penalty.

So, I return to mercy. Mercy is not neat. Mercy is not easy. Mercy is not safe. Mercy costs everything. Mercy cost Jesus his

life. Mercy will cost us our pride…our fear…our certainty. Mercy will cost us the illusion that killing can ever save us.

And mercy's costly now…because the killing hasn't stopped. In fact, it's only ramping up. The machine of death keeps turning. The state keeps scheduling. The calendar of executions keeps filling.

The Names of the Condemned

There are ten executions coming up in the next two months. Ten lives the state is preparing to erase. Ten nights where the machines will hum…the silence will fall heavy…and we will embrace the evil of the destruction of mercy. I speak their names now…because I demand that mercy know their names.

And so we speak mercy over…

Curtis Windom, August 28, Florida
Ralph Menzies, September 5, Utah
David Joseph Pittman, September 17, Florida
Geoffrey T. West, September 25, Alabama
Blaine Milam, September 25, Texas
Roy Lee Ward, October 10, Indiana
Lance C. Shockley, October 14, Missouri
Robert Roberson, October 16, Texas
Richard Djerf, October 17, Arizona
Anthony Todd Boyd, October 23, Alabama

Say their names. Pray their names. Let their names echo against the walls of our hearts until we realize that mercy is not abstract. Mercy is not an idea. Mercy is flesh and blood. Mercy has a name. In fact, mercy has ten names.

The state will try to destroy these names. But mercy refuses to destroy. Mercy remembers. Mercy insists. Mercy declares that no one is beyond love.

The death penalty is about us. It is about whether we'll have the courage to say their names…to remember their humanity…to choose love in a world drunk on vengeance…to remember mercy.

Why Mercy Is the Only Way

Mercy is the only thing strong enough to stop the killing. Mercy is the only thing strong enough to save us from ourselves. Mercy is the only way.

8.26.25

A Letter to Curtisia Windom / Florida, Don't Kill Her Dad

Love is Stronger Than Florida's Death Penalty

August 27, 2025

Dear Curtisia,

I've carried you in my heart in recent days. This afternoon as I was praying for you, the Spirit overwhelmed me and I just had to write. I know the whole world seems to be talking about your father's execution, about justice, about politics, about crime. But I don't want to talk about the state right now…I want to talk about you.

The Weight of Loss and the Courage of Forgiveness

From the moment I read your words…"I've already lost my Mom. I've already lost my Grandma. This is … my Dad"…I felt the Spirit move through me. In one sentence, you gave more truth than all the courts and politicians combined. You named the wound. You named the fear. And you named the cruelty of what Florida is trying to do.

I can't begin to imagine the weight you've carried. To lose your mom before you were old enough to even know her. To spend your life with a father behind bars. To learn how to love him in that space. And now, to face the possibility of watching the state take him too. There aren't words for the kind of pain you've experienced.

And yet, you have found words. You have found courage. You have found forgiveness. When you said, "Forgiveness comes with time, and 33 years is a long time. I, myself, have forgiven my father," I felt my throat catch. I thought of how rare it is in

this world to hear forgiveness spoken so plainly, so vulnerably. That is God speaking through you.

I know some people probably tell you that you're wrong, that forgiveness is weakness. But I want you to know…I see your forgiveness as holy. It's not weakness. It's strength. It's the kind of strength that disarms death itself.

What the State Demands of You and Your Children

I was also moved when you spoke about your kids…"My kids know him. My kids have a real relationship with him, so now I would have to teach them, 'Hey, grandad's not here anymore for a mistake he made in 1992.'" What a cruel demand for the state to place on you. They want to make you the messenger of their violence. They want to make you explain to your children that their grandfather is gone…not because time or nature took him, but because the state chose to kill him.

That is not justice. That is another trauma. This is…

I don't have to keep naming it all…you've already lived enough trauma for ten lifetimes. You've already carried grief most people will never know. And yet, out of that grief, you've found a way to speak mercy. Out of that loss, you've found a way to keep loving. Out of that heartbreak, you've found a way to teach your kids the truth about forgiveness.

Your Prophetic Witness Against Death

Curtisia, you are a prophet. I don't know if you see yourself that way, but I do. Your refusal to let the state use your name to justify killing…that is prophetic courage of the highest order. Your determination to forgive your father even after all that was taken from you…that is stunningly prophetic love.

I need you to know that you're not alone. I am with you. So many of us are with you. We are carrying your words into the streets, into the churches, into the halls of power. We are crying out with you…"Don't kill for me."

Not Alone: Voices Rising With You

I can't promise the governor will listen. I can't promise the courts will stop this. But I can promise you this…your voice is not lost. Your witness will live on long after any date on the calendar has passed. You're showing the world what love looks like when everything in you has every reason to choose hate.

Whatever happens in the days ahead, please hold onto this…your love is stronger than the state's cruelty…your forgiveness is more powerful than their violence…your voice is the one that matters most.

Love, Mercy, and the Final Word

And I hear you. I believe you. I stand with you. I wish I had the words to make all of this go away…but I don't…
…all I can do is tell you that I'm zealously praying that mercy will get the last word.

With love and solidarity,
The Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood
Spiritual Advisor, Death Rows Nationwide

8.28.25

A Manifesto for the Death Penalty Abolition Movement

There are ten executions scheduled in the next two months…

Why the Death Penalty Still Persists in America

On a quiet evening in America, somewhere behind prison walls, a clock approaches the predetermined hour. A man waits in a cell, counting breaths, knowing each one may be his last. Down the hall, technicians check the lines and guards prepare the straps, rehearsing the ritual they will call "justice." Outside, a handful of protesters clutch candles, whisper prayers, shout pleas, and bear witness. And most of the nation sleeps, unaware, unmoved, indifferent.

Keep Watching

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This is how the death penalty survives. Not by overwhelming public support. Not by moral clarity. But by inertia. It survives because it's hidden. It survives because it's been normalized. It survives because people look away.

For years we have been told that executions are "on the decline," that abolition is "inevitable." "It's only a matter of time," they say. Yes, the number of new death sentences is lower than in past decades. Some states have abandoned capital punishment altogether. But the truth is harsher than the platitudes we've been fed: the machinery of death is grinding faster right now than it has in decades. Governors are rushing to sign death warrants. Courts are reluctant to intervene. States are dusting off firing squads, cooking up new ways to suffocate people with nitrogen gas, scrambling to keep the killing business alive.

If we're honest, we will admit that the abolition movement as it exists today is not enough. Advocates have done extraordinary work…organizing vigils, filing lawsuits, persuading legislators… but executions persist. Progress is fragile, uneven, often quickly reversed. The uncomfortable truth is that our movement has grown far too narrow, too professionalized, too cautious to carry us through this dark hour.

But make no mistake. This is not an obituary. This is a manifesto. The death penalty will not simply vanish on its own. It will fall only if we rise to meet it with imagination, disruption, urgency, and fire.

The Limits of Today's Death Penalty Abolition Movement

For far too long, the movement's energy has been concentrated in the courts and the halls of government. These efforts matter. They've saved lives. But they cannot be the center of gravity if the movement is to succeed.

The death penalty is sustained not primarily by legal precedent but by public indifference. Most Americans rarely think about executions at all. When they do, they imagine them as distant events…reserved for monsters beyond redemption. That indifference is the state's greatest weapon.

And indifference is not broken in law journals. It is broken in neighborhoods where people fear crime and are told that death is the answer. It is broken in churches where forgiveness is preached but vengeance wins the day. It is broken in classrooms where students memorize civics but never mercy. It is broken in prisons where men and women live under the shadow of state-sanctioned killing. It is broken…

Abolition cannot remain the work of experts. It must become the work of ordinary people…in churches, schools, community centers, libraries, grocery stores, on buses or in living rooms.

Until abolition becomes a regular part of ordinary lives, the machinery of death will keep grinding along.

Centering the Voices of the Condemned

The death penalty thrives on distance. Executions are scheduled in hidden chambers, carried out at odd hours, described in sanitized legal language. The condemned are reduced to case numbers, docket entries, mugshots. Humanity is scrubbed out of the entire process.

Too often even abolitionists have mirrored this distancing… speaking about the condemned rather than with them. But those on death row, and the families who love them, know the cruelty of this system in their bones. Their testimony cannot be an afterthought. It must be the foundation of our witness.

When condemned people speak, the myths collapse. When a man on death row tells you about his grandchild learning to read, when a woman waiting for execution describes her first prayer in years, when a mother breaks down over the state's plan to kill her son…you cannot keep believing the lie that executions are tidy or righteous. You are forced to see human beings.

If the movement is to succeed, it must center these voices. Those closest to the pain must be closest to the power.

From Cost Arguments to Moral Fire

The death penalty is not just broken policy. It is a moral crisis. Yet, too often, abolitionists argue in safer terms…cost savings, statistical disparities or procedural flaws. These arguments aren't wrong…but they're not enough.

We must dare to speak with moral clarity. No one is disposable. No one is reducible to their worst act. The state has no authority

to decide who deserves to live and who deserves to die. To kill in the name of justice is to destroy the very possibility of justice.

Until abolitionists recover that fire, the debate will remain framed by those who say killing equals justice. We must speak another word. Life is always greater than death. Mercy is always greater than vengeance. Love is always greater than fear.

Critiquing the Movement We Love

Here, honesty is required. The abolitionist movement has too often lost its way.

Our major organizations are filled with brilliant, committed people. But they have become trapped in a cycle of professionalization. They write reports, convene panels, manage grants, and host vigils. But too often this energy fails to ignite public imagination. They measure victories in the language of press hits, policy tweaks, temporary stays. Rarely in the language of moral awakening.

Too many organizations have grown risk-averse. They polish their messaging until it is bloodless. They reduce the struggle against execution to an argument about policy, afraid to speak in the raw cadences of mercy and justice. In doing so, they win a few hearings, a few opeds…but they lose hearts.

Worst of all, many have drifted from the grassroots. Where once the movement drew its power from the testimony of the condemned and their families, now it too often operates in insulated professional silos. Carefully curated campaigns. Sanitized talking points. Safe, bloodless appeals.

This critique is not betrayal. It is love speaking truth. Abolitionist organizations have done heroic work. But if they continue as they are, they will not finish the task. They will keep winning small, temporary victories while executions roll on. The death

penalty is too urgent for timidity. It is time to go big or get out of the way.

From Policy to Prophecy: A New Abolitionist Strategy

For too long, abolitionists have played the role of polite petitioners. Pleading for reforms. Hoping politicians might grow a conscience. But executions will not end because governors suddenly find compassion. They will end because the moral ground beneath them collapses.

The task of the Death Penalty Abolition Movement is not to beg but to bear witness. Not to flatter but to confront. Not to wait but to prophesy.

The death penalty is blasphemy against human dignity. It is murder with the state's signature on it. Our words must reflect the urgency of our cause. Until we name it as murder, until we name it as blasphemy, our movement will remain too timid to prevail.

Toward a Broader, Bolder Death Penalty Abolition Movement

If abolition is to succeed, it must welcome energy, anger, testimony, grief, creativity and confrontation. Real activism that demands real results. It must look less like a sterile campaign and more like a moral uprising.

Movements that change the world are rarely neat. They are alive with lament and hope, with contradiction and courage. They disturb the peace of those who cling to gradualism. They embody the world they are trying to create.

So it must be with the Death Penalty Abolition Movement. We will not win confined to nonprofits and courtrooms. It will win as a revolution of mercy…messy, public, relentless and unafraid. A

revolution that names death as death and refuses to be silent while the state kills in our name.

The Abolitionist Call: Ending Executions in Our Lifetime

The death penalty will not collapse on its own. It will fall only if we strip away its disguises, refuse our consent and proclaim again and again that murder is always intolerable. The status quo of polite persuasion will only yield more polite murders.

The choice before us…the Death Penalty Abolition Movement… is stark. Silence…which is consent…or speech that sets captives free.

The death penalty has claimed the final word for far too long. But it is not the final word. Life is. Mercy is. Hope is.

And until words of abolition are spoken more profoundly and loudly than the language of death, we will keep getting our asses kicked…and our friends murdered.

8.29.25

The Death Penalty and the Limits of Human Righteousness

"They Deserve to Be Executed, Just Not by Us": A Theological Reflection on the Death Penalty, Mercy and Each of Us

The Death Penalty as Theological Ground

I'm haunted by the death penalty.

Keep Watching

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I've walked the sterile corridors of death row. The echo of my shoes bouncing against the concrete walls. I've sat on narrow benches in visitation rooms. The smell of metal, sweat and disinfectant pressing into my nostrils, thick and unrelenting. I've knelt beside men whose lives were measured in hours, sometimes minutes, whose cracked voices whispered confessions that carried the weight of eternity. Their trembling hands pressed against mine. Raw fear is something I can still remember in my chest. These faces, these moments…they all haunt me.

I do not write from theory. I write from presence…from seizing with fear, from the intimate knowledge of human fragility that has settled into my bones and refuses to leave. I do not claim authority over life or death. I only carry what I have seen…what I have felt…what faith demands of me.

"They deserve to be executed, just not by any of us…" I remember saying these words aloud once, almost to myself, as I walked out of a prison after a particularly horrific visit. The cold wind was pushing against my coat like a heavy reminder of the realities of the crimes I'd just been told about. The words are not a compromise. They are a moral summons, a call to conscience,

a refusal to let the machinery of death become our god. Justice is real. Sin is real. Violence is real. But, ultimate judgment belongs to God, not to us. I kneel in the shadows of the condemned, listening, learning and praying that mercy might rise where the world demands death…the death penalty.

Scripture on the Death Penalty (Life, Mercy & Judgment)

The Bible insists that life is sacred, and vengeance belongs to God alone.

"Whoever sheds the blood of any person, by a person shall that person's blood be shed; for God made humankind in his image" (Genesis 9:6). I have felt the weight of that verse in the tremor of a man's hand pressed into mine…his fear a living echo of God's love for us.

Yet, God spares Cain…even marking him for protection, "Then the LORD said to him, 'Not so! Whoever kills Cain will suffer a sevenfold vengeance.' And the LORD put a mark on Cain, so that no one who came upon him would kill him" (Genesis 4:15). I have whispered this verse in the quiet of cells, imagining it resting on the shoulders of men whose histories could have led only to death, reminding them that God's mercy can mark even the vilest of sinners.

Even David, guilty of grievous sins, was spared, "Then David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the LORD.' And Nathan said to David, 'The LORD also has taken away your sin; you shall not die'" (2 Samuel 12:13). I have watched the way forgiveness flickers in the eyes of men on death row, a fragile light I seek to fuel and hold carefully in my prayers.

Jesus shatters the death penalty…the illusion of human authority over life, "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone…" (John 8:7). I have felt the weight of that verse when I have seen men look at one another, eyes wide,

terror and hope mingling. Paul underscores the radical restraint of mercy, “Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord’” (Romans 12:19). And John’s vision reminds me that ultimate authority rests in God alone, “I am the one who lives, and I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever! And I have the keys of Death and of Hades” (Revelation 1:18). Life bleeds through every page of scripture.

Even the passages of the law that seem to sanction execution must be read with care. Moses’ law allowed it, yet the prophets and the Gospels consistently urge us to step back, leave room for repentance and honor life. Mercy is not soft…it is divine. When humans wield death, they don’t just end a life…they damage themselves, the communities they’re supposed to protect and the sacred web of creation. I have felt this in the tremor of hands pressing against mine, in whispered confessions that could be extinguished forever if not protected.

I have watched men in solitary cells…their voices cracking as they pray…repeating the Psalms quietly, “The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul” (Psalm 23:1–3). Those verses become lifelines, a reminder that God’s justice restores, even when the state’s system threatens to undo all of it. I’ve pressed my ear against the thin wall to hear a whispered prayer. I’ve felt a chill run down my spine as a man murmured hope amid despair.

Mercy is tangible here. It is sweat and breath, stiff hands and tears held behind steel doors. I have seen it, felt it, carried it into the silence that follows each final step toward the execution chamber…the death penalty.

Witnesses to Mercy: The Death Penalty Amongst the Theologians

Among theologians, I hear them all…each and every time I even think about the death penalty…and they each press against my conscience in unique ways as I walk this path.

The Church Fathers and Early Christian Voices on Execution

The Church Fathers laid the foundation. St. Clement of Alexandria insists that God desires not the destruction of sinners but their correction and transformation (Paedagogus III.12, trans. Wilson, 1903). St. Origen of Alexandria stresses that no one is finally lost unless they turn away from the light of salvation (De Principiis II, trans. Crombie, 1869). St. John Chrysostom, wrestling with Romans 13, warns rulers that punishment must be tempered by mercy, or it collapses into cruelty (Homilies on Romans 13, trans. Schaff, 1889). Their voices echo through the shadows of cells, reminders that there is hope for even the cruelest of sinners.

The saints carry this vision further. St. Athanasius of Alexandria describes St. Anthony the Great discovering strength in forgiveness, revealing that real power…the kind that transforms hearts and endures beyond fear…is mercy (Life of Anthony, §§53–55). I can almost hear Anthony's whispered prayers echoing through the centuries as I kneel beside men whose hands shake against mine, each confession smashed yet unbroken under the weight of guilt and hope. St. Gregory of Nyssa tells of St. Macrina the Younger, whose sense of justice was measured not in punishment but in care for the vulnerable (Life of Macrina, §§1–5). I see her in the bowed heads of mothers, the clutching of worn photographs, the soft but firm insistence of wives pressing their palms against the glass, their voices quivering yet refusing to yield.

Modern Theologians and the Call to Mercy

Modern church leaders add fire to this call. Pope Francis declares the death penalty inadmissible, grounding his stance in mercy

(Fratelli Tutti §263, 2020). Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle insists justice lies not in life taken but in life restored (CBCP News, 2020). I have heard these words in families' whispered pleas, in tears pressing against steel barriers, in the way hope clings to despair in the same breath. I have felt them in the shiver of a father's hand against mine, in the quiet sobs of a mother who refuses to leave the cell block until she has spoken her love aloud one last time.

Female theologians illuminate the cost further. Mary McClintock Fulkerson shows executions tear apart communal bonds (Places of Redemption, 2007). Karen Baker-Fletcher insists God calls forth life even when the state demands death (Dancing with God, 2005). Ivone Gebara, a Brazilian ecofeminist liberation theologian, reminds us that every life is bound up in fragile interdependence, and that killing severs not only the victim but the entire web of the poor and oppressed (Out of the Depths: Women's Experience of Evil and Salvation, 2002). Ada María Isasi-Díaz, the voice of mujerista theology, insists that real justice must be rooted in the survival and flourishing of marginalized communities, and that any system of death betrays the God of life (En la Lucha, 1993). Pioneering womanist theologian Delores S. Williams insists that God's work is survival and that Black women's history reveals how life itself resists structures of death (Sisters in the Wilderness, 1993). Kelly Brown Douglas unmasks how white supremacy has infected Christian understandings of justice…declaring that any theology which sanctions death is complicit in America's racial sins (Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God, 2015). I hear their truths when mothers of all identities collapse into my arms after a final visit, tears soaking my sleeve… demanding to know why the death penalty is even an option.

Queer theologians press the point with urgency. Patrick S. Cheng envisions justice as radically restorative (Radical Love, 2011). Marcella Althaus-Reid unmasks how theology can be twisted to justify violence (Indecent Theology, 2000). Their

voices remind me that executions fall hardest on the already marginalized. I have felt this in the silent shuffling of men from communities already oppressed, their eyes pleading, their breaths shallow.

From Protestant thought: Karl Barth insists judgment belongs solely to Christ (Church Dogmatics II/2, 1957). Dietrich Bonhoeffer warns against legitimizing killing as justice (Ethics, 1955). Paul Tillich reminds us that coercion undermines reconciliation (The Courage to Be, 1952). Jürgen Moltmann asserts that Christian hope resists every power of death, emphasizing that life must be guarded because the resurrection has already overcome the ultimate enemy (Theology of Hope, 1964). Martin Luther King Jr. proclaims that violence cannot drive out violence…that only love has the power to redeem the oppressor and the oppressed (Strength to Love, 1963). Rowan Williams insists that the death penalty contradicts the gospel's witness…for to claim the right to kill is to deny the possibility of redemption (Faith in the Public Square, 2012). Amidst the horrors of the death penalty, I press my hand into the palm, feeling the weight of these words in the pulse beneath my fingers. I hear the shallow, uneven breaths of a man who has spent decades behind bars, whose body has learned to flinch at every command yet who still looks me in the eye, seeking acknowledgment of his humanity.

Orthodox theologians root this in creation. David Bentley Hart warns that killing desecrates beauty (The Beauty of the Infinite, 2003). Kallistos Ware and John Zizioulas remind us that executions fracture communion itself (The Orthodox Church, 1993; Being as Communion, 1985). Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew has spoken with clarity that human dignity is inviolable…insisting that to take life is to wound the image of God and to betray the Orthodox vision of creation as sacrament (On Earth as in Heaven: Ecological Vision and Initiatives of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, 2012). I have seen this fracture in the guard's averted eyes, in the echo of heavy doors

slamming shut, in broken men led away to die, their footsteps bouncing hollowly off concrete corridors. Nobody asked them for their thoughts on the death penalty. I've felt it in the sudden hush that falls over a visitation room, where whispers of consolation struggle to rise above the oppressive weight of anticipation.

Liberation, African, Asian, and Native Theologies on Justice

Liberation voices cry out. St. Oscar Romero insists that abandoning the weakest is betrayal (The Violence of Love, 1988). James H. Cone unmasks the death penalty in America as inseparable from the history of lynching (The Cross and the Lynching Tree, 2011). Naim Ateek warns that justice severed from mercy distorts God's will (Justice and Only Justice, 1989). Gustavo Gutiérrez reminds us that God's justice is always good news for the poor (A Theology of Liberation, 1971). Leonardo Boff insists that killing destroys the very communion God intends for creation (Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor, 1997). Jon Sobrino declares that true discipleship demands standing with the crucified peoples of history (Jesus the Liberator, 1991). Every time I walk the corridors of a prison, these voices confront me with the machinery of racialized and political violence. I see it in the faces of marginalized persons, young and old, whose eyes hold a mixture of resignation and unspoken anguish, whose lives are framed by systems that have already decided their value.

African theologians expand the vision. John S. Mbiti insists personhood is communal, and executions tear the social web (African Religions and Philosophy, 1969). Mercy Amba Oduyoye insists justice must be restorative (Introducing African Women's Theology, 2001). Kwame Bediako reminds us that authentic Christian identity is measured by how the community safeguards life and resists forces of death (Theology and Identity, 1992). Allan Boesak insists that God always takes the side of the oppressed…and that any system that kills betrays the gospel of

liberation (Farewell to Innocence, 1977). Desmond Tutu, unwavering in his opposition to executions, proclaimed that taking life degrades both victim and executioner, insisting that forgiveness and truth—not death—are the only paths to justice (No Future Without Forgiveness, 1999). I feel these truths in burning faces. And as I move from one prison to another, from one cell to the next, I carry these insights with me, remembering that the work of justice is never merely about punishment…it is about restoring, weaving back together what has been broken, affirming the dignity and life of every person, and refusing to allow death to sever the ties that make us fully human.

Asian theologians echo the call to communal responsibility. Kosuke Koyama measures faith by how we care for the weakest among us (Waterbuffalo Theology, 1974). C. S. Song insists that justice requires forgiveness and healing, that it cannot exist without restoration of relationships (Third-Eye Theology, 1997). Kwok Pui-Lan declares that neutrality in the face of oppression is itself complicity (Postcolonial Imagination, 2005). I have seen these truths in confessions that tremble against the harsh walls of a visitation room, in the way a man flinches yet reaches for a hand extended in solidarity, in the briefest flicker of hope that struggles to breathe in a body weighed down by decades of confinement.

Indigenous voices deepen the imperative. Tink Tinker unmasks executions as extensions of colonial violence (Missionary Conquest, 1993). Vine Deloria Jr. reminds us that Native survival depends on resisting systems of domination that erase life and memory (God Is Red, 1973). Andrea Smith insists that state violence, including executions, is bound up with the same logics that justify gendered and racial oppression (Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide, 2005). I hear the whispers of their ancestors in the quiet of the visitation room, a chorus of memory and mourning that hums beneath the clanging of doors and the low murmur of guards moving between cells. Each slight movement, each shiver, carries the weight of

generations, a testament to the violence that continues to shape bodies and communities.

Together, these voices form a chorus…mercy is not optional. Justice without mercy is a lie. The death penalty fractures creation. I feel it in the pulse of every heart…every sob across barriers…every whispered plea.

Theological Reflections amidst the Death Penalty

Among witnesses to executions, the convergence of life and death become tangible…flesh and blood confronting moral reckoning.

The death penalty takes us to places unimaginable. I've seen the search for mercy in the darkest of places. I've seen those who desperately claw for it…as though mercy itself might break through concrete walls and razor wire. I've heard last words spill out…sometimes apologies, sometimes rage and sometimes silence that shakes the air. Families are left in pieces, their hearts torn open on the altar of the state. They weep, they collapse, they hold one another as if the embrace itself might push back the death that surrounds them. Guards look away, some steeling themselves with practiced indifference, others weeping quietly when they think no one is watching. All of us are drawn into the ritual of death…caught in a machinery that grinds down not only the condemned but every soul it touches.

Into this moment, verses of scripture do not arrive as comfort but as judgment…even as fire in the bones. Words that do not float as pious metaphor in the chamber…but rather words that burn. Who among us dares to claim such innocence? "…who is without sin…" (John 8:7). "…you did it unto me…" (Matthew 25:40). "…depart from me…" (Matthew 7:23). "I have not come to call the righteous…" (Matthew 9:13). "…all are one in Christ Jesus…" (Galatians 3:28). These words are not relics of a distant age. They are the voice of God breaking into the present…

naming the execution chamber for what it is…not justice but blasphemy, a usurpation of the judgment that belongs to God alone. On death row, the scriptures are no abstraction…they are like lightning cutting through the night, exposing our sin, demanding repentance.

The condemned…even when guilty…still bear the image of God. That truth cannot be erased by verdicts or crimes or headlines. "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness" (Genesis 1:26). That promise still clings to the one strapped down before the needle. It still glimmers in the eyes of the one lying on the gurney. To deny their life is to deny God's creation…to blaspheme the Creator. I have seen flickers of holiness in their final hours…repentance blossoming in unlikely soil…courage shaking yet resolute…tenderness breaking through. These are glimpses of a God who does not throw anyone away…who does not finish with any of us until the last breath. However…with the extinguishing of one fragile life… society declares that God's image is expendable…that repentance can be cut short…that the cross is unnecessary. The death penalty is a lie…and God will not let us forget it.

The death penalty wounds more than the condemned. Executions wound families…shredding them across generations. They wound the guards and the witnesses…forcing them to carry the weight of blood on their hands. They wound the community… teaching us to believe that violence heals and vengeance saves. They wound the nation itself…making us colder, harder…more estranged from the heart of God. The blood-soaked ground beneath our prisons cries out for change. The trauma never leaves…it clings…it festers. I live it. You return home in silence…haunted…unable to reconcile what you've seen with the God who breathes life into every soul.

And yet…God is not absent. Even in the valley of the shadow of death, love somehow breaks through. A hug given by a mother who refuses to let her son die unloved. A whispered prayer

offered as a last defiance of despair. A family of a victim speaking words of forgiveness…breaking the cycle of violence with grace that no law can mandate. These moments are fragile…but they burn like embers against the cold. They remind us that justice is not merely retributive but restorative, that mercy is the scandal at the heart of God's reign. "I desire mercy, not sacrifice," says the Lord (Hosea 6:6 / Matthew 9:13). Every act of mercy in that chamber is a prophetic sign…a foretaste of the Beloved Community…a resistance to the empire of death.

The economy of God is never about what one deserves. If justice were about what one deserves…we would all get the death penalty. Grace is not earned. It is given. Grace overturns our calculations and shatters our scales…exposing the lunacy of murder as righteousness. The cross of Christ proclaims forever that life…not death…is the last word. Every execution denies the gospel…but every whisper of mercy, every act of compassion, every refusal to let violence have the final say…loudly proclaims God's love for us all. To stand against execution is not sentiment but prophecy. It is to declare with the Aposttle Paul that, "Death has been swallowed up in victory…" (1 Corinthians 15:54). It is to stand with Jesus against the powers and say: not one more stone, not one more death, not one more blasphemy against the God who is life.

Pastoral and Ethical Responsibility amidst the Death Penalty

Pastoral responsibility here is raw.

I have knelt on dirty floors, heard final words and felt the thunderous echo in my own chest long afterward. Some words were apologies, whispered like fragile confessions carried into the silence. Others were cries of rage, hurled like stones against a wall no one would let fall. Still others were only silence, the unbearable hush of a life about to be extinguished. These moments never leave me. They walk with me into prayer…into preaching…into my dreams. Jesus' words…"I was in prison…"

(Matthew 25:36)…are not metaphor. They are an incarnational imperative. They are not poetic sentiment. They are a divine directive. To stand beside the condemned is to stand beside Jesus Christ himself…suffering, rejected and ultimately executed.

Pastoral responsibility amidst the death penalty is not clean. It is not theoretical. It is bloody, weary and fragile. I have prayed with mothers whose bodies shake with grief, with children who cannot comprehend why their father will not come home and with guards whose eyes glaze over with shame even as they put the process in motion. I have seen witnesses leave execution chambers unable to speak, unable to breathe. This ministry is not safe. It is dangerous, because love always is. Yet the shepherd cannot abandon the sheep in the valley of death. Even when the state has judged, condemned…and prepared to kill…Christ commands His followers to be present in the darkest hour. That is pastoral responsibility…to embody mercy where everything around you cries out for vengeance.

Ethical and Prophetic Witness Against the Death Penalty

Ethical responsibility is no less urgent. The death penalty fractures…not only the condemned…but families, communities and all who participate in the system. Every death sentence ripples outward like shockwaves from an earthquake. Children learn despair. Parents carry shame. Neighbors lose hope. Guards are hardened. Clergy are torn. Communities are poisoned. No one is untouched. Pastoral care must reach across these fractures…to the condemned, to the victims' families, to the executioners, to the politicians…to all who could be touched by the act. To remain silent in the face of such destruction is to collude with it. Even amidst the horror of it all…we have a responsibility to live out what scripture says…"Do not repay anyone evil for evil…" (Romans 12:17).

Prophetic witness demands that we say what others won't. Killing does not heal. Death cannot bring life. The machinery of

execution is a lie…promising closure but delivering only deeper wounds. Prophetic witness of restorative justice is the only faithful path. We must consistently declare the obvious, "Don't kill…" (Exodus 20:13). Damning the actions of people who glorify execution is a prophetic act. Each act of presence…each plea for clemency…each effort at reconciliation…resists a culture that worships vengeance and sanctifies violence. The prophet Isaiah cries out, "Learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow" (Isaiah 1:17). The word of God's justice has not expired. It is alive and binding.

This is why the Church cannot be silent. We must preach mercy from pulpits, cry it out in the streets, teach it everywhere we go and embody it in pastoral care. We must stand between the mechanisms of death…the killers disguised as politicians…and declare…not in our name, not in Christ's name, not in the name of the God of life. The prophetic task is always costly. John the Baptist was beheaded. Jesus was crucified. The vast majority of the apostles were brutally executed. Prophets are never welcomed by empires that wield death. Yet to refuse this witness is to betray the God who is life itself…the one who has given His life that we might be forever free.

Spiritual Formation as Resistance Against the Death Penalty

Spiritual formation is not optional in this work. It is lifeblood. Without it, I collapse. Without it, despair consumes me. Every prayer is oxygen. Every act of mercy and compassion is a flame of grace against the suffocating darkness. To pray with the condemned is to join Christ in Gethsemane. To walk into the chamber is to walk toward Golgotha. To hold a grieving mother is to cradle Mary at the cross. These are not metaphors. They are incarnations of the Gospel.

In our souls, we must be faithful, "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). But prayer is not passivity. Prayer is fuel for

action. When I pray with shaky hands…I also rise to work for justice. When I pray for mercy…I step into the breach to embody it. When I pray for courage…I find myself speaking words I thought I could never utter. This is formation. We must allow ourselves to be shaped by the Spirit into people who refuse to kill…who refuse to bless death…who insist on life…most often to our own detriment.

The Church must cultivate communities where prayer and action are inseparable…where liturgy trains us to love mercy more than vengeance…where scripture is read as a living word against the idols of violence…where sacraments remind us that life is a gift never ours to take…where all are raised to believe that forgiveness is stronger than punishment. Without such formation, we become captives of the culture of death. With it…we become a living resistance.

To walk the path the death penalty has laid before us is exhausting. It is lonely. It is often despised. Yet it is holy. Every visit to the condemned, every tear shed with a grieving family, every word spoken in defiance of the death penalty is a testimony that Christ is risen…and life…not death…will always have the final word. To be formed in this way is to believe and proclaim that no one…not even the filthiest of monsters…is beyond the reach of God's mercy. This is the Gospel. This is our call.

Refusing to Be Executioners: Our Role In the Era of the Death Penalty

Walking amongst a diversity of theologians and the witness of scripture, I see one undeniable truth…human hands should never be instruments of ultimate judgment. The death penalty is the apex of evil.

The death penalty rips through God's creation. Families are torn apart, communities splinter and scars remain for generations. It denies mercy, twists justice and turns human suffering into a

cruel show….a public demonstration of vengeance masquerading as righteousness. I've seen it with my own eyes. Each execution carries a moral contagion…infecting all it encounters. We watch the state claim life. We suspect our own complicity…our own vulnerability to the seduction of violence…yet far too often we do nothing. The machinery of execution is a lie that whispers of finality. But justice can never be achieved in killing. What is inflicted on the condemned is mirrored in the hearts of those who execute…the hands that administer…the eyes that watch…the law that authorizes. All are wounded. All are diminished.

"They deserve to be executed, just not by any of us…" is not a compromise. It is not a timid appeal to sentiment or pragmatism. It is declaration. It is fire. It is refusal. It is a sword against the idol of vengeance…a torch carried into the darkness of human cruelty. It proclaims that life…even that of the horribly guilty… is sacred…that mercy is not optional…and that justice will never be able to be measured by the scale of death. To say this is to insist that we can recognize evil without becoming instruments of evil ourselves. We are all sinners…none righteous enough to take life…all saved by grace. Scripture reminds us, "None is righteous, no, not one" (Romans 3:10). Not the judge…not the executioner…not the lawmakers…not the courts…no one. No truly moral teaching will ever grant permission to extinguish the life God created. To touch the condemned with death is to deny God's ultimate sovereignty over life.

Our vocation is piercingly clear. We are called to speak truth…to resist the allure of evil…to advocate fiercely for life…to love those whom society would discard…to defend and restore the condemned. Refusal of execution is not passive of evil…it is active resistance of evil. It is insistence that even the guilty… even the monstrous…remain within the protective reach of God's mercy. In every courtroom…every prison corridor…every legislative chamber…our witness proclaims, "…today is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2). Salvation is not reserved for the innocent alone. If it was…we would all be damned. Salvation is

offered in the present moment, even to those the world would consign to death. What are we waiting for? To remain silent is to consent. To delay is to betray. The task before us is urgent, sacred and non-negotiable. We cannot know Christ unless we fight the death penalty. We have got to get saved from all of this killing.

In many ways, my life is often defined by the death penalty. Thus, I stand. I shake. I grieve. I am afraid. Yet I am resolute. I stand as a witness to mercy in the midst of injustice. I stand as a voice crying in the wilderness of sanctioned violence… reminding the world that no statute, no machinery, no executioner can annul the sacredness of life or the claim of God's mercy. The condemned must be defended. Families must be comforted. Society must be awakened. Mercy must rise. And we must refuse…in both word and deed…to be executioners. Each act of resistance, each defense of life, each plea for clemency is a sacred flame in the horrors we have created, a sign that God's love is not extinguished by human cruelty.

"Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone…" (John 8:7). These words are not gentle advice. They're a command. They're a jackhammer on the conscience of a world too quick to kill. They are a reminder that power is not measured in death…but in restraint, in compassion and in refusal to mimic evil. To live by this command is to be faithful to the God of life. To stand with the condemned is to stand with Christ Himself. And to stand…frightened yet unyielding…is to declare that mercy is stronger than vengeance, that life is inviolable and that no one has the right to claim that which belongs only to God.

8.31.25

The Body of Death: Bioethics & Nitrogen Hypoxia Execution

Listening to the Bodies: Witness Accounts of Nitrogen Hypoxia Execution

Kenneth Eugene Smith

On a January evening in 2024, Kenneth Eugene Smith walked into a room remade for something no one had ever seen before. The chamber at William C. Holman Correctional Facility in Atmore, Alabama was stark…pale walls and fluorescent lights everywhere. Strapped to a gurney, mask over his face, Smith became the first person to be executed by nitrogen hypoxia.

Within moments of the gas flowing, Smith's body shuddered. His hands fisted tight, legs twitching and shoulders jerking over and over. There were heaves and long irregular breaths as the lack of oxygen ripped at his lungs. Minutes passed. The silence that followed was almost tangible.

Alan Eugene Miller

Eight months later, Alan Eugene Miller laid on the same gurney. His body responded violently to the flow of nitrogen. Limbs twitched and flexed. His chest rose and fell in uneven rhythms. Breaths came in gasps, punctuated by convulsive jerks. Each movement carried the explosive tension between life and death.

Carey Dale Grayson

By November 2024, Carey Dale Grayson became the third man to meet this fate. The cycle repeated…the mask, the gas and the body writhing for air. Muscle spasms surged along his arms and legs. Shoulders stiffened and relaxed over and over. The chest

heaved in extended efforts to draw oxygen. The final pronouncement punctuated a scene of horrific struggle.

Jessie Hoffman

Next, Louisiana introduced the first test outside of Alabama. Jessie Hoffman entered the chamber at Angola State Penitentiary in March 2025. The same sequence repeated. Torso flexed. Limbs jerked. Fists unclenched. Chest rising in waves. Movement persisted longer than officials had anticipated…the body conveyed the struggle…a silent, repetitive testimony of suffocation.

Demetrius Terrence Frazier

Back in Alabama, Demetrius Terrence Frazier's execution took place in February 2025. The event followed the familiar yet harrowing pattern that had become almost routine. Witnesses reported spasms of the limbs, gasping breaths and subtle tremors that suggested the nervous system was determined to do all that it could to hold on. His arms and legs twitched in abrupt unpredictable movements.

Gregory Hunt

Several months later, in June 2025, Gregory Hunt was executed by nitrogen hypoxia in Alabama. Long intervals of jerking movements alternated with moments of stillness…rendering the progression toward death both unpredictable and grotesquely deliberate. His chest would heave suddenly…then remain motionless…while his limbs twitched in irregular sequences.

Across these six executions, a distinct pattern emerged. Nitrogen hypoxia execution…intended to be a quiet, efficient method…consistently produced visibly violent bodily reactions. Chests heaved up and down for breath. Limbs jerked unpredictably. Torsos heaved with uneven breaths. Subtle tremors underscored

the disjunction between voluntary movement and reflex. Officials framed these responses as involuntary and physiologically expected…yet the bodies told a different story.

Patterns and Observations of Nitrogen Hypoxian Execution

The recurring phenomena raise difficult questions. Gasping and jerking were observed in every case. Prolonged twitching and spasms appeared across individuals with no consistent correlation to age or health status. Observers described the same sequence each time…sudden movements, intermittent convulsions, long periods of uneven chest expansion, then ultimate cessation.

The bodies themselves became a narrative. In their final moments, they performed a silent and repeated testimony of the physiological process, leaving visible evidence of the tension between the state's promise of humane death and the observable physical struggle. Each execution reinforced the same message… nitrogen hypoxia execution was not an invisible, painless slide into oblivion…but a highly observable…violent physiological event.

Bioethical Implications of Nitrogen Hypoxia Execution

The nitrogen hypoxia execution present a bioethical landscape both stark and profoundly unsettling. Across six cases…Smith, Miller, Grayson, Hoffman, Frazier, Hunt…observers consistently documented gasping breaths, convulsive jerks, heaving torsos, repeated limb spasms and persistent movements of fingers, toes, and facial muscles. These involuntary actions, emergent from the body's physiological struggle, transform the human form into both a site and a witness of ethical inquiry. Watching a body fight for air forces us to face the limits of state power, the role of those who carry it out and the ethics of testing unproven methods on living beings. Beyond technical considerations…these episodes

reveal the inherent moral tension between legal mandates and the sanctity of human embodiment.

Autonomy and Consent

Autonomy is central to any bioethical framework. In the context of capital punishment, autonomy is legally circumscribed…the condemned individual is subjected to imposed death, a reality that profoundly constrains the scope of meaningful consent. Nitrogen hypoxia…as a newly implemented execution method… complicates this ethical terrain. Although legally permitted, the procedure functions in practice as an experimental intervention, applied to bodies for which empirical human data remains extremely limited. The visible involuntary movements… twitching limbs, irregular chest expansion, convulsions, and even facial contortions…provide material evidence of physiological processes that the individual cannot control. Even if prisoners nominally…choose…nitrogen hypoxia over other methods, the uncertainty surrounding the lived experience raises questions about whether their consent can ever be fully informed or ethically significant. In effect, the body itself becomes a site of documented experimentation.

Autonomy extends not only to the condemned but also to the professionals involved. Corrections officers, medical consultants, engineers designing hypoxia chambers and procedural overseers confront profound ethical dilemmas. They operate within a tension between mandated duties and personal moral convictions. The repeated convulsions, gasping breaths, and jerking movements observed in all six executions make evident that these professionals participate in a process whose outcomes are unpredictable and whose moral weight is unmistakable. Each movement of the body, each struggle to breathe, underscores the moral complicity of those present, raising questions about the limits of professional obedience and the responsibilities of conscience.

Nonmaleficence and Avoidance of Harm

“Do no harm” is foundational in bioethics. Nitrogen hypoxia was promoted as a supposedly humane alternative to lethal injection…yet the evidence from multiple executions challenges this claim. Convulsions, jerking, heaving and repetitive limb spasms indicate that the body undergoes measurable physiological stress. Nonmaleficence demands that such harm be acknowledged, measured and critically assessed…ignoring or minimizing these observable struggles constitutes an ethical lapse. The persistent pattern of bodily movement across cases suggests that the state is administering harm even under the guise of clinical efficiency…undermining claims of humane practice.

The experimental nature of nitrogen hypoxia further complicates the ethical assessment. Each execution produces new information about human physiology under nitrogen deprivation, yet these observations occur without the safeguards typical of ethical scientific research…no prior consent for experimentation in the fullest sense, no independent oversight, no formal risk mitigation. The body is simultaneously the subject and the instrument of inquiry, revealing the tension between empirical experimentation and moral accountability. Each spasm and jerking motion, while medically informative, exists as evidence of human suffering, creating a dual ethical challenge…the pursuit of procedural reliability versus the moral imperative to prevent harm.

Human Dignity and Embodiment

Human dignity is the cornerstone of bioethics…and it is visibly compromised during these nitrogen hypoxia executions. The spasms, gasping breaths, jerks and heaving torsos highlight the vulnerability of the human body and underscore the ethical importance of considering the question of dignity. Each movement communicates a struggle between life and the imposed legal end, transforming the body into an ethical text that

cannot be ignored. From the perspective of dignity, these involuntary motions are not merely physiological events but moral signifiers…they articulate suffering and the human cost of the experimental method. Observing these movements without reflection risks normalizing harm and diminishing society's ethical sensitivity.

Dignity is further compromised by the mechanization of the execution process. The emphasis on technical precision…timed flows of nitrogen, monitored oxygen deprivation, procedural checklists…contrasts sharply with the unpredictable reality of the human body's response. This contrast exposes a central ethical tension…the drive for procedural efficiency versus the obligation to respect the dignity of the living body. The repeated involuntary motions serve as a visceral reminder that human dignity cannot be quantified, controlled or subordinated entirely to mechanistic design…these nitrogen executions are unpredictable.

Experimental Ethics and Human Subjects

Repeated use of nitrogen hypoxia execution underscores profound experimental ethical concerns. Condemned individuals…while legally sentenced…are de facto human subjects in an untested and minimally studied method. Research ethics frameworks require minimizing harm, securing informed consent and ensuring that benefits justify risk. Here, repeated gasping, jerking, and convulsing indicate that physiological outcomes were uncertain and that human bodies were subjected to repeated stress without comprehensive oversight. The state's insistence on predictability and procedural control sharply contrasts with the bodies' visible responses, highlighting the limits of knowledge when life and death intersect with experimental application.

Each execution also raises questions of reproducibility and moral reliability. While procedural efficiency can be statistically

assessed, the lived human experience…the tactile, visual, and ethical dimensions of involuntary movement…cannot be ethically replicated without incurring real moral costs. Each convulsion and gasping breath is a singular moral event, impossible to reduce to a purely empirical datum. The body functions as both evidence and witness, revealing the obvious ethical boundaries of human experimentation.

Witnessing, Professional Responsibility and Societal Complicity

Ethical responsibility extends to those who bear witness. Family members, spiritual advisors, journalists, correctional staff and the wider public confront the repeated spectacle of convulsions, gasps and jerks. Observing bodies subjected to extreme physiological stress imposes moral and psychological weight, even when states frame these events as routine. Witnesses become participants in the moral landscape, their attention and emotional responses shaping the societal perception of legitimacy and ethical acceptability.

Society itself is implicated. Public sanctioning of execution methods…particularly experimental approaches with visible human struggle…reflects collective ethical responsibility. These visible struggles, repeatedly documented, confront social norms and demand ethical vigilance. Failure to critically assess these methods risks normalizing human experimentation under the guise of legal process.

Proportionality and Moral Justification

Bioethics insists upon proportionality…harm must be commensurate with intended outcomes. While nitrogen hypoxia execution achieves its legal goal…death…the physical manifestations of struggle demand moral consideration. Twisting, jerking, spasms and heaving convey ongoing distress, highlighting the moral cost of pursuing technical or procedural efficiency. Each execution, particularly when repeated in similar

patterns, amplifies the ethical stakes. Proportionality cannot be assessed solely through legal or mechanical criteria…the moral calculus must account for the visible suffering of the body and the broader implications of institutionalizing a method that repeatedly produces horrific struggle.

Philosophy and Morality

The persistent, visible bodily movements…limbs jerking, torsos heaving, chests flexing…function as evidence of ethical tension. The state's experimental approach, the involuntary suffering of the condemned and the moral burden on witnesses coalesce into a profound ethical conundrum. The questions that arise cannot be answered merely by invoking the law…they demand deep moral engagement.

Bioethical Critique of Nitrogen Hypoxia Execution

Nitrogen hypoxia execution presents complex, layered bioethical challenges. Autonomy is severely compromised, nonmaleficence is strained, dignity is visibly threatened, experimental ethics are repeatedly tested, witnesses bear psychological and moral weight and proportionality is morally ambiguous. The repeated gasping, jerking, twitching and heaving chest of each executed individual is not merely a physiological occurrence…it constitutes moral evidence. The ethical demand is clear…careful scrutiny of the method, profound consideration of the administrators' responsibilities and societal reflection on the consequences of normalizing repeated human struggle are imperative. These executions serve as a stark reminder that bioethics cannot remain abstract when confronted with the real and visible suffering of living and breathing human bodies subjected to state-sanctioned executions…the death penalty.

Reflections on Human Responsibility and Nitrogen Hypoxia Execution

Across six executions, the human body emerges as both subject and witness, a silent yet eloquent testament to the weight of state-sanctioned death. Limbs jerk unpredictably. Torsos heave in rhythms that defy mechanical control. Chests flex as if attempting to reclaim the breath that is being systematically withdrawn. Gasps, uneven and desperate, punctuate the passage from life to death, a soundscape that resists the clinical order intended by execution protocols. Nitrogen hypoxia execution, heralded in some circles as a method designed for technical efficiency and humane detachment, repeatedly produces outcomes that are profoundly disturbing.

The body refuses to be a passive instrument. In each instance, it asserts its presence, its struggle and its suffering, challenging any notion that death can be rendered entirely abstract or sanitized through procedure. The physical manifestations of these executions occupy a space of ethical tension. On the one hand, the method is praised for its supposed minimalism…the administration of nitrogen supposedly induces unconsciousness before death, theoretically circumventing pain. Yet the repeated observations tell a different story. The jerking of limbs, the uneven convulsions and the intermittent gasps resist the narrative of clinical efficiency.

They reveal that even under the strictest protocols, the human nervous system continues to register, to react and to demand acknowledgment. The body becomes a medium through which the moral weight of the execution is communicated…and it speaks in a language that no legal document or procedural checklist can fully contain. To witness these manifestations is to confront the profound dissonance between the technical aspiration of a humane death and the ethical reality of a body in distress.

Witness accounts reinforce this dissonance. Observers consistently note the subtle yet undeniable signals of consciousness and struggle…the clenching of fists, the arching

of the back, the fleeting opening of eyes. These are not mere procedural anomalies…they are the body's insistence on presence, on recognition and on the persistence of its own agency even as it is systematically extinguished. Ethical responsibility cannot be delegated entirely to protocol.

It remains with every individual present, every witness, who must reconcile the observed reality of the human form with the abstracted legal and institutional frameworks that sanction death. The body is both evidence and ethical testament…demanding reflection and response.

This reflection extends beyond individual executions to the systemic implications of employing such a method. Nitrogen hypoxia…framed as a clinical tool…is intended to create a controlled environment in which death proceeds predictably and without visible suffering. Yet, the repeated physical struggle suggests that predictability does not equate to ethical neutrality. The visible choreography of death…limbs jerking, torsos straining, gasps breaking through silence…disrupts any comfortable narrative of humane procedure.

Ethical accountability is measured in the confrontation with what is real, what is witnessed and what refuses to be reduced to abstraction. The body's resistance is particularly poignant because it reveals the limits of state power when faced with the lived reality of human life. Law and procedure can dictate the mechanics of execution…but they cannot dictate the moral or ethical experience of those subjected to them.

Nitrogen hypoxia execution is less a neutral instrument than a stage on which the tension between authority and human presence is enacted. Each physical manifestation…the jerk, the gasp, the flex of a chest…becomes a reminder that nitrogen executions are not merely technical procedures but moral events…that carry tremendous weight because they involve sentient bodies. The repeated witnessing of these events

amplifies their ethical resonance…compelling those present to reckon with what it means to participate in…or even to observe…an act of deliberate human termination.

Moreover, the ethical significance of these bodily responses extends to the societal and cultural perception of capital punishment. Public and professional discourse often seeks to abstract executions into numbers, procedures and outcomes. Nitrogen hypoxia execution is discussed in terms of hours, oxygen concentrations and loss of consciousness. Yet, the full reality contradicts this abstraction. The visible struggle is an unignorable testament that legal permissibility and procedural sophistication cannot eliminate the fundamental human dimensions of suffering, agony and agency.

In this way, the body serves as both a witness to and a critique of institutional practice, revealing the moral costs that are often sanitized in official narratives. The repetition of these events across multiple cases underscores the universality of the ethical tension. It is not a singular anomaly but a patterned phenomenon…suggesting that the moral implications are inherent to the method itself.

Each nitrogen hypoxyia execution repeats the same choreography of struggle, producing a cumulative effect on witnesses, officials and the broader public conscience. The repetition compels reflection not only on the immediate ethical responsibilities of those administering or observing the procedure but also on the structural and systemic dimensions of state-sanctioned death. The bodies of the executed communicate a persistent and inescapable ethical question: can a procedure that produces visible struggle…even if brief and intermittent… ever be reconciled with the aspiration to humane treatment?

This question gains particular force when one considers the intimate connection between life, consciousness and bodily expression. The nervous system, the muscular reflexes, the

respiratory effort…these are all active participants in the process of dying. They assert presence at moments when legal authority seeks to enforce absence. To witness these processes is to confront the fragility of procedural control and the irreducibility of human experience. Ethical reflection must attend to this reality, recognizing that even meticulously designed protocols cannot fully mitigate the lived experience of the individual.

The body…particularly in its final gestures…refuses to be subsumed entirely by institutional intent. It asserts a claim on moral attention…compelling acknowledgment of its inherent value and the responsibilities owed to it…even in death. Furthermore, these bodily manifestations illuminate the relational dimension of ethics in the context of execution. Ethical responsibility is not solely the domain of those administering nitrogen hypoxia…it extends to all who witness and interpret these events. The act of seeing becomes morally charged.

Observers are placed in a position where they must confront the full humanity of the person before them and reckon with their own complicity in a procedure that…however legally sanctioned…entails profound ethical consequences. The execution chamber thus becomes a space of shared ethical labor, where the body speaks and the witnesses listen, where silence and observation carry their own weight of moral accountability.

Reflections on Nitrogen Hypoxia Execution and the Ethics of Death

In considering nitrogen hypoxia execution as a moral event, it is crucial to recognize the interplay between technical intent and ethical reception. The method is designed to create a controlled, efficient passage from life to death. Yet, its repeated failure to produce entirely peaceful outcomes reveals the ethical limits of technical design. No matter how carefully calibrated and no matter how rigorously standardized, the method cannot erase the physical realities of dying. The body's responses…jerking,

gasping, flexing…serve as persistent reminders that ethical responsibility cannot be delegated to instruments or procedures.

It resides in the conscious engagement of those who enact, observe and interpret the act. The body is the ultimate witness… and ethical accountability is inseparable from the acknowledgment of that witness. The tension between procedural legality and moral responsibility is perhaps most acutely expressed in the contrast between the clinical aspirations of nitrogen hypoxia and the visible struggle it produces. The state may achieve its procedural goals, executing sentences in accordance with established law, yet the ethical dimensions remain unresolved.

The choreography of struggle…the body's insistence on recognition…cannot be legislated away. It demands reflection, dialogue and moral reckoning. Nitrogen hypoxia execution is a site of ethical encounter, a space where the abstract principles of law and the tangible realities of human experience collide. The body, in its final movements, becomes the ultimate interlocutor, challenging assumptions of neutrality, efficiency and humane detachment.

The repeated observations of bodily struggle across multiple executions highlight a central ethical truth…that the human body cannot be divorced from moral consideration, even in the context of legally sanctioned death. Limbs that jerk, torsos that heave, chests that flex and gasps that punctuate the passage from life to death are not mere physiological phenomena…they are ethical signals. They remind all present that death is never merely an administrative task, a technical procedure or a matter of legal compliance. The body, in its silent testimony, insists that dignity, recognition and ethical engagement are inseparable from the act of execution…even when the procedure itself is meticulously controlled.

In this light, nitrogen hypoxia execution transcends its status as a mere method. It becomes a lens through which we confront the tension between law, procedure and moral responsibility. Each execution is a moral event, a convergence of human presence and ethical obligation. The repeated physical manifestations…the jerks, the gasps, the fleeting reflexive gestures…serve as enduring reminders that procedural efficiency cannot replace dignity and legality cannot substitute for ethics.

The body remains, at every step, both subject and witness, a silent yet compelling interlocutor in the ongoing moral dialogue that surrounds the act of execution. Across these six executions, the cumulative effect is undeniable. The repetition of struggle reinforces the ethical lesson that human life, even in its termination, carries inherent weight that cannot be mitigated by technical design or legal sanction. The observable resistance of the body insists upon moral attention, challenging witnesses and society at large to confront the profound consequences of capital punishment. Nitrogen hypoxia execution is less a neutral tool than a stage for ethical confrontation, where the choreography of death and the witness of the living intersect.

In their final movements, the six men executed by nitrogen suffocation left an unavoidable truth…ethical responsibility isn't abstract…it is lived, it is witnessed and it weighs on us all.

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9.1.25

The God Who Will Not Stay Dead: On Resurrection

*This sermon is the foundation from which a much more colorful sermon that I delivered yesterday at the funeral of Carol Orr arose (which can be found on the Facebook page of Quapaw Quarter United Methodist Church). She was a very dear friend. The entire time I knew her, she demanded that I never back down from a fight. I hope I've made her proud.

Keep Watching

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**All scripture comes from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible.

Resurrection in Creation

"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). God arose out of chaos. God pressed breath into dust. "Then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life" (Genesis 2:7). And then, "…God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them" (Genesis 1:27).

Friends, listen to me…every one of us carries resurrection in our flesh. To be human is to bear the stamp of the God who will not stay dead. And here's the heart of it…Christ was in God, and God was in Christ, from the very beginning. Resurrection wasn't an afterthought. Resurrection is at the core of God's being. Resurrection is not just what God does…it is who God is. And because we are made in God's image, resurrection pulses in us too.

God's Image Preserved Through History

Adam and Eve

Look at the Garden. Adam and Eve fail. They hid in shame. But God makes garments, clothes them (Genesis 3:21). That's resurrection. Shame covered. Humanity restored. The image of God preserved. And friends, let me tell you, to bear God's image is to know that even when we fall…resurrection wraps us again in dignity.

Israel in Egypt

When Pharaoh threw Hebrew babies into the Nile (Exodus 1:22), he tried to erase God's image. But God…turned the waters of death into waters of deliverance. The sea split, and Israel walked through on dry ground (Exodus 14:21–22). That's resurrection on the scale of a nation. To be made in God's image is to resist the Pharaohs who deal in death.

Psalms, Job and the Call to Rise

The Psalms…they sing it. "You brought me up, O LORD" (Psalm 30:3). "Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil" (Psalm 23:4). "Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes in the morning" (Psalm 30:5). To be human is to rise with the morning…to carry in our bones the rhythm of resurrection.

Job, crushed in the ash heap, says it, "I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth" (Job 19:25). That's the image of God refusing to surrender to despair. Resurrection will find a way through. Always.

Jesus: Resurrection Embodied

Healings and Raising the Dead

Then Jesus. The fullness of resurrection with skin on. He declares, “I am the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25). Look at Jesus and you see God in full…resurrection embodied. And he shows us. “Little girl, I say to you, get up!” (Mark 5:41). “Young man, I say to you, get up!” (Luke 7:14). “Lazarus, come out!” (John 11:43). Every one of us…made in God’s image…is called to do the same. Raise. Heal. Restore.

The Cross and Resurrection

Then comes the cross. Blood. Nails. Silence. “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34). Death tried to shatter the image of God. But the image of God cannot be broken.

On the third day, the stone rolled back. “He has been raised; he is not here” (Mark 16:6). Mary heard her name (John 20:16). Thomas touched the wounds (John 20:27). The disciples locked the doors, but Jesus walked right through (John 20:19). That is resurrection…the image of God alive, unstoppable. We stand in victory with Christ…the resurrected God.

Living Resurrection in Acts and Paul

Acts shouts it forward: “God raised him up, and of that we are witnesses” (Acts 2:32). To bear God’s image is to be a living witness to resurrection. Not to just say it…to live it.

Paul puts it in the strongest word he knows…love. “Love never ends” (1 Corinthians 13:8). Love is resurrection. Love is the image of God in us. “And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love” (1 Corinthians 13:13). Love without end. Leave no body behind. That is what resurrection is about.

Revelation: The Fulfillment of Resurrection

Revelation gives us a vision of the fullness of resurrection. "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth" (Revelation 21:1). "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more" (Revelation 21:4). Death…thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:14). The river of life flowing through the city. The tree of life with leaves for the healing of nations (Revelation 22:1–3). That is the destiny of all of those made in the image of resurrection…all of us…humanity restored…creation made whole.

It's all Resurrection.

So…stop treating resurrection like a metaphor….stop pushing it off as imagery. Resurrection isn't an idea. Resurrection is who God is. And we…made in God's image…we are resurrection's reflection.

It's all resurrection.

Creation unveils resurrection. Exodus exhibits resurrection. Psalms sing resurrection. Job cries resurrection. Jesus embodies resurrection. Acts preaches resurrection. Paul defines resurrection. Revelation fulfills resurrection.

Let me repeat…it's all resurrection.

Resurrection as Our Identity

Every breath you take is resurrection because you are made in God's image. Every time you rise after falling, resurrection speaks through you. Every time you love in a world of hate, God's image shines through you. And when your body lies down in death…resurrection will still call your name…because the God who made you in his image is the God who will not let you stay dead.

That's the gospel. That's the heartbeat of God. In fact, that's the only damn thing worth preaching about. Resurrection.

*added section connecting the death penalty:

And yet, we cannot speak of resurrection without naming the ways we refuse it in our world. The death penalty…final, irreversible…is the very opposite of resurrection. It says some bodies cannot rise…some lives are beyond redemption…some images of God can be erased. But God's truth shouts louder… every human bears the stamp of resurrection. Every condemned life is still God's creation, still capable of being lifted and still worthy of restoration. To honor resurrection is to resist the executioner's supposed claim on life.

9.2.25

Nitrogen Executions as Moral Suffocation

On Nitrogen Executions or The Horror of Suffocating Someone to Death or On Moral Suffocation

Nitrogen Executions: Forced Suffocation

In quiet thought, you realize what it truly means to suffocate someone. Nitrogen executions promise clean, efficient, scientific death. But behind that sterile language lies the same moral suffocation…breath ripped away…life ended…by human hands. The act may be modern, clinical, and controlled…but the terror, the intimacy of dying and the violation of the sacred gift of breath remain unchanged.

Breath Is Life: The Sacred Gift

Breath is life. The first cry of a newborn. The last exhale when a body falls still. Everything in between is a gift we do not own… it is God's gift. To suffocate someone is to step into God's place and say, "No more." To choke the breath out of a body is not just murder. It is blasphemy. It is a declaration that you…not God… get to decide when life ends.

The Choice to Kill: Intentionality

Suffocation begins with the choice. There is nothing accidental about taking away breath. Everything is intentional. Someone decides that life stops now. That another person no longer deserves to draw a single breath. In that decision, a human being becomes a problem to erase…a burden to remove. The choice claims dominion over the very thing God gives freely.

The Cruelty: Pain, Panic, and Moral Consequences

Then comes the cruelty. Death by suffocation is slow. The lungs burn. The chest tightens. Panic floods the mind. Every cell screams for air. Every instinct cries for life. This is not merely killing. It is torment. It is intimate. Deliberate. Cruel. The one who inflicts suffocation weaponizes the very mechanics of life itself.

The Intimacy of Violence

The act requires closeness…an invasion of sacred space. The aggressor is near enough to see the fear, hear the gasping and feel the struggle. This is not a distant clinical act. It is violation. It is domination at its rawest.

Ripples Beyond the Body

The harm spreads beyond the body. No life exists in isolation. Families, friends, communities…all feel the void left behind. The grief, the panic, the silence…ripple outward and multiply the moral catastrophe. One act of suffocation becomes anguish that touches far more than the body on which it is inflicted.

Methods Matter

Some argue that death is death and that the method does not matter. Wrong. Methods always matter. Some deaths are quick. Some conceal suffering. Some distance the killer from the act. Suffocation forces one to witness the struggle…hear the terror… and prolong the panic. To choose this method is to choose the apex of horror.

The Stain on the Conscience

The act also stains the conscience of the one who carries it out. Empathy must be silenced. Compassion muted. The natural aversion to another's suffering suppressed. Watching terror unfold and continuing anyway normalizes cruelty.

Clinical Language Cannot Hide the Horror

Even attempts to disguise suffocation under procedure cannot hide the moral reality. Words like humane and technical cannot erase the gasping body, the terrified soul or the stolen breath. Dressing it up does not hide the horror. The act remains suffocation. The terror remains fully present no matter who is carrying it out.

Collective Corruption: Society Suffocates

Suffocation does not stop with the body. It seeps into the soul of those who witness it, those who permit it and those who legislate it. Each sanctioned act of this horrific evil is a chokehold on our collective morality. Compassion dulls. Conscience tightens. We begin to see suffering as acceptable, panic as incidental and agony as routine. In killing the breath of one…we suffocate the ethics of us all. Moral courage shrinks. Empathy bends under pressure. The community that tolerates forced executions inhales this slow choking corruption until horror becomes familiar… no…normal. In every gasping body, there is a mirror held up to our own humanity…showing us that we are willing to compromise, that we are willing to overlook and that we have begun to smother in ourselves.

Breath Is Sacred

At the heart of the matter…the truth is simple. Breath is sacred. To take it away deliberately is to deny the God who gives it. To suffocate someone is to reject their humanity…to reject your own humanity…and to reject the One who breathed life into dust.

Nitrogen Executions: Modern Methods, Timeless Moral Horror

And yet, forced suffocations have now been enshrined in law. Nitrogen Hypoxia Executions. Nitrogen Gas Executions.

Nitrogen Executions. They promise quickness. They promise mercy. But mercy does not look like choking a person to death. Efficiency cannot excuse terror. Behind the sterile language is the same reality…a body gasping, a soul terrified and breath stolen. The moral reality has not changed. Giving it a new name does not make it right. It is still the theft of life itself. Still the defiance of God.

9.3.25

On Possession, Radical Evil and the Pursuit of Justice

The Mystery of Possession

In recent days, the horrific shooting at Annunciation Catholic Church…where children were gathered for Mass…has forced me to once again wrestle with possession and the depths of radical evil. To imagine the terror of little ones at prayer confronted with sudden violence is almost unbearable…and to think that they were the targets of this shooting is unfathomable. Yet, this is the world we live in. This reflection on the possession of evil is my attempt to face that reality, to wrestle with what overtakes people and to ponder what it means for those who push back.

Keep Watching

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When Humanity Is Seized

There are moments when a human loses the ability to act human. Their eyes go cold and hollow. Their voice hardens into something detached. Every movement gains a deliberate and terrifying precision. Thoughts press in from somewhere beyond…twisting thoughts that they once held dear. Choices emerge that betray everything they once valued. The path they tread is guided by something relentless…something external…something alive. It is not weakness. It is not confusion. It is possession. The self…once sovereign…is seized, twisted, unrecognizable. The light of recognition dims. Familiar gestures become foreign. Love turns brittle. Mercy dries up. What was once warm and human becomes rigid, mechanical and almost ritualistic. Friends withdraw, terrified by the gaze. Family wonders if they still know the one standing before them. The body remains…but the spirit seems hijacked. What was once

trustworthy begins to feel dangerous. The ground of relationship collapses. You look into their face…and you see someone…and no one…all at once.

Defining Radical Evil

This is radical evil. It is precise. It is persistent. It presses against morality, corrodes empathy and bends human thoughts and action toward cruelty. Even the most disciplined human can be caught in its currents…struggling against impulses that feel invasive, alien and unrelenting. Integrity hangs by a thread. Life is balanced on the edge of chaos. Radical evil is not content with small corruptions. It multiplies. It seeks cracks in conscience and expands them until everything fractures. It does not announce itself loudly at first. It whispers. It tempts. It erodes. Then, it overwhelms. Radical evil operates like a shadow that lengthens until light itself is suffocated. You begin to see it in their posture…in their tone…in their decisions. It is not just wrong…it is calculated wrong. Not just cruelty…but rehearsed cruelty. A choreography of destruction. Those caught in its grip often appear calm and rational. That is part of the terror. It feels natural to them.

The Horror of Possession

Some people…those who commit acts of unspeakable cruelty, deliberate harm and systematic deception…are possessed. They are vessels through which a force opposed to life moves. Yet… even in the grip of possession…they remain human. Beneath the horror the self still exists. Fragile, battered and struggling…but somehow still present. It may be buried under layers of distortion. It may be twisted beyond recognition. It may be almost impossible to find. But the human is there. The child they once were. The dreams they once carried. The hopes they once held. Somewhere…beneath the mask…beneath the terror… beneath the violence…there is still a pulse of humanity. That is what makes possession so horrifying. Because we cannot simply

dismiss the possessed as monsters. They are not wholly other. They are us. They are what we could become. They are humans who have been overtaken…not humans who have ceased to exist.

Justice and Possession

Even when the possessed move as instruments of cruelty…even when the darkness within them seems absolute…life remains. The self…however seized or fractured…continues to exist. To recognize this is to confront the painful necessary work of vigilance in the face of evil. True justice is measured not in finality…but in the refusal to become what we oppose. It is not neat. It is not simple. It demands that we hold the tension. That we guard the fragile flame of conscience even when the world around us rages with destruction. Justice is not about resolution. It is about endurance. It keeps watch. It remembers. It resists the temptation to mirror the evil it names. And in that refusal, there is moral courage. Courage that does not seek the comfort of ending…but the endurance of resisting.

The Harder Work: Illumination and Containment

Radical evil is real. It presses, distorts and possesses. But so too does the possibility of conscience…of restraint…of moral courage. The work of confronting possession is not destruction… it is about illumination, containment and the protection of life… for the innocent and even the possessed. That is the harder work. It is easier to crush than to contain. It is easier to extinguish than to illuminate. But illumination is what keeps us human. Containment is what prevents evil from multiplying unchecked. Protection is what allows us to affirm the sanctity of life even when life has been twisted almost beyond recognition. If we abandon this work…we abandon ourselves. If we surrender to destruction…we surrender the fragile truth that even in darkness…humanity persists.

The Fragile Line Between Resisting Possession and Becoming Evil

We must feel the weight of this darkness. We must allow it to warn us that morality is hard, integrity fragile and human life precious. Some are possessed. Some are instruments of a force that defies understanding. But even in these cases…destruction is not the answer. To destroy is to join the destruction…not to end it. We cannot turn in to the very thing we claim to resist. We have to stand in opposition by refusing to become what we fear. Indeed, our response to evil will always reveal whether we too have been overtaken.

Those who respond to the actions of the possessor with the actions of the possessor will quickly become the possessed. Those who surrender to destruction will themselves be destroyed. Those who abandon the hard work of restraint will lose themselves in the very darkness they condemn. To resist radical evil is to resist its methods. To confront possession is to refuse possession's ways. The line between the possessed and the unpossessed is both thin and fragile. We cross it the moment we surrender to destruction. If we are to remain human…if we are to remain free…we must resist not only evil itself…but also the temptation to fight evil by becoming it.

Final Word: On Restraining Possession and Pursuing Justice

In the midst of possession, justice cannot look like vengeance. It cannot be about pretending that destruction will heal us. Justice must be about holding on to what is still human…sometimes barely human…in both the harmed and the one who harms. We cannot cure possession by mirroring it. We cannot drive out darkness by becoming darkness ourselves. What we can do is contain, protect, keep watch and pray. We can guard the fragile spark of life…even when it flickers faintly. Justice is not clean. It is not simple. But it is the refusal to give up on humanity…even

when humanity has been twisted almost beyond recognition.
That is the work we are left with.

9.3.25

The Case Against the Death Penalty for Adolf Hitler

Penalty? On the Weight of Human Atrocity

To say Adolf Hitler's name is to summon the darkest chapters of human history. Trains screaming into camps. Families torn apart at arrival. Children led to their deaths. Six million Jews murdered in the Holocaust. Millions more…Romani people, disabled people, queer people, political opponents, prisoners of war…also swept away by systematic cruelty. Cities leveled. Nations shattered. The landscape marked with graves.

If there was ever a man who seemed to deserve the death penalty…the rope…the bullet…the guillotine…it was Hitler. His crimes are almost incomprehensible. His name synonymous with destruction. To argue that such a man should not have received the death penalty may sound insane. And yet… The argument is not about mercy. It is not about forgetting. It is about justice… and about what justice truly requires when faced with the most extreme evil.

The Cry for the Death Penalty and the Temptation of Vengeance

The cry for the death penalty for Hitler would have been overwhelming…and rightly so. Survivors who lost everything. Soldiers who buried friends. Parents left with empty cradles. Children left with empty arms. Entire nations would have demanded balance. To see him sentenced to death by the death penalty might have felt like closure…a symbolic repayment for the immeasurable pain he caused. I understand that cry. To deny it would be dishonest. The hunger for vengeance is human… visceral…understandable. But justice cannot be built on hunger alone. Justice must rise above instinct.

Vengeance feels like justice because it offers symmetry. He killed…therefore he should be killed. It promises balance…an equation neatly closed. But vengeance is not justice. It is the reflection of harm back into the world. If we had imposed the death penalty on Hitler…the act would have satisfied grief momentarily…but left the deeper moral truth unsettled. The death penalty is never justice. Not even with Hitler.

Human Dignity Cannot Be Conditional

Human dignity cannot be conditional. If it can be stripped away, it was never dignity at all. Hitler built his empire on the lie that dignity could be erased. He declared that Jews, Romani people, disabled people and countless others were unworthy of life. His crimes flowed from that belief. If the world had imposed the death penalty on him…it would have risked repeating his logic in a different key. It would have said…some lives fall beneath protection. And the moment we allow that principle…we stand on the same ground that gave birth to Hitler's crimes.

To resist Hitler fully is to resist the temptation to decide who is worthy of life. Even him. To sentence him to the death penalty would have been to betray the universality of dignity at the very moment it needed defending most fiercely. The refusal to kill him would have been the radical declaration that dignity does not depend on conduct. That even in the face of atrocity…life remains sacred.

The Ultimate Punishment: Life or the Death Penalty?

Hitler's entire reign was a machinery of horror and death. If we had responded to him with the death penalty…we would have echoed his worldview. We would have ratified the lie that death is the final word. But justice cannot mirror the crimes it condemns. It must show another way. Refusing the death penalty would have been a radical refusal of his logic…a clear

declaration that death and the death penalty do not get to rule over us.

There is also the danger of symbols. The death penalty does not end with the body. It becomes story, myth and fuel for ideology. Hitler's death penalty could have been twisted by his followers into martyrdom…recast as noble defiance. Death is easily mythologized. But life in prison drains myth away. There is nothing noble in watching a dictator waste away behind bars. No grandeur in watching him age into irrelevance. The slow decay of a man who once claimed godlike power would have been the truest punishment. It would have shown the world not a martyr… but a broken man…reduced to silence and memory.

Death is quick. But life stretches on. Life without power. Life without audience. Life without empire. Imagine Hitler in a cell… no armies, no flags and no adoring crowds. Only walls and time. Only memory and decay. The death penalty would have let him escape judgment. Life would have forced him to endure it. To deny him the death penalty would not have been mercy. It would have been the harsher sentence…the deeper justice.

Justice Beyond the Death Penalty

The refusal to use the death penalty would not only have been about punishment. It would have been about the meaning of justice itself. He built his empire on death. If we had answered in kind…we would have let him define morality for us. True justice must be more than a response to harm. It must be a refusal to let evil dictate the boundaries of good. By sparing his life, humanity would have said…even here, even now, death is not our master.

Of course, this refusal would have been costly. Survivors would have cried out in rage. Families would have felt abandoned. Nations would have felt cheated. But such is the cost of moral responsibility…to hold principles even when the cost is seemingly unbearable. The cost of sparing Hitler would have

been immense. But that cost would have testified to the strength of our moral convictions.

Historical Accountability

The death penalty is easy justice. It pretends to balance what cannot be balanced. It pretends to heal what cannot be healed. But the truth is harsher…Hitler's crimes could never be repaid. His death by the death penalty would not have resurrected the murdered. His death would not have rebuilt the ruined cities. His death would not have healed the wounds. The death penalty would only have pretended that the debt was settled. Refusing the death penalty would have been to accept the harder truth… some wounds remain, and justice must live with them without resorting to death.

The Weight of Survivor Grief

Keeping him alive would not have meant forgetting. It would have meant remembering in a deeper way. Every day of his imprisonment would have testified to his crimes. Every day would have reminded the world of what he did and of what we chose not to do in return. His survival would have been a monument…not to his power…but to our refusal to echo him. The burden of memory would have been heavy…but it would have been a testimony…that even in the shadow of atrocity… humanity chose life over death.

We cannot talk about moral principle without acknowledging human grief. Those who survived the camps…who lost parents, siblings, spouses, children…would have had every reason to demand the death penalty. That grief is righteous. That grief is unbearable. To resist it would have been its own act of violence…if done without recognition. True justice is not indifferent to pain. It is aware of it. It carries it. It sits in the same room with anger and does not flinch. The refusal to impose the death penalty on Hitler and to insist on life imprisonment instead

would not have been a denial of grief…it would have been the discipline to hold grief and principle together.

Justice Beyond History

Refusing the death penalty for Hitler is not just a historical thought experiment. It is a declaration for all time. It tells future generations that justice is not revenge. It teaches that moral courage is measured not by how we punish the guilty but by how we protect the living. It says that principles are worth standing for even when the cost is personal, national or even global. The act of sparing him would have spoken across decades, across cultures… Justice does not kill. Justice affirms life. Justice resists the logic of destruction.

Why the Death Penalty Causes us to Risk Becoming What We Hate

The risk of the death penalty is that it turns us into what we hate. To kill Hitler would have been to let his logic shape our own. He was guided by evil. If we had imposed the death penalty, we would have joined him. The refusal to kill him would have been the ultimate act of resistance…to face evil without becoming it… to confront death without imitating it…to insist that life is stronger than the ideology of destruction.

This is the true test. Hitler is the boundary case. If the principle against the death penalty cannot hold here…it cannot hold anywhere. If we exempt him, we admit that killing is sometimes justified. If we refuse to exempt him, we declare that dignity is real, life is sacred and that the death penalty is never the answer even in the most extreme cases. That is the lesson for every generation that follows.

Principles That Outlast the Death Penalty

To say Hitler should not have received the death penalty is not to offer him mercy. It is to hold onto ourselves. It is to refuse to let death dictate morality. It is to insist that even here…even with him…the line must not be crossed.

The world never had to make this choice. Hitler took it away when he put a gun to his head in a bunker in Berlin. But imagining the choice is not wasted effort. It forces us to wrestle with what justice means, to confront the limits of vengeance and to decide whether dignity is real or only a convenience. It forces us to decide whether the death penalty will remain the master of our morality…or whether we will declare…once and for all… that life is the stronger word.

And this is the declaration that would have mattered most… justice is not about killing the guilty…but about affirming the living. Justice is not about vengeance…but about refusing to echo the crimes we condemn. Justice is not about symmetry… but about breaking the cycle of death.

To refuse the death penalty for Hitler would not have been weakness. It would have been the strongest thing humanity had ever done. The refusal would have been a monument higher than any gallows and stronger than any rope. It would have been the clearest proof that justice is not vengeance…that life is not conditional…that death does not rule us.

If even Hitler shouldn't face the death penalty…then no one should. That is the final word. Not death. Life.

9.4.25

The Epistle to Alabama Christians: Nitrogen & Anthony Boyd

To Alabama Christians,

Grace and peace to you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ… the crucified one, the risen one, the merciful one who judges the living and the dead.

I write to you with both trembling and fire. I write as one who fears for your souls. I write because on October 23, the State of Alabama intends to kill a man named Anthony Boyd by suffocating him with nitrogen gas. You now know the date. You now know the name. Now, your response is up to you.

Keep Watching

2

This is not simply about the state and its instruments of death. This is about you…Alabama Christians. Scripture is clear: "For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God" (1 Peter 4:17). So, if Alabama kills Anthony Boyd, God will judge you for your complicity…for your silence…for your excuses… for your failure to stand with Christ in the condemned.

I plead with you as one who like you believes in the Gospel of Jesus Christ…you cannot allow this killing to happen without recognizing what it means for your faith…your witness…your salvation.

Anthony Boyd: A Man, Not a Symbol

Anthony Boyd is not just another name on a legal docket. He is not a number in the statistics of capital punishment. He is not an

abstraction for debate. He is a man. He is a human being. He is a brother…created in the image of God.

From the dust of the earth, God formed him. From the breath of God, he drew his first breath. His life…like every life…is a miracle. Even now, as the state prepares to choke him with gas, that same divine breath sustains him.

Though there are deep questions that remain about the fairness of the trial…Boyd was convicted of a terrible crime…a brutal murder in 1993. But guilt does not erase the image of God. Sin does not erase God's claim. Even Cain…the first murderer…bore a mark of protection from God so that no one would take his life. If God refused to let Cain be executed, who are we to say that Anthony Boyd deserves death?

When you look at Boyd, you are looking at someone for whom Christ died. Jesus took his sins…as he took yours…to the cross. Jesus shed his blood for him…just as he shed it for you. If you believe that salvation is for sinners, then you must believe that salvation is for Anthony Boyd.

To suffocate him with nitrogen is to desecrate the image of God. It is to spit on the cross. It is to declare that the blood of Jesus is not enough.

The Idol of the Death Penalty

Alabama Christians have long bowed before the idol of the death penalty. You defend it as though it were an article of faith. You quote Romans 13 as if it gives license for vengeance, forgetting that Paul himself was executed by the same empire he warned against. You treat the death chamber as though it were an extension of the church's altar.

And now the idol has a new mask…nitrogen hypoxia. They will strap a mask on Boyd's face, flood it with nitrogen and watch as

his body starves for oxygen. They call it “humane.” They call it “painless.” They call it “progress.”

But listen…death by suffocation is not mercy. It is ritual. It is sacrifice. It is worship of the false god of retribution. It is Moloch, dressed up in medical clothes.

The prophet Isaiah warns: “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness” (Isaiah 5:20). You are calling suffocation good. You are calling cruelty justice. You are calling execution holy. But it is blasphemy.

The Cross of Jesus Christ already settled the matter. His execution revealed the violence of empire as godless. His resurrection revealed the futility of death as final word. To execute Boyd is to say you have learned nothing from the Cross.

Anthony Boyd and the Cross

Let me be clear…when Anthony Boyd is executed…it will not be Boyd alone who dies. It will be Christ.

Do you not see the parallel? Jesus was condemned by the state…declared a danger to society…abandoned by the crowds, mocked, beaten and executed. His execution was legal. It was orderly. It was justified by the authorities of his time. And yet, it was the greatest sin in human history.

Every execution since Calvary is a repetition of that sin. Every execution cries out, “Crucify him! Crucify him!”

The nitrogen mask that Alabama prepares for Boyd is a crown of thorns. The straps are nails. The suffocation is the cross. If you allow Boyd to be killed, you crucify Christ again.

The New Testament declares, “Once for all Christ died for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God” (1 Peter 3:18). Once for all. No more killing is needed. To kill Boyd is to reject the sufficiency of Christ’s sacrifice.

Alabama Christians, Matthew 25 and the Judgment of the Nations

Hear the words of Jesus in Matthew 25,

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.”

And how will the separation be made? Jesus tells us, “I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to me.”

The righteous are confused, “Lord, when did we see you like this?” Jesus answers: “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”

And to the others…the goats…he says the opposite, “Whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.”

Anthony Boyd is in prison. He is among the least of these. He is precisely the kind of person Jesus was talking about. To show mercy to Boyd is to show mercy to Jesus. To kill Boyd is to kill Jesus.

On the day of judgment…you will not be asked how many Bible verses you memorized…how many hymns you sang…how many sermons you listened to. You will be asked: What did you do to

the least of these? And on October 23, that question will be… What did you do to Anthony Boyd?

If you execute him, Jesus will say, “As you did it to him, you did it to me. Depart from me.”

Mercy Triumphs Over Judgment

But there is hope. James 2:13 proclaims, “Judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment.”

If you show mercy to Boyd, God will show mercy to you. If you refuse to kill him, God will refuse to kill you. If you see Christ in Boyd, Christ will see himself in you.

But if you deny him mercy, you deny yourself mercy. If you choose execution, you choose judgment.

Mercy is not weakness. Mercy is the power of God. Mercy is the gospel. Mercy is what saves. If you want to be saved, show mercy. If you want to be forgiven, forgive. If you want to be spared, spare Anthony Boyd.

The Prophets Against Sacrifice: A Warning for Alabama Christians

God has always rejected human sacrifice. “I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings” (Hosea 6:6).

Israel once believed that killing would cleanse the land. They built altars, offered animals and were even willing to sacrifice their children. And the prophets rose to condemn them:

“Your burnt offerings are not acceptable; your sacrifices do not please me” (Jeremiah 6:20).

“Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me… Your hands are full of blood!” (Isaiah 1:13, 15).

Alabama Christians, listen…your offerings are meaningless while you prepare to kill. Your hymns are detestable while your prisoners suffocate. Your hands are full of blood if you let Anthony Boyd die.

The execution chamber is not the temple of God. It is the altar of Moloch. And if you participate, you are not worshiping Jesus… you are worshiping death.

Alabama Christians Under Judgment

Do not think that God will overlook this. Alabama Churches that sanctify death are under judgment. Alabama Pastors who stay silent are under judgment. Alabama Christians who shrug their shoulders are under judgment.

Your prayers will rot. Your worship will stink. Your witness will crumble. You will become whitewashed tombs…beautiful on the outside, full of death inside.

You cannot serve both Christ and the death penalty. You cannot preach resurrection and practice execution. You cannot worship Jesus on Sunday and kill Anthony Boyd on Thursday.

The Call to Repentance and Action

I write this letter not to condemn you but to call you to repentance. God does not delight in the death of the wicked but in their turning and living (Ezekiel 18:23). There is still time to repent. There is still time to act.

Pray for Anthony Boyd. Protest this execution. Call your leaders. Preach against it from your pulpits. Stand outside the prison and

cry out. Speak his name in your churches. Refuse to let this happen quietly.

If you cannot stop the state, you can still refuse to give it your consent. You can still stand on the side of life, on the side of mercy, on the side of Christ.

Alabama Christians: The Choice is Life or Death

Siblings, the choice is before you…life or death. Blessing or curse. Christ or Moloch. Sheep or goats.

On October 23, Alabama will choose whether to kill Anthony Boyd. But you…Alabama Christians…will choose whether to kill Christ.

If you kill him, judgment without mercy will be shown to you. If you show him mercy, mercy will triumph over judgment.

As the Scripture says: “I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live” (Deuteronomy 30:19).

Choose life. Choose mercy. Choose Christ.

For…to those who show mercy, mercy will be shown.

The Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood

Founder, Execution Intervention Project

Priest (Old Catholic Church)

9.6.25

Priest-Penitent Privilege: A Defense from Death Row

In Defense of Priest-Penitent Privilege

*Bibliography at the end of the article.

Death row represents the ultimate moral, spiritual and ethical crucible. Inmates in extremely confined spaces daily face the final reckoning of their lives. Yet, even in the shadow of execution…fundamental rights and moral duties endure. Central to this is priest-penitent privilege…the inviolable protection of confidential communications between a priest (spiritual advisor) and penitent. For those condemned to die, such interactions are essential for moral reflection, reconciliation with God among others and preparation for death.

Priest-penitent privilege sits at the intersection of theology, morality, practicality, ethics and law.

Roman Catholic canon law mandates the absolute inviolability of the confessional seal (Canon 983 §1, 1983), a standard also followed by Old Catholic bishops who also emphasize freedom of conscience and pastoral autonomy (Utrecht Declaration, 1889). Eastern Orthodox theology frames confession as a spiritual encounter in which the priest acts as a healer of the soul (John Chrysostom, On the Priesthood, 4.9). These three traditions combine to speak widely to the historical teachings of Christianity.

Priest-penitent privilege serves a profound moral purpose. By ensuring confidentiality, it allows inmates to confront guilt honestly, engage in true ethical reflection and seek reconciliation with both God and others. This moral safeguard preserves human dignity and agency, a principle recognized not only in domestic law but also in international human rights standards. For

example, Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948), which affirms the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. Privilege between a priest and penitent enables death row inmates to approach the end of life with integrity, remorse and the possibility of spiritual restoration.

Legally, confidentiality is protected under Federal Rule of Evidence 501, as interpreted alongside constitutional guarantees under the First Amendment, Equal Protection Clause and statutory protections such as the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act (RLUIPA, 42 U.S.C. §2000cc-1(a)). RLUIPA explicitly safeguards the religious exercise of institutionalized persons, including death row inmates… prohibiting substantial burdens unless justified by a compelling state interest pursued in the least restrictive means.

The protection of priest-penitent communications has long been reinforced through legal precedent. Early 19th-century cases, including People v. Phillips (1813) and People v. Smith (1817), recognized that compelling disclosure would undermine both moral accountability and societal interests…affirming the sacred and confidential nature of confession. In modern contexts, federal courts and statutory frameworks continue this protection…Mockaitis v. Harcleroad (1997) upheld clergy privilege even in capital cases…while Ramirez v. Collier (2022) extended these principles to executions, ensuring that final sacramental rites are legally safeguarded. Together, these cases create a continuous line of authority demonstrating that priest-penitent communications are inviolable, providing death row inmates with essential protection for spiritual guidance, moral reconciliation and the exercise of conscience. This essay argues that priest-penitent privilege is essential on death row.

By integrating moral, theological and legal reasoning, it demonstrates that confidentiality in spiritual counseling preserves human dignity, moral agency and religious liberty even at the point of death.

Theological Foundations of Priest-Penitent Privilege

Roman Catholic Perspective

In Roman Catholic theology, confession is a sacramental encounter by which the penitent reconciles with God. The priest acts in persona Christi, facilitating repentance and spiritual healing (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1993, §1467). Canon 983 §1 affirms: “The sacramental seal is inviolable; therefore, it is absolutely forbidden for a confessor to betray in any way a penitent” (Code of Canon Law, 1983).

Breaking this seal would not only violate canon law but would deprive the penitent of moral agency and the opportunity for genuine repentance. Confidentiality ensures that the condemned can confront guilt honestly, reconcile internally with victims and approach death with spiritual integrity. Morally, the seal enables inmates to engage in true ethical reflection, accept responsibility and seek reconciliation with God and humanity.

Further, the Catholic theological framework asserts that sacramental confession is an encounter with divine mercy and the priest serves as a conduit of grace. The penitent’s honest articulation of sin…paired with the priest’s guidance…allows for both moral and spiritual restoration. On death row, where the stakes are ultimate and irretrievable. The sacramental encounter provides a critical avenue for facing past wrongdoing and confronting mortality.

Old Catholic Perspective

The Old Catholic Church, in addition to regularly following the Roman canon, also emphasizes freedom of conscience.
The Utrecht Declaration (1889) asserts that confession must be approached freely, without coercion from church or state. This

aligns with moral and legal reasoning…the state cannot impose on the penitent's religious exercise without violating conscience, ethics and statutory protections.

For inmates, Old Catholic priests provide a confidential space in which repentance is free from fear of civil or institutional reprisal. Ethical guidance is paired with the assurance of confidentiality…enabling penitents to engage in honest self-reflection and moral reckoning. The Old Catholic perspective complements Roman practice by highlighting conscience as a moral touchstone…ensuring that penitents' engagement with God remains uncompromised by external pressures.

Old Catholic theology is also informed by Eastern Orthodox tradition of priests serving as moral and spiritual guides.

Eastern Orthodox Perspective

Eastern Orthodox theology portrays confession as spiritual therapy. St. John Chrysostom stresses that betrayal of a penitent's trust harms both the individual and the Church (On the Priesthood, 4.9). Orthodox canon law emphasizes confidentiality as a mechanism for moral and spiritual healing (Guidelines for Clergy, 6 (Orthodox Church in America, 1998)) (Statute of the Russian Orthodox Church (as adopted by the Jubilee Bishops' Council of the Russian Orthodox Church, August 2000).

A death row inmate revealing decades of violent conduct and deep remorse relies on confidential guidance to achieve moral clarity and spiritual reconciliation. Breach of this confidentiality would cause profound moral harm, demonstrating the convergence of ethical, theological and legal imperatives. Orthodox teaching also emphasizes the therapeutic aspect of confession, guiding penitents toward ethical realignment, preparation for death, and restoration of spiritual balance… critical outcomes for those facing execution.

Ethical and Human Rights Foundations of Priest-Penitent Privilege

Denying priest-penitent privilege fundamentally undermines human dignity, moral agency and the ability of condemned inmates to engage in reconciliation. Even individuals facing execution retain fundamental human rights under both domestic law and international law. The First Amendment guarantees freedom of religion (U.S. Const. amend. I), and the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment ensures all inmates are treated equitably under the law (Cruz v. Beto, 405 U.S. 319, 1972; Turner v. Safley, 482 U.S. 78, 1987). These protections are complemented by international standards, particularly Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which affirms the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, including the right to practice one's faith both publicly and privately (UDHR, 1948). Compelling spiritual advisors (priests/clergy) to disclose confessions or limiting confidential spiritual counseling reduces inmates to mere objects of punishment, depriving them of the moral agency that underpins repentance and reconciliation (Ramirez v. Collier, 142 S. Ct. 1264 (2022)).

Priest-penitent privilege fosters authentic moral reflection. Inmates assured of confidentiality are more likely to fully disclose past wrongs, confront the consequences of their actions and articulate genuine remorse. Confession provides a structured framework for ethical introspection, enabling penitents to align conscience with both divine moral law and societal ethical norms (Canon Law Society of America, 1983; Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1993, §1467). Confidentiality ensures that this process is unhindered by fear of state intrusion…supporting both spiritual reconciliation and internalized ethical accountability.

Clergy, too, bear ethical responsibilities that are protected by privilege. Without legal recognition, priests risk moral compromise if compelled to violate the confessional seal…

undermining both canon law and theological mandates. Protecting confidentiality allows clergy to provide spiritual guidance faithfully and to uphold moral integrity…even under the pressures inherent in death row contexts (Utrecht Declaration, 1889; Chrysostom, On the Priesthood, 4.9). Here, ethical, legal and theological reasoning converge…safeguarding the seal protects both the conscience of the penitent and the integrity of the confessor.

The ethical imperative extends to society as a whole. Confidential sacramental reconciliation encourages acknowledgment of wrongdoing, moral reflection and contrition…even among those condemned for severe crimes. By facilitating genuine ethical engagement, society indirectly fosters moral rehabilitation and reinforces recognition of human dignity (UDHR, 1948; Cruz v. Beto, 405 U.S. 319, 1972). Such engagement also reinforces broader societal norms around accountability, forgiveness and ethical responsibility… demonstrating that the protection of religious exercise benefits both individuals and the moral fabric of the community.

From a practical perspective, priest-penitent privilege supports psychological, spiritual and ethical well-being. Inmates who can confess honestly and receive absolution often experience reduced anxiety, greater emotional stability and a stronger capacity for ethical reflection. Even imminent execution does not diminish the significance of these practices…they provide moral closure, mitigate despair and enable inmates to confront their final accountability in accordance with conscience (Ramirez v. Collier, 142 S. Ct. 1264 (2022); Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1993, §1467).

Legal recognition of priest-penitent privilege is therefore both a moral and human rights obligation. It ensures that inmates can engage in final acts of repentance and moral reconciliation, while clergy are able to minister without coercion. Privilege represents a unique intersection of religious liberty, ethical responsibility

and human rights, affirming the inherent worth of every human being, including those condemned to death. By protecting this confidentiality, society demonstrates respect for conscience, religious freedom and universal human dignity…aligning domestic legal protections with international human rights standards (UDHR, 1948; RLUIPA, 42 U.S.C. §2000cc-1(a), 2000).

Practical Examples of Priest-Penitent Privilege on Death Row

Confidential spiritual guidance is critical. Inmates confront fear, guilt and existential despair. Priest-penitent interactions allow them to confront these realities and move forward with moral closure. Consider these examples…

Reconciliation with Family

A condemned inmate estranged from his children sought moral reconciliation. In private confession, he recounted past neglect and abuse of loved ones. The priest provided absolution, declaring that God forgives sins through the sacrament of reconciliation when the penitent demonstrates sincere contrition and resolution to amend their life. Over several sessions, the priest guided him to articulate remorse and prepare letters of apology. Though he was prohibited from sending the letters by his attorneys (who were afraid that it might influence his final appeals), the sacramental act of confession allowed the inmate to confront guilt and achieve internal peace. Confidentiality was essential…without it…he would have withheld truth…denying himself the grace of spiritual reconciliation.

Confronting Past Violence

Another inmate…guilty of multiple violent crimes…faced fear of divine judgment. Through confession, he recounted each act of violence and its moral consequences. The priest instructed him in penance, provided counsel and granted forgiveness, emphasizing

that God's pardon is available to those who repent sincerely. The sacramental experience allowed the inmate to feel morally reconciled and spiritually prepared for death. Without the inviolability of the confessional seal…he might have concealed truths in fear that others (maybe even family) might find out and judge him for…depriving himself of moral and spiritual restoration.

Emotional Healing and Moral Preparation

An inmate experiencing severe anxiety about execution engaged in repeated sessions of confession and spiritual reflection. Each session involved examining conscience, confessing sins, performing penance and receiving absolution, which provided profound moral relief. The priest guided him to reconcile with his conscience, accept responsibility and achieve spiritual readiness. Confidentiality allowed full honesty, ethical growth and reconciliation with both God and self.

Reconciliation with Victims' Families

A condemned inmate sought to reconcile spiritually with victims' families. Through confession, he admitted wrongdoing and expressed remorse. The priest guided him in spiritual penance and pronounced forgiveness, affirming God's absolution. Even though he was not allowed direct contact with victims' families by law, the sacramental encounter allowed the inmate to experience profound moral and spiritual closure without harming anyone else.

Spiritual Guidance at Execution

In a situation akin to Ramirez v. Collier, a condemned individual requested his pastor's presence during execution. The inmate received final confession and absolution, verbally recounting sins, acknowledging remorse and accepting responsibility. The priest prayed aloud, laid hands on him and pronounced

forgiveness. The Supreme Court recognized such spiritual guidance as protected under RLUIPA, highlighting that confidential sacramental acts are legally safeguarded and morally necessary (Ramirez v. Collier, 2022).

The examples are limitless. Confidentiality and spirituality are by their nature intimately intertwined. Priest-penitent privilege is necessary for any remotely spiritual society to function.

Legal Foundations of Priest-Penitent Privilege

The protection of priest-penitent privilege on death row is deeply rooted in constitutional principles, particularly the First Amendment and the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment and is further reinforced by statutory safeguards such as RLUIPA. For incarcerated individuals…including those facing execution…these protections ensure that religious exercise is not subordinated to administrative convenience or penal objectives.

First Amendment Protections

The First Amendment guarantees the free exercise of religion, prohibiting the government from interfering with an individual's right to practice faith (U.S. Const. amend. I). For prisoners, this includes access to religious counsel and confidential communication with clergy (Cruz v. Beto, 405 U.S. 319, 1972). The Supreme Court has emphasized that incarceration does not eliminate the fundamental right to religious exercise, even under highly controlled or security-sensitive conditions. Confidential spiritual communication is an integral part of faith practice… confession, absolution and pastoral counseling are not merely symbolic but essential for moral and spiritual reconciliation… especially for inmates confronting death (Cruz v. Beto, 405 U.S. 319, 1972; Cutter v. Wilkinson, 544 U.S. 709, 2005).

Requiring priests to disclose confessions or limiting access to private spiritual counseling constitutes a substantial burden on religious exercise…undermining the inmate's ability to practice faith according to conscience. The denial of confidentiality disrupts the moral and ethical dimensions of religious practice… particularly in capital cases, where the opportunity for genuine repentance and spiritual reconciliation is often the last available chance. Courts have repeatedly recognized that even in high-security environments, inmates retain a protected right to confidential interaction with clergy, reflecting the constitutional understanding that faith and conscience are not suspended behind prison walls (Ramirez v. Collier, 142 S. Ct. 1264 (2022)).

The First Amendment also safeguards clergy as intermediaries of moral and spiritual guidance. Forcing a priest to violate the sacramental seal would not only infringe on the inmate's rights but also impinge on the ministerial freedom of religious advisors, creating a conflict between conscience and state authority (Cruz v. Beto, 405 U.S. 319, 1972). By protecting priest-penitent communications, the law ensures that faith practices are respected and clergy are empowered to provide guidance without fear of reprisal, fulfilling both constitutional and theological imperatives.

Equal Protection Clause

The Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment (U.S. Const. amend. XIV) complements First Amendment protections by guaranteeing that all inmates, regardless of faith tradition, have equal access to confidential clergy counseling. This clause prevents arbitrary distinctions that would allow one inmate to receive sacramental guidance while denying it to another based solely on denomination, administrative policy or institutional discretion (Turner v. Safley, 482 U.S. 78, 1987).

Denying access to priest-penitent communications disproportionately affects faith traditions that rely heavily on

sacramental practice…including Catholic, Old Catholic, and Orthodox Christians…as well as other faiths with confidential spiritual guidance rituals. The Equal Protection Clause ensures that institutional rules do not privilege or disadvantage any religious group. This is particularly critical on death row…where unequal access to spiritual guidance can mean the difference between moral and spiritual reconciliation and existential despair. Courts have recognized that failure to provide equitable access to clergy counseling violates both legal and moral imperatives, as it creates unequal treatment of inmates with sincere religious needs (Turner v. Safley, 482 U.S. 78, 1987; Ramirez v. Collier, 142 S. Ct. 1264 (2022)).

Moreover, the Equal Protection Clause serves to reinforce the First Amendment by requiring that prison regulations are applied consistently. Even if the state asserts a compelling interest in maintaining security or order, those regulations cannot selectively burden one religious practice while accommodating another. In practical terms, this means that a Catholic or Old Catholic or Orthodox inmate must have the same access to confidential spiritual advisement and sacramental guidance as an inmate from any other faith tradition. Ensuring equal access protects both conscience and spiritual integrity…which is especially consequential for inmates confronting the finality of execution (Cruz v. Beto, 405 U.S. 319, 1972).

RLUIPA Protections

The Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act (RLUIPA, 2000) further strengthens these protections, explicitly forbidding any substantial burden on religious exercise of institutionalized persons unless justified by a compelling government interest applied in the least restrictive manner (42 U.S.C. §2000cc-1(a), 2000). On death row, RLUIPA ensures that inmates' access to confession and sacramental guidance cannot be denied merely for administrative convenience or institutional policy. The statute codifies the principle that religious exercise…

including priest-penitent communication…is a fundamental human and legal right that persists even under the most controlled circumstances.

RLUIPA also highlights the cumulative importance of constitutional and statutory protections. It integrates First Amendment safeguards with practical prison administration by requiring courts to scrutinize any policies that substantially burden religious exercise. In capital cases, where the ability to confess, receive absolution and engage in penance may be the inmate's last opportunity for moral reconciliation, RLUIPA reinforces both the ethical necessity and legal entitlement of priest-penitent privilege (Ramirez v. Collier, 142 S. Ct. 1264 (2022)).

Synthesis

Together, the First Amendment, Equal Protection Clause and RLUIPA create a robust legal framework ensuring that priest-penitent privilege on death row is protected. The First Amendment guarantees the freedom to practice religion, including confidential spiritual guidance. The Equal Protection Clause ensures that all inmates are treated equally, preventing arbitrary discrimination based on faith. RLUIPA codifies these protections into enforceable statutory law, prohibiting substantial burdens unless absolutely necessary.

In practice, this triad of protections ensures that death row inmates can confess sins and receive forgiveness without fear that their communications will be disclosed. It guarantees that clergy can minister without compromising conscience, preserving the moral and theological integrity of the sacramental encounter. These protections demonstrate that religious liberty and human dignity are paramount, even in the context of the state's interest in security, order, and capital punishment.

By emphasizing equal access and non-interference, these legal provisions align with both moral imperatives and constitutional mandates. Denial of priest-penitent privilege would violate the First Amendment, undermine the Equal Protection Clause and contravene RLUIPA, stripping inmates of spiritual guidance at the most critical moment of life. Protecting these rights ensures that faith, conscience, and moral agency remain inviolate, even in the shadow of execution.

Legal Precedence for Priest-Penitent Privilege

Priest-penitent privilege occupies a unique space, offering protection to communications made during confession. Across centuries and jurisdictions, courts have consistently recognized that these communications are not ordinary speech but sacred encounters, essential to moral reflection, spiritual reconciliation and ethical accountability. For death row inmates, the privilege takes on heightened significance…it safeguards their ability to confront guilt, perform penance and seek absolution without fear of secular reprisal. From early American cases like People v. Phillips (1813) and People v. Smith (1817) to modern federal and Supreme Court rulings such as Mockaitis v. Harcleroad (1997) and Ramirez v. Collier (2022), the legal system has affirmed that confession is protected by law, morality and religious principle. This section examines these precedents, demonstrating that priest-penitent privilege is both legally enforceable and ethically indispensable, particularly for those facing the ultimate sanction of death.

People v. Phillips (New York Supreme Court, 1813)

In People v. Phillips, the New York Supreme Court considered whether a Catholic priest could be compelled to testify regarding a confession made by a defendant accused of theft (People v. Phillips, 1813). The case arose when the prosecution subpoenaed a priest to disclose statements made during confession, aiming to use them as evidence against the defendant. The priest refused,

invoking the absolute inviolability of the sacramental seal as recognized in Catholic canon law.

The Court carefully analyzed the nature of confession, emphasizing that it is a sacred encounter between penitent and priest, not merely a private conversation. The court recognized that compelling testimony would chill penitential practice… undermining both the individual's moral development and broader societal interests in ethical accountability (People v. Phillips, 1813). The decision highlighted the importance of protecting religious conscience, establishing that certain communications cannot be subordinated to procedural demands even in criminal proceedings.

Importantly, Phillips demonstrated an early recognition of the unique moral and theological significance of confession. The court noted that requiring disclosure would discourage penitents from fully confronting wrongdoing…compromising opportunities for repentance and moral restoration. This precedent is particularly relevant to death row inmates, who confront ultimate accountability and rely on confidential confession to seek spiritual reconciliation, perform penance and receive absolution before execution. By protecting priest-penitentcommunications, the court ensured that religious practice could continue unimpeded…preserving both spiritual integrity and societal moral order.

The ruling also implicitly recognized that confession serves more than evidentiary purposes…it is a moral instrument that facilitates internalized justice, ethical reflection and personal transformation. For death row inmates, this aspect is critical…the seal allows them to confront crimes honestly without fear that candid admissions will be used against them, reinforcing the notion that religious liberty intersects directly with moral rehabilitation.

People v. Smith (New York Supreme Court, 1817)

People v. Smith built on the foundation laid in Phillips, clarifying the boundaries of clergy privilege (People v. Smith, 1817). In this case, the defendant had confessed to a serious crime, and the prosecution again attempted to compel the priest to testify. The Court was faced with balancing the needs of justice against the moral and spiritual protection of the confessional.

The Court reaffirmed that confession to clergy is protected, emphasizing that compelling disclosure would not only undermine the penitent's moral development but also violate societal interests in internalized justice and ethical accountability. The ruling underscored that the law must respect the sanctity of religious exercise…even in cases involving grave offenses… including potential capital crimes (People v. Smith, 1817).

In its reasoning, the Court highlighted that sacramental confidentiality serves both moral and legal ends. Morally, it allows penitents to engage in truthful self-examination, experience contrition and seek forgiveness. Legally, it ensures that the judicial system does not interfere with constitutionally and socially recognized rights to religious practice. For death row inmates, Smith has profound implications…it establishes that even in the most high-stakes circumstances, the state cannot compel disclosure of penitential communications, preserving opportunities for spiritual reconciliation, moral closure and absolution.

The decision also illustrated a nuanced understanding of the role of clergy in society. The Court recognized priests not merely as witnesses but as moral mediators whose guidance has societal and individual importance. In denying the subpoena, the Court affirmed the principle that faith and conscience are protected even when weighed against evidentiary interests, a principle that continues to safeguard spiritual counseling in modern capital punishment contexts.

Cruz v. Beto (1972)

The Supreme Court's decision in Cruz v. Beto, 405 U.S. 319 (1972), is a landmark case for religious freedom in prisons and provides important context for the recognition of priest–penitent privilege. The case involved a Buddhist inmate in Texas who was denied access to a place of worship and prohibited from sharing his religious literature with other prisoners…even as Christian inmates enjoyed full access to chapels and ministers. The Court held that the First Amendment guarantees of religious freedom apply within prisons and that inmates must be given "reasonable opportunities" to exercise their faith comparable to those afforded to adherents of other religions.

The significance of Cruz for priest-penitent privilege lies in its affirmation that incarceration does not extinguish constitutional rights, particularly those rooted in the free exercise of religion. Just as Buddhist inmates must be afforded the opportunity to practice their faith on equal footing with Christians, so too must all inmates be ensured confidential access to clergy for confession and spiritual counsel. The Court's reasoning underscores that religious practice is not a privilege granted at the discretion of prison authorities…but a fundamental right protected by the Constitution.

Applied to the death penalty context, Cruz v. Beto reinforces that condemned inmates retain the right to sacramental practices, including confession. Denying access to confidential clergy… penitent communication would replicate the constitutional violation at issue in Cruz…favoring state authority over the free exercise rights of inmates. Thus, the case strengthens the claim that priest–penitent privilege must remain inviolate even on death row, protecting the moral and spiritual integrity of the incarcerated at life's end.

Federal Rule of Evidence 501 (Federal Courts, 1975)

Federal Rule of Evidence 501 provides the modern statutory framework for recognizing privileges…including clergy-penitent

privilege…in federal courts (Fed. R. Evid. 501, 1975). The Rule codifies that privileges are governed by common law, interpreted by courts in light of reason and experience. This allows courts to adapt longstanding protections…like the priest-penitent privilege…to contemporary legal challenges, including those involving death row inmates.

The rule emerged to reconcile competing interests…the need for reliable evidence in criminal proceedings and the moral, ethical and religious imperatives that underlie confidential communications. Courts interpreting Rule 501 have emphasized that clergy-penitent communications are fundamentally different from ordinary conversations. They are not made for social convenience or personal benefit but for spiritual formation, repentance and moral realignment (Fed. R. Evid. 501, 1975).

For death row inmates, Rule 501 serves as a crucial safeguard. Confidential confession allows inmates to articulate past wrongs, experience genuine contrition and receive absolution without fear of secular repercussions. The Rule affirms that these communications are legally protected and that any attempt to compel disclosure would constitute a substantial burden on religious exercise, contravening both constitutional and statutory protections.

Additionally, Rule 501 reflects an understanding that clergy-penitent privilege protects the integrity of moral and spiritual guidance. By recognizing the privilege under common law, federal courts acknowledge that sacred communications serve both personal and societal moral interests. This is especially relevant for death row inmates, for whom the opportunity to confess and seek absolution is often their last chance for spiritual reconciliation. Without this legal protection, penitents might conceal sins, undermining both personal moral responsibility and the ethical objectives of justice.

Turner v. Safley (1987)

The Supreme Court's decision in Turner v. Safley, 482 U.S. 78 (1987), established the standard for evaluating prison regulations that burden constitutional rights. The case addressed two issues: restrictions on inmate-to-inmate correspondence and prohibitions on prisoner marriages without warden approval. The Court held that while prisoners do not forfeit all constitutional protections upon incarceration, those rights may be limited by regulations that are "reasonably related to legitimate penological interests." The Turner test thus balances the constitutional rights of inmates against the state's interest in security, order and administration.

Though not directly about religion, Turner is central to understanding how courts evaluate claims involving priest-penitent privilege in prison. The decision makes clear that any restriction on religious rights must have a reasonable legitimate connection to penological objectives. Generalized fears or administrative inconvenience are insufficient to justify burdening fundamental freedoms.

For death row inmates, Turner means that attempts to restrict confidential access to clergy must withstand exacting scrutiny. A prison cannot deny sacramental confession or compromise its confidentiality simply for administrative ease or speculative security concerns. Instead, prison authorities must show that restrictions are narrowly tailored and truly necessary for safety or order. In practice, this standard has bolstered judicial recognition that confidentiality in confession is not only morally and theologically essential but also constitutionally protected against unwarranted intrusion.

Mockaitis v. Harcleroad (U.S.C.A. 9th Ct, Oregon, 1997)

Mockaitis v. Harcleroad involved a capital murder case in Oregon in which the State sought to compel a Roman Catholic priest to testify regarding a confession made by the defendant, William Mockaitis. The confession took place in private within the prison, following the traditional sacramental format…the

inmate disclosed specific acts of criminal conduct, expressed genuine contrition and requested spiritual guidance and absolution. The priest, bound by the sacramental seal, refused to reveal any content of the confession, asserting that disclosure would violate both canon law (Canon 983 §1) and his ethical obligations.

The District Court had to weigh the competing interests…on one side, the state's interest in fully prosecuting a serious criminal offense…on the other, the penitent's constitutional and religious rights. The court engaged in an exhaustive analysis, recognizing that the penitent-priest relationship is not merely confidential but sacred, serving a moral and spiritual purpose essential to human conscience. The court observed that compelling testimony could undermine the penitent's ability to engage fully in moral reconciliation…thus inflicting irreparable spiritual and ethical harm.

The court's ruling emphasized several key principles. It affirmed that the priest-penitent privilege is not conditional on the gravity of the crime or the public interest in prosecution. Even in capital cases, the moral and theological imperatives of sacramental confession cannot be discarded. Compelling testimony would force clergy to violate a fundamental moral and spiritual duty… creating a direct ethical conflict between obedience to civil authority and adherence to sacred law. The court also noted that forcing disclosure could erode public confidence in religious institutions. If penitents feared that their confessions could be used against them in court…the confessional would lose its moral efficacy…diminishing society's access to the moral benefits of spiritual guidance. Finally, the ruling recognizes that for those facing execution, confession and absolution are not auxiliary rites but essential opportunities to confront guilt, seek forgiveness and prepare spiritually for death. Without full confidentiality…penitents may withhold critical moral truths… undermining both the sacramental act and their own moral agency.

Cutter v. Wilkinson (2005)

In Cutter v. Wilkinson, 544 U.S. 709 (2005), the Supreme Court addressed the scope of the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act (RLUIPA) as it applied to inmates' religious rights. The case arose when Ohio prisoners who practiced non-mainstream religions…including Wicca, Satanism, and Asatru…claimed they were denied access to religious literature, ceremonial items and group worship opportunities afforded to more conventional faiths. The State argued that enforcing RLUIPA in favor of minority religions violated the Establishment Clause by advancing religion.

The Court unanimously rejected this argument, holding that RLUIPA is a permissible accommodation of religious exercise in institutional settings. Importantly, the Court emphasized that protecting inmates' rights to practice their faith…even in restrictive prison environments…is consistent with the First Amendment and does not improperly privilege religion. Instead, it ensures that religious freedom is meaningfully preserved, even behind prison walls.

For priest-penitent privilege, Cutter demonstrates that constitutional and statutory protections extend beyond mainstream practices to encompass the deeply personal and sacramental needs of all faith traditions. The ruling affirms that prisons must actively accommodate religious exercise rather than merely avoid overt discrimination. In the context of death row, this precedent underscores that absolute confidentiality in sacramental confession is not a dispensable courtesy but a protected form of religious exercise. Denying such access would directly contravene the constitutional and statutory mandates affirmed in Cutter, undermining both the integrity of religious practice and the moral rights of the condemned.

Ramirez v. Collier (U.S. Supreme Court, 2022)

Ramirez v. Collier represents one of the most significant modern affirmations of religious liberty for death row inmates. In this case, John Henry Ramirez…a Texas death row inmate… requested that his pastor be allowed to lay hands on him and pray aloud during his execution, as part of his final sacramental rites. The State initially denied this request, citing security and procedural concerns. Ramirez's counsel argued that such denial imposed a substantial burden on his religious exercise under RLUIPA and violated First Amendment protections.

The Supreme Court's analysis was meticulous and far-reaching. It considered the centrality of religious exercise, emphasizing that the requested pastoral acts…laying on of hands, audible prayer, and final confession…were not ancillary but central to Ramirez's faith and preparation for death, and that preventing these acts would undermine the very core of his religious practice. It also addressed the substantial burden under RLUIPA, recognizing that RLUIPA prohibits any substantial burden on the religious exercise of institutionalized persons unless justified by a compelling government interest in the least restrictive manner, and that denying Ramirez's requests placed a direct and substantial burden on his ability to engage in sacred rituals that provide moral clarity, absolution, and reconciliation. The Court further acknowledged the moral and theological significance of these practices, noting that the laying on of hands is a sacramental act that allows the penitent to approach death in alignment with conscience and religious duty, and that denial would interfere with moral agency and spiritual integrity, which the Court recognized as critical even in the final moments of life. Finally, the Court considered the implications for future cases, with Ramirez establishing a precedent that death row inmates' religious exercise must be respected even in the context of execution procedures, reinforcing priest-penitent privilege and extending protection to ritual acts essential to confession and absolution.

The Court ultimately granted relief, permitting Ramirez's pastor to perform the requested sacramental acts. In doing so, the ruling highlighted the convergence of constitutional, statutory, and ethical imperatives: RLUIPA, the First Amendment and centuries of moral and theological tradition converge to protect spiritual guidance at the moment of death (Ramirez v. Collier, 2022).

This case underscores several critical points for death row ministry. Confidentiality is essential, as the priest's role in final confession and absolution cannot be compromised. The moral agency of the penitent is protected, since the condemned retains the right to fully engage in religious practice that reconciles conscience and prepares for death. Institutional obligations must also accommodate faith, meaning that even administrative and security concerns must yield to the compelling interest in religious exercise. Finally, Ramirez integrates with broader legal precedent, aligning modern law with Mockaitis, Phillips, Smith, and federal rules governing clergy privilege, thereby reinforcing the doctrinal and legal continuity of priest-penitent protections.

In effect, Ramirez v. Collier not only safeguards Ramirez's spiritual rights but also sets a binding standard for the treatment of all death row inmates seeking priestly guidance, ensuring that their final sacramental encounters…including confession and absolution…are legally protected, morally affirmed and spiritually respected.

Synthesis

The jurisprudence surrounding priest-penitent privilege illustrates a consistent commitment to preserving the moral and spiritual integrity of confession. Cases
like Phillips and Smith establish foundational protections, affirming that compelling disclosure undermines both personal moral development and societal ethical interests. Federal Rule of Evidence 501 and decisions such as Mockaitis v.
Harcleroad further codify these protections, emphasizing that

clergy privilege is absolute, even in capital cases. Ramirez v. Collier demonstrates that modern courts continue to uphold these principles, recognizing the profound moral and theological significance of sacramental acts for death row inmates. Collectively, these cases underscore that priest-penitent privilege is not merely a procedural formality but a critical safeguard of conscience, religious liberty, and human dignity. For inmates facing execution, it ensures that their final opportunities for confession, absolution, and reconciliation remain fully protected, honoring both the letter of the law and the deepest moral imperatives of justice.

Religious Liberty, The Sacredness of Confession and Priest-Penitent Privilege

Priest-penitent privilege on death row is morally, theologically and legally indispensable. Catholic, Old Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions converge on the inviolability of confession. Ethical reasoning emphasizes human dignity, moral agency and clergy responsibility. Practical experience demonstrates that confidential spiritual guidance facilitates repentance, reconciliation and emotional preparation for death.

Legally, cases from People v. Phillips (1813) to Ramirez v. Collier (2022), alongside Federal Rule of Evidence 501 and RLUIPA, give evidence of the protection of this privilege across centuries and jurisdictions. First Amendment protections and the Equal Protection Clause further bolster claims that all inmates… regardless of denomination or circumstance…should be able to access confidential clergy guidance.

To deny priest-penitent privilege would subordinate conscience to procedure, strip the condemned of essential spiritual guidance and diminish human dignity at life's end. Upholding it affirms that faith, conscience and moral agency remain inviolable, even in the shadow of execution.

Religious liberty is not an abstract concept…it is the very lifeline of the soul. On death row, where fear, guilt and mortality converge the freedom to confess, receive absolution and reconcile with God must be protected…because if it is not protected there then it is not protected anywhere. Protecting priest-penitent privilege is therefore not merely legal compliance…it is a profound affirmation that even at the edge of death…the religious practice of every person is sacred, untouchable and inviolable.

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9.7.25

The Dalai Lama & The Death Penalty: Engaging Buddhist Ethics

The Dalai Lama & the Death Penalty: Compassion & Liberation

"The death penalty is pure violence, a barbaric and useless violence. Dangerous even…because it can only lead to other acts of violence…as all violence does." – The Dalai Lama

The Dalai Lama's Opposition to the Death Penalty

The Dalai Lama's opposition to the death penalty is not casual opinion. It is the consistent fruit of a life rooted in compassion (karuṇā), nonviolence (ahimsa) and the deep well of Tibetan Buddhist tradition. Central to his thought is the Dharma…the Buddha's teaching and the truth it expresses. The Dharma is not merely a collection of doctrines but a living path intended to guide beings to liberation from suffering. It is a description of the way things are…the moral and spiritual law that underlies reality itself. In this sense, the Dharma can be compared to Western concepts such as natural law in the tradition of St. Thomas Aquinas (Thomism), which understands moral truth as rooted in the very order of creation. Just as Aquinas argued that human law must be measured against natural law to ensure justice (Summa Theologiae, I–II, Q.91), the Dalai Lama insists that human systems of punishment must be measured against the Dharma's central truth…that violence breeds suffering…while compassion and restraint lead to peace. Modern human rights traditions… from the Enlightenment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to the International Criminal Court…also echo this recognition that human dignity is not granted by governments but inherent to human existence. For the Dalai Lama, rejecting the death penalty is not only a Buddhist teaching but a universal ethical imperative.

The Dalai Lama, The

Dharma & Buddhist Ethics

The Kangyur…the canonical scriptures of Tibetan Buddhism… grounds his vision. In the Vinaya texts, the Buddha commands disciples to abstain from killing…"A disciple of the Buddha must not intentionally deprive a living being of life, even an ant" The Dalai Lama often appeals to this principle…arguing that respect for life cannot be selectively applied. If compassion is only extended to the innocent, it is not truly compassion. The Buddha's prohibition reminds us that even those who have committed grave wrongs still possess life worthy of protection. To execute under the cover of law is still to kill, and to kill is to break with the Dharma (the path of liberation).

He presses this conviction:

"The death penalty fulfills a preventive function, but it is also very clearly a form of revenge. It is an especially severe form of punishment because it is so final. The human life is ended and the executed person is deprived of the opportunity to change."

Echoes of this logic can be found in words that have been repeated across centuries of Buddhist practice…"Hatred does not cease through hatred; hatred ceases only through love. This is an eternal law." State executions may feel like justice, but they are ultimately the institutionalization of hatred…the belief that killing will solve killing.

Violence, Revenge & the Cycle of Suffering

The Dalai Lama's vision rests on the conviction that people can change.

“My overriding belief is that it is always possible for criminals to improve and that by its very finality the death penalty contradicts this.”

This conviction is not misplaced optimism but a deliberate ethical stance…to deny the possibility of change is to deny human dignity itself. A society that embraces execution embraces vengeance over justice.

The Dalai Lama has carried this message into public life, writing to leaders such as the President of Mongolia:

“I have supported the abolition of the death penalty for many years and have written on many occasions to world leaders appealing to them to waive the death sentence in their countries…To take the life of a human being, which provides the precious opportunity for the being to change and develop is especially grave… does not solve the problem of crime…”

Even when asked about the execution of Saddam Hussein, he did not soften his stance:

“The death penalty may help in preventing further crimes but it is an act carried out with a revengeful motive.”

His words return to the same conclusion…executions satisfy revenge, not justice. They close the door on repentance and leave only suffering behind.

Compassion, Rehabilitation & Transformation

The Dalai Lama’s opposition is both deeply Buddhist and universally human. It grows from the Dharma but speaks across traditions. The Dharma…the Buddha’s teaching and the path it points toward…is not simply a code of belief but a way of life that rejects killing and honors compassion. At its heart is the conviction that violence, hatred and killing only deepen the cycle

of suffering…while compassion, wisdom and restraint open the way to liberation and peace.

The Buddha's prohibition against killing and his teaching that hatred cannot end hatred find practical expression in the Dalai Lama's call to replace execution with compassion, rehabilitation and transformation.

The Dalai Lama's witness leaves no ambiguity. The death penalty is not justice. It's violence. It destroys lives that could be transformed. It feeds cycles of revenge instead of breaking them. His call is clear…abandon execution, embrace compassion and conform all ideas of justice to the way of liberation.

9.8.25

Locking God Out: Prison Chaplains & Religious Liberty

Locking God Out: Why Prison Chaplains Must Never Be Gatekeepers

Prisons as Graveyards of the Human Spirit

Prisons are graveyards. Every breath is monitored. Every movement is tracked. Every choice extinguished. The system is built to crush, cage and erase the human spirit. In such a place, faith is not a luxury. It is all that you have. And yet, even that freedom is under threat. Too many prisons allow their chaplains to decide which clergy may enter and which is turned away… which faith is allowed and which faith is turned away. No one should have that much power over the faith of anyone.

When Prison Chaplains Hold the Keys to God

Religious liberty is not a gift…it is not a privilege granted by the state…it is a right. It cannot be conditional. No prison chaplain should have the authority to decide who gets to pray, who gets to preach or who gets to be heard. When prison chaplains assume that role, faith becomes a tool of politics. It is twisted into favoritism. It is measured by someone else's belief… someone else's comfort…someone else's bias. That is spiritual tyranny. It turns hope into fear. It turns sacred space into a battlefield. It makes God's presence contingent on human approval. Faith is no longer freedom. Faith becomes permission…fragile and fleeting.

The Betrayal of True Chaplaincy

Prison Chaplains = Wardens in Collars?

Prison chaplains who act as gatekeepers betray the very reason that they're there. They become wardens in collars…policing access to God. Some favor one faith and block another. Some allow only the familiar and dismiss the different. Some impose rules that have nothing to do with compassion and everything to do with control. The incarcerated are left starving for the spiritual sustenance that is their right. Basic humanity is executed in the process.

The Diversity of Belief in Prison

Prisons are microcosms of the world. The diversity of belief behind the walls is staggering. No single chaplain can represent all of it. No single person should try. To act otherwise is arrogance. To deny people access to their faith is oppression. Freedom means every person has a chance to pray…to sing…to meditate…to hope…to heal in the way their soul knows best. Every voice matters. Every tradition matters. And every prayer… especially the ones no one else wants to hear…matters. To shut one out is not just to break an individual spirit…it is to fracture any hope for basic justice itself.

The True Calling of Prison Chaplains

Prison Chaplains Should Be Opening Doors, Not Closing Them

Prison chaplains are called to open doors…not close them. To protect freedom…not police it. They are meant to be guides. The last thing they should be are gatekeepers. Prisons already suffocate, punish and kill in ways both obvious and unseen. The last thing the incarcerated need is another lock. The last thing they need is God trapped behind a gate…filtered through human judgment. When prison chaplains become gatekeepers, spirituality dies.

Humanity at Stake

This is about more than religion. It is about humanity. It is about the right to believe, to hope and to find meaning in the darkest corners of confinement. When prison chaplains deny access to faith leaders, they crush more than spirits…they crush identity. They strip away the rituals, the songs, the prayers and the comfort that make a person whole. The impact is immediate and lasting. Isolation becomes deeper. Despair becomes heavier. Lives that might find redemption instead wither under the weight of indifference.

Every Voice, Every Prayer, Every Tradition

Every faith has value. Every tradition deserves space. Every incarcerated person deserves access to the spiritual guidance that sustains them. One prison chaplain…no matter how dedicated or well-meaning…cannot be the arbiter of that access. Faith cannot be filtered, measured or ranked by a single perspective. The consequences are profound. When faith is withheld…prisons become places where bodies are confined but souls are buried. When access is controlled…hope is conditional. When a single person decides who is worthy…injustice multiplies. The incarcerated deserve more. They deserve prison chaplains who act as protectors, as defenders, as advocates for every tradition, every belief and every prayer.

Religious Freedom Is Essential, Not Optional

Equal Treatment, Not Theological Agreement

No prison chaplain should hold the keys to God's door. No chaplain should decide which faith lives in prison and which dies. Religious freedom is not a luxury. It is not a favor. It is the lifeblood of the soul. When one faith is locked out…freedom itself is locked out. Without freedom, prisons do not just confine bodies…they bury souls.

Faith in prison must never be controlled by personal preference. The process of deciding who can minister behind bars must be religiously blind…fair, transparent and free from bias. No single prison chaplain, administrator or denomination should determine which faith gets access and which does not. The standard must be equal treatment, not theological agreement. The call is clear… prisons must build systems that guarantee neutrality.

The High Stakes of Failure

The stakes are high…and the consequences of failure are measured in human despair. Religious freedom in prison is not negotiable. It is essential, it is sacred and it must never be left solely in the hands of the subjective judgment of prison chaplains.

9.10.25

The Old Catholic Church: Traditional & Revolutionary

The Old Catholic Church

The Old Catholic Church is fully Catholic, yet fiercely free. Born in Europe to resist papal overreach, Old Catholics now thrive in the United States as a network of inclusive, justice-driven communities. Rooted in ancient liturgy, Old Catholics are boldly shaping a future where faith is both sacred and revolutionary.

Keep Watching

3

Breaking from Rome: The Origins of the Old Catholic Church

The roots of the Old Catholic Church stretch back to the 19th century. At the First Vatican Council (1869–1870), the Roman Catholic Church formally defined the doctrine of papal infallibility…claiming that the pope…when speaking ex cathedra (or with the full weight of the office) on matters of faith and morals…is preserved from error by the Holy Spirit. For many Catholics, this was a step too far.

Opponents argued that the early Church had been guided by ecumenical councils rather than by one man ruling from the top down. For centuries, bishops had gathered to deliberate, correct and discern. Papal infallibility seemed not like continuity, but like a rupture…a dangerous concentration of power in the hands of one man.

The protests that followed converged with an older story. Since the early 1700s, the Church of Utrecht in the Netherlands had resisted centralized papal control, maintaining its own archbishop and a strong sense of local authority. When many

Catholics in Germany, Switzerland and Austria broke from Rome after Vatican I, they joined forces with Utrecht. By 1889, these communities formally banded together as the Union of Utrecht of Old Catholic Churches. As the Declaration of Utrecht (1889) states:
"We consider ourselves to be an expression of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church in continuity with the Scriptures and the ancient ecumenical councils of the undivided Church."

At first, their movement looked conservative…an effort to preserve the old ways against new papal claims. But over time, the Old Catholic Church became something much more…a laboratory for modern Catholic reform and a place where ancient tradition and contemporary conscience could meet.

The Reforming Spirit of Progressive Catholicism

Old Catholics carried two instincts from the start…loyalty to the ancient Church and a fierce belief in freedom of conscience. That mix of tradition and freedom created space for bold reform.

Vernacular Worship

Long before Vatican II, Old Catholics celebrated the liturgy in local languages so that all people could understand and participate.

Communion for All

They restored the chalice to the laity, offering both bread and wine at Eucharist.

Shared Governance

Old Catholic synods included bishops, clergy and laity making decisions together…rejecting the idea that ultimate authority rested in Rome.

In the 20th century, their reforming spirit deepened. Old Catholics ordained women and LGBTQ+ persons as priests and bishops, opened their altars to LGBTQ+ couples, allowed clergy to marry and encouraged grassroots leadership at every level of church life.

As the 2001 Statute of the Old Catholic Bishops United in the Union of Utrecht boldly affirms:
"While not denying a special pastoral ministry of the Bishop of Rome, we do not consider communion with the Bishop of Rome to define what it means to be Catholic."

While Rome moved slowly…sometimes grudgingly…Old Catholics moved first. Practices that once scandalized the Vatican, like vernacular Mass or lay participation, later became mainstream Catholic reforms…but Old Catholics had already been living the reforms for decades. By the 21st century, they were known as some of the most progressive Catholics in the world…small in numbers, but large in imagination.

Crossing the Atlantic

When Old Catholicism crossed the ocean, it took on a distinct flavor. The United States has always been a place where religious independence flourishes. From storefront congregations to revival movements, American soil has long nurtured experiments in faith. Old Catholic ideas fit right in.

Instead of one centralized national church, Old Catholicism in the United States grew through independent jurisdictions and communities. They shared the same DNA as their European cousins…Catholic sacraments, apostolic succession, and a devotion to freedom…but they also absorbed America's particular struggles and hopes.

The Old Catholic Church: A Progressive Catholic Witness in America

Old Catholic communities in the United States are scattered and diverse. Sometimes they gather in grand churches, sometimes in living rooms. Yet they share a common spirit…

Welcoming the Excluded

Many parishes are led by LGBTQ+ clergy and celebrate the marriages of same-sex couples.

Ordaining Women

Women serve not only as priests but as bishops overseeing dioceses.

Open Sacraments

The Eucharist is for everyone who hungers for Christ. Baptism has no barriers. Marriage blessings are offered to every couple who seeks them.

Shared Leadership

Clergy and laity often make decisions together, resisting the old clerical model.

Commitment to Justice

Old Catholic clergy frequently stand alongside activists in various struggles.

In these communities, justice is not an optional outreach program…it is sacramental. Baptism affirms the dignity of every human being. Eucharist becomes a table of solidarity with the hungry and oppressed. Ordination is understood as lifting silenced voices…not enforcing hierarchy.

Social Justice as Sacrament

Old Catholic communities insist that the Gospel cannot be separated from justice. The sacraments do not end at the altar… they spill into the streets. To receive the Body of Christ is also to care for Christ in the poor, the imprisoned, the immigrant and the marginalized.

That is why many Old Catholic leaders have been outspoken in movements against the death penalty, in support of Black Lives Matter and in solidarity with LGBTQ+ youth among a whole host of other commitments. Their theology insists that God's grace is wide, that every human life is holy and that the Church exists to defend that holiness whenever and wherever it is under threat.

The Old Catholic Church: Small, Scattered and Prophetic

By every institutional measure, Old Catholics in the United States are marginal. They have no sprawling cathedrals, no armies of clergy or grand institutions of theology. What they do have is more precious…the courage to be Catholic without fear.

Their communities are often tiny, yet they embody a vision of church that is both ancient and alive to the present moment. They remind the wider Christian world that Catholicism does not belong to Rome alone…it belongs to the people of God.

In their storefront chapels, their rented sanctuaries and their circles of prayer in homes and community centers, the Old Catholic spirit lives on…rooted in tradition, unafraid of reform and centered on justice.

Conclusion: The Old Catholic Church is Catholicism Without Fear

The Old Catholic Church began as resistance to papal infallibility…but in America it has become something bolder…a vision of Catholicism set free. Old Catholic communities show

that one can love the sacraments, honor tradition and still stand on the side of the excluded.

They are small…yes…but they are mighty in witness. They carry forward the conviction that the Church is not an empire ruled from above, but a communion of believers called to walk with the marginalized. In a world where so many are searching for faith without exclusion, the Old Catholic witness is not just old…it is urgently and defiantly defining what is new.

Wherever priests stand at the altar in the name of inclusion, wherever sacraments are offered without condition…and wherever ancient tradition meets the struggle for justice…there, the Old Catholic Church is alive.

9.9.25

Father Aleksandr Khmelyov: Modern Saint

Father Aleksandr Khmelyov: A Modern Witness

Courage rarely looks glamorous. It doesn't usually arrive in the form of medals, parades or even applause. Most often, it looks like one person quietly refusing to move…even when it costs them everything. Such is the story of Father Aleksandr Khmelyov, a young Russian Old Catholic priest whose life has become a living witness to what it means to take the Gospel seriously.

Old Catholic Roots in Russia

Father Aleksandr's priesthood has never fit neatly into the mold of respectability. He was ordained in the Old Catholic tradition, a movement that has long refused the heavy hand of Roman authority and has often embraced communities that the world would rather forget. In Russia…a country where the Orthodox Church walks hand in hand with the state…an Old Catholic priest already stands out as a curiosity…if not an overt threat. Father Aleksandr chose not only to accept that role but to live into it fully.

Founding the Mother of Solidarity Community

In 2017, he founded the Mother of Solidarity community in St. Petersburg. It was not a grand cathedral. It was a gathering place for LGBTQ+ Christians who had been told by both church and state that they didn't belong. These were people often living in hiding, carrying wounds from rejection and searching for a God who would not condemn them. Father Aleksandr opened his doors. He gave them the sacraments. He heard their confessions. He blessed their relationships. He created authentic community.

Father Aleksandr Khmelyov Defying Church and State

Blessing LGBTQ+ Christians in Russia

To do this was not just an act of kindness. It was an act of defiance. In a country where “gay propaganda” laws create constant threat, Father Aleksandr proclaimed with his actions that LGBTQ+ people were not enemies of the faith but beloved children of God. He didn’t just offer tolerance. He gave dignity…recognition…a place at God’s table. In short, he did what every priest should…he stood at the altar, broke the bread, poured the cup and said to the world…you belong here.

Refusing to Bless the War in Ukraine

Then came the war. In February 2022, Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine…and unleashed a brutal crackdown on dissent. New laws made even the smallest criticisms of the military a crime. Most religious leaders…whether out of fear or loyalty…fell in line. Patriarch Kirill of the Russian Orthodox Church went so far as to put his arm around Russian President Vladimir Putin and bless the war as a sacred struggle…baptizing violence in the name of God.

But Father Aleksandr Khmelyov could not stay silent. He preached what the Gospel demands…peace. He spoke of the immorality of killing, the tragedy of war and the responsibility of Christians to resist violence. For this, the state charged him with “discrediting the army.” A court fined him 30,000 rubles…about a month’s salary in Russia. The Ministry of Justice labeled him a “foreign agent”…a scarlet letter that marks dissenters as enemies of the nation.

And still, he refused to recant.

Exile of Father Aleksandr Khmelyov and Priesthood Beyond Borders

July 25, 2025 – Forced to Leave Russia

On July 25, 2025, the sentence was handed down. That very day, Father Aleksandr was forced to leave Russia. He did not leave because he wanted to. He left because he had to…because the state made it impossible for him to remain faithful to his calling and survive. Exile isn't some noble choice. It's a wound. It's being shoved out by people who can't stand the truth staring back at them. Father Aleksandr crossed the border carrying little more than his convictions and the hope that one day…freedom might return to his homeland.

Priesthood in Exile

Here is what moves me most…Father Aleksandr has never stopped being a priest. Even in exile, his vocation continues. He speaks, he blesses, he reminds the world that the role of a priest is not to bless power but to break it with love. He embodies the truth that the sacraments are not the property of the state, nor the inheritance of the powerful…they are gifts of God, meant especially for those who have been cast aside.

Why Father Father Aleksandr Khmelyov's Witness Matters

A Challenge to the Church Today

Father Aleksandr's courage is not just admirable…it is convicting. His life is a mirror held up to us all. It asks questions we would rather avoid:

Would we welcome the outcast if it cost us our reputations?
Would we preach peace if it made us enemies of our own country?
Would we choose love if it meant losing home, community or even safety?

For most of us, the answer comes too quickly…of course we would. But Father Aleksandr actually did it. That's what sets him apart. That's why his courage matters. He didn't hide behind sermons. He didn't play it safe on paper. He didn't just throw words online. He risked his life, his freedom and his ministry for the sake of the Gospel.

The Church today faces a choice. We can continue to hide behind neutrality…blessing the powerful and ignoring the rejected. Or we can follow Father Aleksandr's lead…we can open our doors to those the world despises…we can speak peace when war is popular…we can choose truth, even when truth costs everything.

Father Aleksandr Khmelyov chose…love over fear….peace over silence…truth over survival.

Will We Follow His Example?

Now the choice is ours.

Will we follow Father Aleksandr's example…or will we keep pretending that discipleship requires nothing of us?

The world sure as hell doesn't need more polite Christians.

9.10.25

Don’t You Dare Call the Shooting of Charlie Kirk Justified

The Shooting of Charlie Kirk: Evil.

A Horrendous Act of Violence

The news of Charlie Kirk being shot hit me like a punch I didn’t see coming. I won’t lie…I’ve disagreed with almost everything he has said for a long time. He uses his platform to shape ideas that harm people. And yet, none of that gives anyone the right to shoot someone. None of it makes this act anything less than horrendous. The violence itself is a wound on our society…a stark reminder that anger and division have real consequences beyond words and tweets.

Remembering Charlie Kirk’s Humanity

For all the noise that surrounds him, it’s important to remember that Charlie Kirk is a human being before he’s a public figure. He is someone’s family and friend. Behind the podiums and headlines is a person who eats quick meals, laughs at dumb jokes, worries about the future and carries private struggles just like the rest of us. It’s far too easy to flatten people into their politics and forget their humanity.

The Call of Jesus in Response to The Shooting of Charlie Kirk

What strikes me most is how easy it is to fall into this trap of cyclical violence and hate…even for those who profess love. Retaliation is not how Jesus taught us to live. “Love your enemies. Pray for those who persecute you.” Those words from Matthew 5:44 are heavy…almost unbearable sometimes…but they are the path forward. We pray for Charlie Kirk. Not because we condone what he says or what he does…but because he is a human being…because his life matters…and because the

work of God in the world does not exclude anyone…not even those we strongly and passionately oppose.

Charlie Kirk and a Society that Breeds Violence

This is also a moment to reflect on the society that allows these things to happen. Violence doesn't spring from nothing. It grows from isolation…from fear…from the normalization of anger… from systems that teach some people that the only way to be heard is through force. Social justice isn't just a buzzword…it's a moral necessity. People are hurting, communities are under siege and the wounds go far beyond one shooting.

Following Jesus With Justice and Mercy

I keep thinking about how Jesus moved among people who were broken, marginalized and overlooked. He didn't respond with violence. He didn't meet hate with hate. He stood with the oppressed. He called out the powerful. He lived the radical mercy that God asks of us. That's our guide. That's what it looks like to respond with courage…not vengeance. To confront injustice without becoming the very thing we oppose.

Prayer as Active Resistance to Charlie Kirk and those We Disagree With

And yes, it is hard. It is human to want Kirk to pay for the harm his ideas cause. But vengeance belongs to God. Our responsibility is to pray, to act justly, to love and be witnesses of the truth in a world that too often values power over life. Prayer is not passive. Prayer is active. Prayer is showing up in the spiritual and moral sense, asking God to protect, to heal and to guide…not just Kirk…but ourselves and the communities around us.

Acting With Compassion and Courage

So we pray. For Kirk. For the people impacted by this violence. For the society that fosters it. For ourselves, that we might respond with clarity, compassion and courage. And then, we act. We speak for justice. We build communities where the vulnerable are protected. We fight not with guns, but with integrity, compassion and moral courage. That is how we resist the spiral of hate that threatens all of us.

Conclusion: Faith, Hope and Justice

This shooting is horrendous. It's frightening. It should shake us to our cores. But it can also remind us who we are called to be. Christians are called to love, to act, to stand for life, to confront injustice and to embody mercy. Not selectively, not for convenience, not only for those we agree with…but for everyone. That is the work of faith. That is the work of hope. That is the work of justice. That is how we respond to violence in a world desperately in need of all three.

9.10.25

Political Violence : The Anti-Gospel

Political Violence is the Enemy of Christ

The Fundamental Betrayal of Political Violence

Political violence is not just a sin among many. It is the fundamental betrayal of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. To speak of political violence is to speak of a rival faith, a rival story, a rival salvation. The Gospel announces reconciliation. Political violence announces domination. The Gospel calls us to the breaking of bread. Political violence calls us to the breaking of bodies. The Gospel proclaims that God is love. Political violence proclaims that God is force. The two cannot coexist. They are opposites. They are enemies. They are Gospel and anti-gospel.

Forgetting the Cross

Too many have forgotten this. I sometimes wonder…painfully… how we have convinced ourselves that the cross can march under our flags. Across centuries, Christians have baptized crusades, blessed armies, and wrapped Christ's name around the machinery of war. Empires have paraded under banners claiming Christ while their hands dripped with blood. Revolutionaries have invoked liberation while reproducing the very oppression they swore to destroy. Even the Church has told itself that some violence is "necessary" to protect faith, people or nation. But all of this is nothing more than heresy.

Jesus in the Midst of Empire

The life of Jesus exposes this heresy of political violence for what it is. He lived under Rome's watchful eye, in a land where taxes crushed the poor and local leaders rubbed elbows with occupiers. I imagine him watching a small fisherman despair

over debts and thinking…this is not God's way. He knew the brutality of Rome. He saw the collusion of religious leaders with imperial power. He heard the whispers of zealots who dreamed of violent uprising. He entered this contested space not with the sword of Caesar but with the words of the Sermon on the Mount…"Blessed are the peacemakers." His politics were scandalous. He refused to join the zealot's war. He refused to bow to Rome's coercion. He refused to let violence define the horizon of true liberation.

The Cross as Political Violence

And for this refusal, he was executed. Crucifixion was not an abstract punishment. It was political violence at its most raw. Rome nailed rebels, dissidents and threats to public order to crosses to show the world what happens when you resist the empire's logic. The cross was terror. The cross was intimidation. That Jesus was hung on such a cross tells us that his Gospel was recognized for what it truly was…a threat to the politics of violence. But God disrupted the script. Resurrection shattered the claim that political violence is ultimate. Death was not final. Empire did not win. The logic of domination was broken open by the power of life. Resurrection proclaims…your killing cannot save you…your weapons cannot secure you…your terror cannot rule forever. Only love endures.

The Temptation of Political Violence

Yet even after the Resurrection, the temptation of violence never goes away. The world insists that violence is realistic, necessary and unavoidable. States justify wars in the name of order. Leaders imprison and execute to maintain control. Movements fracture because they think freedom must be bought with blood. And Christians…again and again…consent to the lie. We call weapons "security." We call bombing campaigns "peacekeeping." We call executions "justice." Every time we do, we proclaim the anti-gospel.

The Politics of the Cross

To say that political violence is the anti-gospel is not to withdraw from politics. It is to insist that there is another politics…the politics of the cross. The cross is not simply personal piety…it is public witness. It is a refusal to let Caesar have the last word. It is a rejection of violence as the path to peace. It is the scandalous claim that God's realm comes not with soldiers but with saints… not with domination but with the washing of feet…not with executions but with resurrection.

Martyrs as Witnesses

The politics of the cross is hard. It is costly. It demands that we lay down the weapons of control and trust the foolishness of love. It asks us to risk being crushed by violence rather than reproducing it. It dares us to stand in front of the empire and speak peace even when the empire is nailing us to wood. The martyrs understood this. They did not resist with armies. They resisted with bodies, with prayers and with forgiveness. Their blood was not spilled in conquest but in witness. They knew that to take up the sword was to betray the one who told Peter to put it away.

The Anti-Gospel of Political Violence Consumes All

The anti-gospel of political violence…on the other hand… demands endless sacrifice. It consumes soldiers and civilians… enemies and allies…the innocent and guilty alike. It thrives on the logic of necessity…this one must die for the people to live, this village must be destroyed for the nation to be secure or this prisoner must be executed so society can be safe. But the Gospel unmasks these lies. In Christ, God has already declared that no one's death can secure life. Only resurrection can do that. To continue believing in political violence is to continue crucifying Christ in the name of order.

The Church's Call

The Church's task is to expose this idolatry. We are not called to bless the empire's wars, nor to sanctify revolutions of blood. We are called to embody another politics…the politics of peace, mercy, forgiveness and resurrection. To be disciples of Jesus is to refuse the sword, the bomb, the prison or the execution chamber. It is to live in such a way that our very existence announces… political violence is for the enemies of God not the servants of Christ.

The Choice Stands

And so, the choice stands before us, as stark as the wood of the cross…Christ or Caesar…Gospel or anti-gospel…love or violence. The world will always tell us that we must kill to survive. But the Gospel proclaims that only in refusing to kill do we find life. Resurrection is the proof. The empty tomb is the testimony. And the witness of the saints, prophets and martyrs is the reminder…political violence may crucify, but it cannot save.

9.11.25

Saint Mychal Judge: The Eucharist in the Rubble of 9/11

God's Canonization of Mychal Judge

The Church doesn't need to canonize Mychal Judge. God already did.

Running Toward Chaos: Mychal Judge in Action

On September 11, 2001, when planes tore into towers and the streets of New York filled with screams, Mychal Judge ran toward the chaos. He didn't carry a weapon. He didn't carry armor. He just wore a collar and carried a burning heart. While others fled, he entered the lobby of the North Tower with the firefighters he served as chaplain. He prayed over broken bodies. He blessed the maimed. He whispered forgiveness into ears that were already fading into silence. He was a priest to the very last breath of so many. God, he was a priest.

A Queer Priest at the Margins: Mychal Judge's Ministry

But let's not wash his story clean. Mychal Judge was not a saint made for stained glass. He was a queer man…a gay priest…who bore the weight of his identity in a Church that wanted him hidden. He knew what it meant to live at the margins…and that knowledge gave him a deep tenderness for all who were pushed aside. Like Jesus, Mychal Judge was a dear friend to the homeless, the addicted, the poor, the sick and so many others that society had cast out. When AIDS swept through New York and the Church turned its face, Mychal Judge walked straight into hospital rooms. He held the hands of men dying in isolation. He kissed foreheads others feared to touch. He blessed bodies the world called unclean. Mychal Judge was a queer priest who loved without calculation…who turned shame into embrace… who carried Christ into places the hierarchy dared not go.

The Death of a Saint: Mychal Judge in the Rubble

In the lobby of the North Tower, violence struck Mychal Judge down. A slab of steel and glass came roaring down from above. It split his skull. His body hit the floor. Blood pooled beneath him. Dust filled his lungs. His clothes smeared with ash. His collar soaked in blood. His life ended in horrific fragments.
And yet…Mychal Judge's body spoke as loudly as any body ever has. Firefighters and police officers gathered him up…carrying him out as if they were carrying Christ himself. Look at the photos…soot-soaked men cradling his limp body like an offering. They carried him out of the hell of empire as if to say, Here is our priest. Here is our brother. Here is our saint. They laid him on the altar of St. Peter's Church…a queer Pietà… Mychal Judge's body broken and given for the world.

The Queer Eucharist: Mychal Judge's Sacrifice

What happened that day was nothing less than the Eucharist… This is my body, broken for you. This is my blood, poured out for the world. Mychal Judge's broken flesh became bread. His spilled blood became wine. His death became a feast of memory, a sacrament of defiance.
The Vatican wants miracles? Here is miracle enough… A gay man in a collar who loved more fiercely than the fear that surrounded him. A priest who walked into AIDS wards and never turned away. A friar who carried Christ into queer bars and firehouses with equal joy. Mychal Judge died not with a sermon…but with a body that became the very incarnation of Jesus Christ. If you can't see the miracle…it's not because it isn't there. It's because you're too afraid to admit that holiness can come clothed in queer flesh.
Mychal Judge's body is the chalice. His wounds are the bread. His love is the real presence of Christ.

Resurrection: Mychal Judge Lives in Memory

But resurrection will not be silenced. Mychal Judge rises every time his story is told. He rises in the courage of firefighters who still whisper his name before running into danger. He rises in queer kids who see in him proof that God not only tolerates them…but delights in them. He rises in the homeless and the sick who remember a priest who never turned away. He rises in every act of defiant love that refuses to bow to fear.

Queer Love Indestructible: Mychal Judge's Legacy

This is the truth the Church doesn't want to face…queer love is indestructible. You can crush the body, but you cannot kill the love. You can split the skull, but you cannot silence the witness. You can bury the gay priest, but you cannot keep Mychal Judge's holiness in the ground. Mychal Judge lives because queer love cannot die.

Every Eucharist is resurrection. So is his memory. His queer body, broken in the rubble, declares that no violence, no empire, no tower of hate or fear can overcome love. His very death spits in the face of violence and says…Do your worst. Love will rise again.

And love has risen. In every queer kid who dares to love themselves. In every priest who dares to bless the rejected. In every community that refuses to give up on compassion. Mychal Judge is not gone. He is here. He is watching. He is blessing. He is laughing. He is rising. He is raising us up.

Already a Saint: Mychal Judge in Spirit

The hierarchy may hesitate. But the faithful already know…and when the hierarchy refuses to act…the people will. Mychal Judge is already a saint. The Spirit has already declared it in fire and ash…This is the Body of Christ. This is Mychal Judge. This is a saint whose love will live forever.

Liturgical Prayer: Saint Mychal Judge, Watch Over Us

So let us proclaim:

Saint Mychal Judge, watch over us. Teach us to carry love into the fires of our own time. Teach us to believe that even broken bodies can feed the world. Teach us to stand against every violence with the only power that endures…the power of love. Watch over the firefighters who run into flames. Watch over the sick abandoned in their beds. Watch over the queer who wonder if they are beloved. Watch over us in our violence, our fear and our ruin. Teach us to love as you loved. Teach us to die as you died…with arms open wide. Teach us to rise as you have risen… with love that cannot be destroyed.
For your body…broken in the rubble…still speaks. It rebukes violence. It feeds us with courage. It watches over us as bread watches over the hungry…as blood watches over the living…as Christ watches over the Church.
And so…with dust in our lungs and hope in our bones…
Saint Mychal Judge, pray for us.

9.13.25

Lactantius Against the Death Penalty: Early Christian Ethics

Lactantius and the Death Penalty: A Radical Moral Witness from the Early Church

It's hard to even imagine what it must have felt like to stand in that crowd and hear the cheer when the sword dropped. Roman streets hosted spectacles of death…crucifixions, beheadings and other types of public executions staged as both punishment and entertainment. Citizens gathered not only to witness justice…but also to marvel at the power of the state. Life itself was measured by obedience…not by dignity.

Into this world steps the early writings of Lactantius (c. 250–325 AD), a Christian intellectual. He speaks with rare courage. Arguing, "…it is killing itself that is
prohibited" (Lactantius, Divine Institutes VI.xx).

It is not enough to ask whether something is legal. Lactantius asks whether it is moral. To obey God when the state demands obedience is no small task. He insists that divine law stands above human convenience, that conscience cannot be muted to accommodate cruelty and that true justice can never be measured by the sword (VI.xx).

Lactantius Amongst Public Executions in Ancient Rome

Picture the Roman forum. Blood dripping from the stones. A crowd cheers. Law is not abstract…it is spectacle. To witness sanctioned death is to risk dulling the soul. Moral desensitization seeps into the citizenry. Life becomes a commodity.

Opposing this was more than a philosophical stance…it was radical courage. To question the state's right to take life invited suspicion, ostracism and strange speculation. And yet, Lactantius

confronts this reality without hesitation. He refuses the comfort of legality. Christians…he insists…cannot participate in or condone the machinery of death (VI.xx).

Philosophical Implications of Roman Law

From a philosophical perspective, the Roman system treats life as instrumental…a means to maintain order rather than an end in itself. You can almost feel the clash here…Rome saw order… Christians saw persons (VI.xx). Thus, the moral challenge is not merely to disobey immoral laws but to resist the societal conditioning that normalizes violence.

Lactantius: Moral Responsibility Beyond Law

Lactantius is uncompromising…

"Thus it will be neither lawful for a just man to engage in warfare… nor is it lawful for him to accuse anyone of a capital crime, because it makes no difference whether you put a man to death by word, or rather by the sword, since it is the act of putting to death itself which is prohibited" (VI.xx).

Moral responsibility rises above law. The judge or the accuser or the executioner or the citizen…each is implicated. That's unsettling, isn't it? It means none of us can claim innocence just because the law gives us cover. The law may permit…but conscience cannot stand by in the midst of injustice.

Lactantius on The Moral Weight of Witnessing Violence

He goes further…

"For he who reckons it a pleasure, that a man…should be slain in his sight, pollutes his conscience as much as if he should become a spectator and a sharer of a homicide…" (VI.xx)

Even passive witness carries weight. To stand by while another is executed…to watch life extinguished as entertainment…stains the soul. I think about this when I see people glued to a screen… watching violence unfold like it's just normal. Blood becomes communal corruption.

At the root lies a profound truth…

"For when God forbids us to kill, He not only prohibits the violence condemned by public laws, but He warns us against committing those things which are esteemed lawful among men" (VI.xx).

Legality does not equal morality. Divine law is the standard. Conscience cannot be outsourced to the state.

Philosophical Anticipation of Natural Law

Philosophically, Lactantius anticipates natural law theory… human beings…by virtue of reason and intrinsic dignity…can discern moral truths independent of state decrees. His insistence that even passive complicity carries moral weight challenges legalistic notions of justice and anticipates modern human rights reasoning.

Lactantius Sees Justice as Relational Care

For Lactantius, justice is relational…not retributive.

"The whole point of justice consists precisely in our providing for others through humanity what we provide for our own family through affection" (V.xvi).

Justice, he reminds us, is care extended beyond the family or even beyond the self. Vengeance has no place in any of it…

A wise man does not seek revenge…true justice can only be administered by God. (V.xvi)

"Certainly it is justice not to put a man to death, not to take the property of another." (V.xvi)

To execute a life is to violate these principles. True justice leaves judgment to God…protects the innocent…and refuses to participate in the machinery of vengeance (V.xvi).

Lactantius on The Theological Foundation of Human Dignity

Theologically, human dignity is grounded in the belief that all humans bear the image of God (Imago Dei). Taking a life is not simply a social or political act…it is an affront to the divine imprint in the person and a violation of sacred dignity. Lactantius' ethical vision is therefore both relational and transcendental…it requires care for others as a reflection of God's care, and it recognizes that ultimate judgment belongs to God alone.

Lactantius: Morality is Beyond Legality

Lactantius bridges moral philosophy and theology in a profound way. Philosophically, he challenges the assumption that legality justifies action and emphasizes that morality transcends human authority (VI.xx). The act of killing cannot be morally neutral… regardless of social approval or legal sanction.

Divine Justice and Human Fallibility

Theologically, his reasoning is rooted in divine justice and providence. God's law governs the moral order of the universe and human laws are subordinate. The act of killing violates the sacred moral order and endangers the soul. Witnessing or condoning violence corrupts not only the victim but also the community and the conscience of the observer (VI.20). Moral

compromise…even in the name of legality or convenience… undermines human participation in divine justice.

Lactantius also addresses the problem of human fallibility. Humans cannot judge perfectly…our perception of justice is limited. The pursuit of vengeance through execution is therefore not justice…it is human arrogance. True justice is patient, relational and merciful…and leaves ultimate judgment to God alone (V.xvi).

Lactantius Amongst Christian and Secular Thinkers

Among early Christian thinkers, Lactantius is unique. Augustine allowed capital punishment in limited cases. Aquinas recognized the state's right to execute. Lactantius rejects it outright (VI.20). Nearly two millennia before contemporary abolitionist thought… he anticipated arguments against state-sanctioned death. His clarity and courage make him both prophetic and instructive (V.xvi; VI.xx).

His vision contrasts sharply with prevailing Roman assumptions, which treated violence as civic necessity and spectacle. Where Roman law saw the taking of life as a tool of order, Lactantius saw it as moral failure…a violation of divine law and the sacred dignity of persons. He challenges both ancient and modern readers to reconsider the moral legitimacy of legal violence.

Moral Imperative for Today

The death penalty remains a battleground. Lactantius offers a moral lens that transcends politics…legality is not morality… complicity stains the soul…and true justice is always centered on mercy, care and protection (VI.xx).

He challenges us personally. How often do we turn a blind eye to violence? I do it. We all do. Watching, condoning or remaining silent mirrors the moral corruption he condemned in Rome.

Conscience is sacred…and moral responsibility cannot be outsourced to the state (VI.xx).

Lactantius' critique demands that we examine our laws, our justice systems and our moral engagement. It calls us to resist vengeance, honor life and recognize sacred dignity.

Lactantius and Modern Ethical Thought

Though separated by nearly seventeen centuries, Lactantius' moral vision resonates deeply with contemporary debates on human rights, criminal justice and capital punishment. Modern philosophers and ethicists grapple with many of the same questions: How can a society justify the deliberate taking of life? What is the moral responsibility of those who witness or participate in state-sanctioned violence? How should divine or natural law inform human law?

Human Rights and Legal Morality

His insistence that legality does not equal morality anticipates modern human rights theory. Thinkers such as John Locke and the framers of international human rights law recognize that human beings possess intrinsic dignity that cannot be overridden by state authority. Lactantius' reasoning aligns with the principle that life is inviolable…and no legal or political expediency can justify killing (VI.xx).

Theological and Philosophical Resonance

Theologically, his vision anticipates modern Christian ethical teaching…including John Paul II's consistent condemnation of the death penalty and Pope Francis' total condemnation of the death penalty (V.xvi; VI.xx). Philosophically, he challenges utilitarian and retributive approaches to justice…emphasizing relational care, mercy and moral responsibility.

Contemporary Lessons from Lactantius

Lactantius challenges society to examine its complicity in normalized violence. Today, executions are often mediated by media, public opinion and political narratives. He reminds us that the moral burden extends to all who condone, witness or remain silent. Justice begins with conscience, not law and morality cannot be outsourced (VI.xx).

Moving Forward with Lactantius

Lactantius' critique of the death penalty is radical, prophetic and enduring. Condemning a life carries the same weight as ending it. Witnessing state violence stains conscience. Divine law surpasses human law. Justice is care, mercy, protection…not vengeance (VI.xx; V.xvi).

In a world still wrestling with capital punishment, systemic injustice and the fragility of human dignity…his voice demands attention. He is not merely historical. He is contemporary moral guidance. To follow him is to honor life, resist vengeance and leave ultimate judgment to God. Conscience and justice must always reign supreme…not the sword…not revenge. This is the hardest part…trusting God when all of your soul wants vengeance.

Amongst contemporary horrors, Lactantius' early writings stand as a bridge between early Christian moral thought and contemporary ethics…especially with regard to the death penalty.

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Note: While Lactantius offers one of the most forceful early Christian condemnations of capital punishment, his later writings show some equivocation. Early in his career, he framed opposition in terms of absolute moral ethics…killing is

inherently wrong. Later, he occasionally adopted a situational ethics perspective, suggesting that in rare divinely sanctioned circumstances, violence might be permissible. This distinction highlights the tension between aspiration and situation…the hope for nonviolence and the confusion of the temporal reality.

9.14.25

Apokatastasis: Who Goes to Heaven? What a Stupid Question.

Apokatastasis.

Note: Throughout this essay, Greek theological terms are provided with brief definitions in parentheses to help the reader engage with the richness of Orthodox thought.

Let's be blunt: asking "Who goes to heaven?" is already the wrong question. It's lazy, self-righteous, and spiritually shallow. Heaven isn't a reward, God isn't tallying points, and obsessing over who "qualifies" is the purest form of pride. From an Orthodox Christian perspective, it doesn't matter. What matters is synergy (synergeia, cooperation with God's grace) with God's grace (charis, unmerited divine favor), metanoia (repentant turning), living in eucharistia (participation in the Eucharist), opening your heart to the transformative fire of the Divine and submitting to the process of theosis (divinization, participation in God's life).

Salvation is not about exclusion. It is about participation, transformation and restoration…apokatastasis (the ultimate restoration of all creation). It is relational, experiential and ongoing. Love…agapē (selfless, divine love)…is the engine… the ultimate redemptive principle…the force that will draw all creation to God. Heaven is not a prize…it is the living breathing presence of God's love transforming all creation…moving every soul toward apokatastasis.

Theosis and Apokatastasis: Heaven as Participation

At the center of Orthodox soteriology is theosis (divinization, participation in God's life)…the transformation of the human person into participation with God. Heaven is not a place you

"arrive at" like a destination on a map. It is union with God…a participatory reality where the soul is drawn into the energies (energeia, divine activity) of God, sharing in the divine light (phōs akatharton, uncreated light) and restored to the image (eikōn, the image of God) and likeness (homoiosis, conformity to God) of God…all as part of the ultimate apokatastasis of creation.

The early fathers (and mothers)…Origen, Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus the Confessor… spoke of apokatastasis (universal restoration). God's love is universal, relentless and patient beyond measure. Every soul is invited to the kenotic (kenōsis, self-emptying) embrace of Christ…emptied of pride, fear and illusion…and filled with uncreated light (phōs akatharton). Heaven is not "won"…it is entered through cooperation…synergeia (synergeia, working with God's grace)…and the movement of every soul toward apokatastasis.

Too often, Christians reduce salvation to moral arithmetic…good deeds here, belief there and suddenly you're "in." This is not the faith of the fathers. Heaven is not a reward. Heaven is life. And it begins now, in the movement of every soul toward apokatastasis.

Love as the Engine

The nous (mind) must be purified (katharsis, spiritual cleansing), and the heart (kardia) must learn philoponia (love for others in imitation of Christ). Theosis is not theoretical…it is a burning, dynamic, painful and beautiful engagement with God's life. Each act of love (agapē, selfless divine love) participates in the transformative process. Love is not optional. It is the ultimate energy pulling all creation toward apokatastasis. Even the universe groans (synechōs stenōn, continuously sighing) toward union with God…anticipating the fullness of apokatastasis.

Judgment and Apokatastasis: Mystery, Not Scorekeeping

Orthodoxy affirms judgment…but it is relational, mystical (mysterion, mystery) and deeply experiential. God's judgment is the full encounter with divine love (agapē pantokrator, all-powerful love). Hell is not an eternal punishment…it is the light of God burning away every inclination that we have that is not toward God. Pistis (faith), metanoia (repentance) and synergeia (cooperation with divine grace) determine how a soul experiences that divine fire and its movement toward apokatastasis.

The Pull of Divine Love

Scripture reminds us: God "desires all men to be saved" (1 Timothy 2:4). Judgment is not exclusionary…it is the transient encounter with the uncreated energies (energeiai akathartoi) of God. Those who resist experience it as unbearable until they relent…those who cooperate experience it as life itself. Love… agapē…is the ultimate redemptive principle…the gravity of God's soul. The pulling every rational being toward apokatastasis.

Human Responsibility

You do not get to see the scoreboard. You cannot measure the soul of your neighbor, nor weigh their ousia (essence) against yours. That is God's prerogative. Your work is metanoia (repentance), katharsis (purification), leitourgia(participation in liturgical life) and diakonia (service). Obsessing over who is "in" or "out" is pride masquerading as piety.

Judgment is relational, not legalistic. Oikonomia (God's providential ordering of the cosmos) ensures that divine love operates toward restoration, not exclusion. Every encounter with God's energies becomes a summons to embrace love and participate in apokatastasis.

Living Toward Apokatastasis

God's love is relentless, infinite, uncontainable and unstoppable. The Church gives us sacraments, prayer, fasting, and liturgy… tools for synergeia (synergeia, cooperation with divine grace). They are instruments for theosis. Every participation in eucharistia (Eucharist) is an encounter with divine energies, a taste of heaven unfolding in time and a drawing of the soul toward apokatastasis.

The Cosmic Pull

Some souls meet the fire with joy, some with pain and some resist for years. Yet the cosmos moves inevitably toward apokatastasis. God's love is unstoppable. Every rational soul (logikon pneuma, rational spirit) will eventually meet this transformative fire and be saved. This is not wishful thinking…it is the epicenter of Christian soteriology. It is universal.

The process is difficult. The path is narrow. But it is open to all. God does not discriminate. God does not calculate. Synergeia, philokalia (love of the beautiful and good) and metanoia (repentance) are the mechanisms by which every soul is drawn toward theosis and ultimate apokatastasis. Heaven is not a place…it is participation in God's love. And God wills make it a reality for all.

Engage with leitourgia, fast with intention (nēpsis, watchfulness), pray with the mind (nous) and serve with diakonia(service). This is the universal call. Nothing is outside the reach of divine love. Nothing is beyond God's restorative fire. That is the ultimate truth…agapē draws all to God…toward apokatastasis.

A Universalist Orthodox Vision of Apokatastasis

Salvation is universally offered. Heaven is not selective. Every soul encounters God's energies (energeiai akathartoi) differently…but none are ultimately excluded

from apokatastasis. This is the hope of the fathers and mothers, the trajectory of the scriptures and the lived tradition of the Orthodox Church.

Patristics

The early fathers and mothers did not speak in half measures. Origen's apokatastasis was radical…every rational soul reconciled, every creation restored. Gregory of Nyssa insisted that God's oikonomia operates toward fullness, not exclusion. Maximus the Confessor described a cosmos caught in tension with divine love (agapē), where God's will (thelema) is transformative and redemptive for all.

This is not soft theology. It is fierce, relentless and unapologetic love. And it is difficult. It requires kenosis (self-emptying), turning away from pride and obsession, daily metanoia, immersion in eucharistia, prayer (proseuchē), fasting (nēpsis) and service (diakonia). Salvation is relational, transformative and universal…leading every soul toward apokatastasis.

Stop tallying souls. Stop judging. Open your heart. Engage in synergeia with divine grace. Participate in leitourgia. Live the life of metanoia, humility (tapeinophrosynē, lowliness) and love (agapē). God's love is too big to fail. It will reach every soul, drawing all into apokatastasis.

Stop Obsessing, Start Living Apokatastasis

Heaven is already here for those who dare to live in God's love today. Pray. Love. Fast. Participate in eucharistia. Enter into theosis. Let God handle the rest. Salvation is a fire that purifies, restores and elevates. Every soul will encounter it. Every soul will be drawn into it. Every soul will be perfected. Everything will be made whole.

The western obsession over “who gets in” is a distraction. It is pride. It is fear. It is refusal to live the life of transformation that God calls us to. Heaven is not a reward. Salvation is not a ticket. The feast is prepared. The table is set. The fire of God’s love burns and will reach every soul. Nothing will resist God’s love forever. Nothing will escape God’s redemption. This is the cosmic promise of agapē…of love. This is the reality of apokatastasis.

9.15.25

Situational Ethics: The Enemy of Liberation

The Call to Liberation

Ethics is not a casual conversation…it is the terrain upon which life itself is waged. Every choice we make, every compromise we entertain, every whisper of convenience or calculation leaves an imprint on the soul. And yet, the dominant moral frameworks of our age…particularly situational ethics…invite us to measure principle against circumstance, to trade fidelity for expedience, to barter truth for comfort. This is not simply a failure of morality…it is a failure of moral…and a betrayal of humanity itself. Situational ethics promises sophistication but delivers compromise. It promises flexibility but produces fragmentation…and moral obliteration.

In the midst of such lunacy, liberation makes a claim that cannot be ignored…fidelity, love and justice cannot be negotiable. They are the absolutes of human existence. Liberation refuses to bend to convenience…refuses to excuse compromise…refuses to allow delay or calculation to supplant principle. It is the fire that purifies conscience…and calls us to restoration of the soul to wholeness. To live by liberation is to live in fidelity…to live in fidelity is to live in truth…to live in truth is to live in love. This is the architecture of true ethical existence. Thus, liberation is not optional…it is essential…it is inevitable.

The Collapse of Situational Ethics

Morality is Life, Not Calculation

Morality cannot be abstracted from life, though many have tried. To reduce ethics to a calculation, a sliding scale, a negotiation of circumstances, is to detach it from the raw blood of existence itself. To live is to confront limits. To confront limits is to

discover that there are truths which cannot bend without breaking…and when they break…they shatter…taking lives, communities and souls with them.

Situational ethics imagines itself merciful, contextual and compassionate. It whispers that principle should never be absolute, that fidelity is rigidity and that truth must be pliable. But behind these whispers lurks a deeper reality…situational ethics is not humility, it is cowardice masquerading as compassion, convenience draped in the garments of mercy. It serves not the oppressed but the chooser, not the weak but the powerful, not the vulnerable but those who already live insulated from consequence.

At the center of situational reasoning is the enthronement of the self. The chooser becomes the arbiter of good and evil, not by discerning what is eternally demanded, but by bending demand to circumstance, weighing what is convenient against what is costly, calibrating morality not according to truth but according to survival of comfort. The self becomes sovereign. In its sovereignty, the self determines who will be remembered and who will be forgotten, who will be dignified and who will be expendable. Situational ethics thus installs hierarchy into the heart of morality…those with the power to interpret circumstance become those with the power to decide who matters. And it is always the vulnerable who are left behind, for they have no voice to shape the calculus, no leverage to alter the "context," no authority to bend the rules of convenience.

Liberation as Absolute

Liberation begins from the opposite side. Liberation refuses to enthrone the chooser. Liberation decenters the self. Liberation sees the one who has been abandoned and proclaims…there is no circumstance that can justify your abandonment, no context that can excuse your erasure. Liberation binds itself to principle because only principle can bind the oppressor's hand and protect

the oppressed body. Where situational ethics allows the self to improvise according to comfort…liberation ethics demands fidelity to that which transcends self-interest.

The word “absolute” is hated in the halls of situational reasoning. But for those who have been crushed, the absolute is the only refuge. If dignity is negotiable, then it’s deniable. If morality is flexible, then it is fragile. Liberation cannot be fragile. Liberation must be a rock against which the waves of circumstance break in vain.

The essence of situational ethics is betrayal. Betrayal does not always arrive as a dramatic act of violence…more often it is the quiet decision to yield principle to convenience, to delay justice until it is easier, to weigh the worth of one life against the efficiency of preserving many. Betrayal is justified in the language of complexity…in the language of waiting…in the language of realism. But beneath every justification lies a fundamental truth…betrayal is always the preservation of the self at the expense of the other. Situational ethics is betrayal codified into a moral system. It institutionalizes abandonment.

The deepest problem is not simply that situational ethics fails in practice. It’s that situational ethics is ontologically corrupt. It is built upon a false vision of reality. It assumes that truth is contingent…that morality bends to context…that being itself is malleable to circumstance. But liberation philosophy begins elsewhere. It begins from the conviction that reality is not contingent but structured, that there are foundations which cannot be eroded without collapsing the whole, that fidelity is not an option but the very condition of truth.

To make morality contingent is to make existence itself contingent. If good and evil shift with circumstance, then the very distinction collapses. What remains is not morality but preference…not ethics but improvisation. To live within such a

world is to live in chaos, where power names itself good and convenience calls itself virtue.

There is a profound irony in situational reasoning. It presents itself as humility, as a recognition that life is too complex for absolutes. Yet in practice it is the most arrogant of moral frameworks, for it assumes the chooser has the authority to decide anew what is good and what is evil in each situation. It enthrones the ego at the very moment it pretends to dethrone principle. Liberation ethics sees through the disguise. Liberation unmasks the false humility of flexibility and exposes the raw selfishness that lies beneath.

Liberation Against Delay

The Tyranny of Delay

Situational ethics thrives in societies that fear absolutes, are addicted to compromise and that depend on delay. It thrives because it makes room for selfishness while disguising selfishness as virtue. It thrives because it demands nothing ultimate from the powerful and promises everything provisional to the oppressed. It thrives because it converts justice into process and process into postponement.

But liberation does not wait. Liberation cannot wait. Liberation is the cry of those who have already waited too long. It is the demand of those who cannot endure another postponement. Liberation is fidelity breaking into history. It is the refusal to delay truth for convenience.

The slow death inflicted by situational ethics is spiritual as much as social. For when morality becomes negotiable, the soul becomes divided. Desire rules over conscience. The will bends truth until truth becomes unrecognizable. And in that bending, something inside collapses. Responsibility dies. Conscience dies.

Only appetite remains, cloaked in the fragile garments of circumstance.

To participate in situational ethics is to hollow oneself out until nothing but self-interest remains. Liberation sees this hollowness not merely as moral failure but as spiritual damnation…a descent into the abyss of the self where no neighbor can be found and no truth can be discerned.

Liberation as Wholeness

Liberation is fullness. It is the recognition that to be is to be bound…bound to the other, bound to principle and bound to truth. Liberation demands that the self kneel before what is greater than circumstance. Liberation is costly, for it requires the renunciation of convenience and the sacrifice of selfishness. But liberation is the only path to life, for only in fidelity to principle can the dignity of the vulnerable be secured.

Liberation ethics is not optional for those who long for justice. It is the very condition of justice. Without absoluteness, there is no liberation, only perpetual negotiation with the powers that be.

If liberation begins from the refusal of betrayal, then we must understand that betrayal itself is not an accident of circumstance but a pattern written into the very logic of situational ethics. It is not as though there are occasional failures when flexibility is abused…rather, the abuse is the system itself. Every time principle bends, it bends toward power. Every time circumstance is invoked, it is invoked in service of convenience. Every time morality becomes negotiable, the negotiation is rigged in advance. The powerful always end up sitting at the table and the vulnerable are left outside. This is not incidental but structural. Situational ethics was born of selfishness and cannot transcend it. Its' very grammar is compromise. Its' vocabulary is delay. Its' syntax is betrayal.

To speak of liberation in such a context is to speak of an unyielding interruption. Liberation does not arrive politely into the frameworks of situational reasoning. It arrives as a fire that consumes compromise. Where situational ethics calculates, liberation judges. Where situational ethics delays, liberation insists. Where situational ethics excuses, liberation unmasks. The collision is absolute, for there is no reconciliation between a morality that bends and a morality that refuses to bend. They are two fundamentally opposed visions of existence itself. They cannot coexist.

The Cross, Death and Resurrection

The Cross as Absolute Liberation

The reason situational ethics appears so seductive is because it cloaks itself in compassion. It whispers that life is complex, that mercy requires flexibility and that rigid principles wound more than they heal. But liberation philosophy knows the difference between compassion and pity. Compassion binds itself to the oppressed in fidelity. Pity excuses the oppressor in comfort. Compassion risks suffering to protect dignity. Pity rearranges morality to avoid suffering altogether. Situational ethics is not compassion…it is pity institutionalized. And pity is nothing more than selfishness with a tear on its cheek.

The metaphysical core of situational reasoning is its worship of circumstance. Circumstance is elevated to the highest principle. Truth is no longer measured against what is eternal but against what is possible here and now. The present becomes the idol before which principle must bow. But circumstance is fickle. It shifts with the winds of power. To worship circumstance is to worship change itself…and to worship change is to ensure that nothing enduring remains. Liberation shatters this idol. Liberation declares that circumstance cannot be god, because circumstance always abandons the poor. “Not yet.” “It’s

complicated." "We don't have enough." Liberation always calls, "Bullshit."

At its root, situational ethics is a metaphysics of delay. Delay is its chosen weapon. Delay is how it preserves the comfort of the powerful while leaving the oppressed to endure another season of suffering. Delay is always justified as prudence, as wisdom and as patience. But liberation knows that delay is betrayal. To postpone justice is to deny it. To withhold fidelity for the sake of timing is to abandon principle. The eternal cry of the oppressed has always been against delay. Situational ethics…in enthroning delay…institutionalizes abandonment.

Fidelity, Love and the Absolute Ethics of Liberation

The Corruption of the Soul

The soul that consents to situational reasoning becomes corrupted not simply by what it does…but by what it becomes. Each compromise reshapes the inner life, training conscience to bend, habituating desire to reign, teaching the will that truth is negotiable. Over time, the self that once trembled before the demands of fidelity now calculates with ease…weighing principles against convenience as though they were commodities to be traded.

In such a soul, betrayal ceases to feel like betrayal…it feels like wisdom…even maturity. The hollowing out of conscience is almost invisible, for it comes clothed in the language of responsibility. Liberation names this not only moral failure but spiritual death. For the self that abandons fidelity abandons its own humanity.

Resurrection of Fidelity

Liberation restores by demanding. It calls the soul back to fidelity not by soothing but by summoning, not by excusing but

by insisting. Liberation does not say “you have done enough”; it says “you have abandoned too much.” Liberation does not say “principle is unrealistic”; it says “without principle you are unreal.” Liberation’s demand feels harsh because it exposes the depth of compromise, but its harshness is healing. For the only way to resurrect conscience is to confront its death. The only way to rebuild humanity is to renounce the self that betrayed it. Liberation is the voice that refuses to allow betrayal to become normal. Liberation insists that what has been bent must be straightened, that what has been excused must be confessed and that what has been delayed must be enacted. Liberation restores life by restoring absoluteness.

Situational ethics cannot comprehend eternity. It lives within the prison of the immediate. It sees only what is expedient here and now, what can be justified in this moment and what appears plausible within this arrangement of power. It refuses to see beyond the horizon of the present…and in so doing it denies the very possibility of liberation. For liberation is always eschatological. It is the eruption of what is not yet into what is. It is the breaking in of eternity upon time. It is the refusal to allow the present to be final.

Situational reasoning bows before the possible…liberation bows only before the necessary. The possible is always constrained by circumstance…by the powers that be…by the limits of imagination. The necessary bursts those constraints, tears open those powers and expands imagination beyond what has been deemed realistic. To live by situational ethics is to live trapped in the prison of what is. To live by liberation is to live summoned by what must be.

The Cross as the Ultimate Refusal

The failure of situational reasoning is therefore not only ethical but cosmic. It shrinks the horizon of existence to what can be negotiated. It denies the pull of eternity. It amputates hope by

reducing it to possibility. Liberation refuses such diminishment. Liberation insists that hope is not what might happen but what must come. Hope is fidelity to what transcends circumstance. Hope is the confidence that truth is not fragile, that dignity is not negotiable…that justice is not a calculation. Hope is liberation's twin…for both reject the worship of circumstance and anchor themselves in eternity.

When liberation speaks of absoluteness, it does not speak of rigidity for its own sake. It speaks of fidelity as worship. To remain faithful to principle in the face of circumstance is to declare that truth is greater than appetite, that dignity is greater than convenience and that justice is greater than power. Fidelity is an act of reverence. The bending of the self not to circumstance but to truth. To betray principle is not merely to commit an error…it is to commit idolatry. It is to worship circumstance, to genuflect before convenience and to make an offering to selfishness. Betrayal is not simply failure…it is apostasy. Fidelity is not simply discipline…it is liturgy. To live faithfully is to live as though eternity were already breaking into time…to embody in one's own life the refusal to bend that liberation demands of the world.

Liberation as Love

Thus, liberation is both moral and spiritual, both social and ontological. It insists upon fidelity because fidelity alone can resist the corrosion of selfishness. It demands absoluteness because absoluteness alone can defend the dignity of the oppressed. It calls forth courage because courage alone can resist the seduction of delay. Situational ethics abandons. Liberation abides. Situational ethics excuses. Liberation insists. Situational ethics worships circumstance. Liberation worships truth. And this confrontation will not end until one devours the other. For there can be no peace between betrayal and fidelity, no reconciliation between convenience and principle, no common ground between abandonment and liberation. There can only be

fire, burning until the idol of circumstance is reduced to ash and the rock of fidelity restores all.

The cross is the final rupture between fidelity and circumstance. For the cross was not necessary according to the logic of situation. Circumstance demanded compromise, demanded calculation, demanded accommodation to the structures of power. Circumstance whispered that survival was preferable to witness, that negotiation was wiser than fidelity, that delay was more practical than confrontation. Circumstance offered the bargain of safety in exchange for silence. But fidelity rejected the bargain. Fidelity chose to be lifted up rather than bent down. Fidelity chose to endure the instrument of shame rather than yield to the seduction of excuse. The cross is the cosmic refusal to make peace with betrayal. It is the eternal rejection of situational reasoning. It is the proclamation that truth cannot be bartered, that justice cannot be delayed and that dignity cannot be negotiated.

The resurrection is not the reversal of the cross but its confirmation. It does not undo death as though fidelity had failed…it vindicates fidelity by showing that fidelity cannot fail. Resurrection reveals that fidelity is stronger than circumstance, stronger than betrayal, stronger than the calculation of time, stronger even than death. It proclaims that liberation is not a dream but a reality…not a hope deferred but a life already begun. The resurrection is the dawn of eternity within time, the proof that the refusal to compromise is not folly but truth. It is the manifestation that fidelity cannot be conquered…that liberation cannot be silenced…that truth cannot be negotiated.

Eschaton: The Triumph of Fidelity

Yet resurrection does not erase the demand of fidelity…it intensifies it. For if fidelity is vindicated beyond death, then the excuse of circumstance is utterly destroyed. No calculation remains that can justify betrayal. No appeal to survival can

excuse abandonment. No reference to delay can soften compromise. Resurrection proclaims that fidelity is not merely noble but necessary. To betray it is to embrace death…to remain faithful is to live already in eternity. Liberation is therefore not optional, not one possible ethic among others, but the very structure of reality. To live otherwise is not simply to choose wrongly but to step into nothingness.

The eschaton is the horizon where liberation becomes all in all. It is not the completion of compromise but its annihilation. It is not the accommodation of circumstance but its obliteration. It is not the balancing of fidelity with convenience but the final triumph of fidelity alone. The eschaton is the world transfigured into absoluteness…the cosmos remade into fidelity. It is the end of delay, the destruction of excuse, the death of calculation. It is the eternal "now" where justice is not postponed, where dignity is not negotiated, where truth is not bartered. The eschaton is the cosmic liberation that situational ethics cannot even imagine… for it shatters the prison of time and inaugurates the fullness of eternity.

Liberation therefore is not a project among projects but the very essence of existence disclosed. It is not a moral preference but the very shape of reality. To live otherwise is to live in contradiction, to inhabit unreality or to embrace the void. Situational ethics offers itself as sophistication, as maturity, as the art of nuance, but it is nothing more than betrayal adorned in language. It makes cowardice appear reasonable, makes selfishness appear humane, makes abandonment appear merciful. But the soul that surrenders to this illusion discovers only emptiness. For betrayal cannot sustain life…it devours the betrayer as much as the betrayed. Every compromise corrodes the self until there is no self left, only fragments of calculation. To live by situational ethics is to die by a thousand rationalizations, each one a small surrender to nothingness.

Liberation as Wholeness and Love

Liberation is the opposite movement, the return to wholeness. It does not fragment the self but binds it together in fidelity. It refuses to calculate, refuses to compromise, refuses to delay and thereby restores the soul to integrity. To live in fidelity is to live undivided, to live in truth without remainder, to exist as one who is whole. This wholeness is liberation itself. It is the freedom from the tyranny of circumstance, from the coercion of survival and from the idol of delay. Wholeness is freedom from betrayal. Wholeness is life in fidelity.

This life is not passive but active, not retreat but confrontation. Liberation confronts the structures of betrayal because it cannot do otherwise. Situational ethics sustains oppression precisely because it justifies compromise with it. Liberation dismantles oppression precisely because it cannot tolerate betrayal of principle. Liberation is not a strategy…it is a necessity. It is not optional, it is ontological. And in this confrontation, love is revealed as the ultimate ethic. Not love as sentiment or preference, not love as feeling or convenience…but love as fidelity, love as liberation, love as the refusal to abandon. True love refuses compromise with injustice. True love refuses negotiation with betrayal. True love embodies the absolute. Love…and only love…is forever the final law. Liberation is love in action, love incarnate, love unflinching, love triumphant.

Love is absolute because only love can refuse betrayal. Only love can insist on fidelity. Only love can break the seduction of circumstance and restore the soul to wholeness. Only love can carry the weight of justice and lift the oppressed into life. Love is liberation, liberation is love and together they are the only ultimate ethics. All else…situational ethics, compromise, negotiation, convenience…falls away before the fire of fidelity. The truth of existence is that love…unyielding and absolute…is what sustains life, restores the soul and inaugurates the realm of God.

And this is the lesson that must be held against every whisper of compromise, against every excuse for delay, against every argument for situational calculation. The call is clear…fidelity, liberation and love are not optional…they are the ultimate, absolute and unnegotiable ethics. To live in betrayal is to step into nothingness. To live in fidelity is to step into eternity. To live in love is to bring eternity into time, to bear the weight of justice, to restore the dignity of the oppressed and to proclaim without compromise that liberation is the law of the cosmos, the law of the soul and the law of life itself.

Liberation as the Absolute Horizon

Situational reasoning has shown its horror…it excuses betrayal, justifies compromise and collapses the soul into a calculus of convenience. Every attempt to negotiate principle against circumstance diminishes the self, corrodes conscience and betrays the oppressed. The hollow victories of expedience are illusions. The fleeting comfort of compromise masks spiritual death. Liberation confronts this reality with unflinching clarity. It refuses to rationalize betrayal, to excuse delay or to negotiate fidelity. Liberation insists upon the wholeness of the soul, the absoluteness of justice and the inviolability of dignity.

Love is not optional…it is the ethical bedrock upon which liberation stands. Love is not sentiment…it is fidelity enacted in the real world. Love is the refusal to bend before circumstance, the refusal to compromise with injustice and the refusal to delay the claims of the oppressed. Love is liberation in motion…the very force that transforms conscience into courage, principle into action, fidelity into freedom. To live apart from this love is to inhabit unreality…to live within it is to participate in eternity itself.

The cross, the resurrection and the eschaton reveal the ultimate truth…fidelity cannot fail, love cannot be silenced justice cannot be bartered. Liberation is the law of existence, the horizon of

human action and the absolute standard that sustains life itself. Compromise may offer comfort, situational reasoning may offer plausibility, but these are illusions. The only ethic worthy of the soul, worthy of humanity, worthy of the cosmos…is the ethic of liberation and love.

To live otherwise is to step into nothingness. To live faithfully is to step into eternity. To live in love is to bring the eternal into time, to proclaim without compromise that liberation is the law, the fire and the life of the world. Every act of fidelity, every choice for justice, every expression of love is a refusal to surrender to the tyranny of circumstance. Liberation is absolute. Love is absolute. And in this truth, the soul is finally restored, the oppressed are vindicated and the universe itself bows to liberation as the ultimate ethic.

9.16.25

Nitrogen Execution Over My Head: Waiting with Anthony Boyd

A Nitrogen Execution Over My Head:

Anthony Boyd's Prophetic Cry

"To have a nitrogen execution hanging over my head on October 23 is unreal and constantly nerve-racking. Haven't you seen what it did to these other guys?" – Anthony Boyd, September 15, 2025

Anthony Boyd's words are not sterile. They are not distant. They are prophecy spoken through trembling lips. They testify to the sickness of a society that imagines killing can heal, that violence can be sanctified by law, that cruelty can masquerade as justice. His cry is not just his own…it is ours. If we do not hear it, then we have already forfeited our humanity.

I know this because I am walking with him. I have heard the tremble in his voice. I have seen the exhaustion in his eyes. I have felt the weight of this slow crucifixion in the silence that follows a court's cold decision. When Anthony speaks of the execution hanging over his head, I know exactly what he means. I can testify…the nerves fray. The spirit aches. This is not theory. This is torture unfolding in real time.

The False Promise of Humane Killing

A Nitrogen Execution Over My Head and the Lie of Clean Death

"Haven't you seen what it did to these other guys?" Anthony's question refuses to let us look away. Nitrogen hypoxia was sold as clean, quick, merciful. A new way to kill that would ease the conscience of the state. But the lie is already exposed…men convulsing, gasping, suffocating before horrified witnesses.

What was promised as science has revealed itself as spectacle. What we call “protocol” is nothing more than ritualized torture.

I don’t have to imagine what this dread feels like. I hear it in Anthony’s whispers about what happened to the others. I hear it when he wonders aloud if his own body will thrash and seize in those final moments. Humane killing? There is no such thing. There is only suffocation dressed up as justice.

The Torture of Waiting

Over My Head: Death Row as Crucifixion by Calendar

“To have a nitrogen execution hanging over my head…is unreal and constantly nerve-racking.” In those words is not just the threat of death but the slow strangulation of anticipation. Scholars may call it the death row phenomenon…but I call it what it is…torment.

I have sat across from Anthony when the date was set. I have watched his hands shake when the news comes down. I have prayed with him in the silence after. This waiting tears at the mind, the body and the soul. It is crucifixion by calendar. Each delay is another nail. Each date is another wound.

And make no mistake…the suffering spreads. His family carries it. His friends carry it. I carry it. Everyone who dares to look this system in the eye is dragged into its cruelty. The state wants us to believe the punishment belongs to Anthony alone. That is a lie. His torture belongs to all of us.

A Broken Sacrament of Justice

The death penalty wraps itself in the garments of law, but the garments are filthy and torn. We know the truth…wrongful convictions, racial bias, the poor left to stand alone. Hundreds of human beings once condemned to die have been proven

innocent. And yet we carry on as if error were acceptable, as if vengeance justified the risk of killing the wrong man.

When I sit with Anthony, there are no statistics. There is only a man staring into the abyss of suffocation. There is only the groaning of a system that pretends to be justice while feeding on human lives.

The Anti-Sacrament of a Nitrogen Execution

Theologians speak of sacraments as signs of grace. The death penalty is its opposite…a sign of corruption, a ritual of desecration. Each nitrogen execution is not justice…it is idolatry at the altar of death.

Mercy as Revolution

Life Stronger than Death

The prophetic voice doesn't stop at tearing down. It calls for something new. If execution is crucifixion, then mercy is resurrection. To spare Anthony Boyd is not to erase accountability…it is to affirm that life is greater than death. It is to announce that the state does not get the final word. It is to bear witness that God's image still flickers, even in the condemned.

I have seen that image in Anthony. I have seen flashes of hope. I have seen the reach for dignity. And I know this…if the state kills him, it snuffs that out. If mercy prevails, then life proclaims itself stronger than death.

Mercy is not weakness. It is rebellion. It is resistance. It is the refusal to let violence define us. In Anthony's fear…and in my testimony of walking beside him…we are given a chance to reject the false sacrament of death and embrace the sacrament of life.

“I desire mercy, not sacrifice.”

Conclusion: The Prophecy of a Condemned Man with A Nitrogen Execution Hanging Over His Head

Anthony Boyd’s cry…“Haven’t you seen what it did to these other guys?”… is not a complaint. It is prophecy. It unmasks the lie of execution. It reveals cruelty paraded as order. It calls us to remember that killing cannot heal.

And I testify…I have walked into the heart of this torture with him. I have seen what it does. I have felt the collapse of his spirit under the suffocating weight of the state. If we kill him, we destroy not only his body but the fragile truth he dares to speak.

But if we listen…if we stop this execution…we do more than save one man. We take a step toward dismantling the machinery of death itself. We refuse to bow at the altar of execution. We choose mercy. We choose life. We choose resurrection.

To execute Anthony Boyd is to crucify him again and again in our name. To spare him is to declare that prophecy has not fallen silent…that justice has not been swallowed whole by vengeance…that love remains the only absolute.

And I tell you, as one who walks with him…mercy is the only way forward.

9.16.25

Save Anthony Boyd!: A Brother's Plea for Mercy

Save Anthony Boyd

*This essay originates from a conversation I had with Maurice Boyd about his brother Anthony Boyd.

Who Is Anthony Boyd?

When Maurice Boyd thinks of his older brother, he doesn't think about the charges, the courtroom or even the years on death row. He thinks about the brother he copied, the teenager he admired, the person who was always looking out for him. "I was just always trying to mimic what he was doing…I just always wanted to do like him. If he had it, I wanted it, or if he was going, I wanted to go." That's where it all started for him…with love.

A Brother's Memories of Love and Loyalty

They grew up twelve years apart. Anthony was already a man when Maurice was still a boy. Their bond was full of play and protection. Anthony could tease…turning off the lights to scare Maurice or getting mad when his little brother pulled pranks… but he always had his back. "He would give you his last dollar… if his friends had nowhere else to go, he brought them home. He was always looking out for everybody else." That's the Anthony Maurice knows. Generous. Loyal. Brave.

The Weight of a Broken System

Then came the trial. Maurice was in fourth grade. Too young to understand it all, but old enough to feel the weight. "I came home, got off the school bus and I walked in the house and my mom…she was just making calls left and right, trying to figure out what was going on and how she could help." He remembers

her voice…the desperation. He remembers realizing that this time his mom couldn't fix it. "As a kid, you look at your parents as always heroes…and this was something she couldn't fix."

A Childhood Stolen by the Trial

The truth about the death penalty hit him later. Middle school. That's when it sank in…the state really meant to kill his brother. It was shocking. Crushing. But Maurice never doubted. "I knew my brother. I love my brother…I still stood my ground and defended him. I kept saying he was coming home, like all this is a mistake." Thirty years later, that faith hasn't moved.

Facing the Truth of Death Row

Through letters and phone calls, Anthony stayed close. He was still a brother, still guiding Maurice from behind the walls. "Even though it was letters and phone calls…he was always supportive. I still felt like I had a brother…someone looking out for me… from a distance." Yet there's no way to cover over what's been lost. The weddings. The births. The graduations. The family table missing one chair for three decades.

Thirty Years of Waiting for Justice…for Somebody to Save Anthony Boyd

When Maurice speaks now, his words come with fire. "You have an innocent man that's on death row that they're trying to kill, who has been lied on…he was young, black and poor, and he was just thrown through the system. No one gave a damn." He doesn't sugarcoat it. "He is just a black young man from a small southern town who fit a description…and his friends threw him under the rug to save themselves."

The Lost Family Moments

Anthony has held on through it all. “He’s more scared of not living daily…not filling the days he has left with his life as possible…he’s always had faith, always had something positive to say…he’s the one trying to encourage us to stay strong.” Think about that…the man waiting to die is the one giving strength to everyone else.

The Faith That Wouldn’t Break

The trial itself? Maurice can’t forget it. A lawyer with only a few months experience. A courtroom that felt rigged. “It felt like just going through the motions. It felt weird…it was like they were all in this together. He never had a fighting chance.”

Still, Anthony never disappeared. He keeps showing up, even from prison. “We love him. We’re still proud of him…there was never a moment that we didn’t believe in him,” This is more than a plea for mercy. It’s a plea to see Anthony for who he is. Not a case number. Not a headline. Simply as a man who has lived with dignity even while facing death.

Why We Must Save Anthony Boyd

Maurice’s words cut to the bone. “Look at this situation for what it is… someone who was young, black, poor and innocent, facing the ultimate punishment and no one cared enough to fight for him.” Thirty years. Thirty years of prayers and waiting. Thirty years of a system that refused to hear the truth.

The Call for Mercy in Alabama

But Maurice hasn’t let go. His love is still fierce. His hope is still alive. His demand is simple…don’t kill my brother. Recognize Anthony Boyd’s life for what it is…sacred. “We love him. We’re still proud of him.”

Stopping Executions by Nitrogen Hypoxia

Maurice doesn't talk like a lawyer. He doesn't talk like a politician. He talks like a brother. And his voice is the most human thing in the room, "…save my brother."

9.16.25

The Right to Celebrate Charlie Kirk's Assassination. *Don't.

You Have the Right to Celebrate Charlie Kirk's Assassination. *Don't.

Free Speech Protects the Words We Hate

Free speech is difficult. It is uncomfortable, dangerous and necessary. It protects words we despise. It protects words that make us angry. That is why you should have the right to celebrate Charlie Kirk's assassination. The law must allow it. The state cannot and must not silence your words, even when they shock or disturb. Without that protection, free speech is meaningless.

Rights vs. Morality

But rights do not dictate morality. Rights give us the ability to act…but they do not tell us what is wise, what is just or what is human. Celebration is not the same as freedom. Celebration is vengeance dressed as liberty. And we must be clear…no one should never justify an assassination. Not for politics. Not for revenge. Not for personal satisfaction. To justify it is to become the shadow of what we claim to oppose.

The Temptation to Celebrate Death

Charlie Kirk built a career on outrage. He fed fear. He mocked the weak. He flattered the powerful. He called cruelty conviction. Many despised him. Many will feel relief now that he is gone. Relief is natural. Relief is human. But relief is not license to celebrate. Relief is not permission to step into darkness with joy. Celebration crosses that line.

Violence Begets Violence

To celebrate an assassination is to mirror cruelty. Violence begets violence. Words that glorify death spiral outward. Joy rooted in destruction poisons the heart. It all erodes the very humanity we claim to defend.

Free Speech Without Cruelty

We must defend free speech…even when it's ugly…even when it is horrifying. Freedom protects speech we detest…because without that protection, all speech is at risk. But protecting the right to speak does not require indulgence in cruelty.

The Power of Restraint

Restraint is powerful. Restraint is revolutionary. To refuse to cheer death is to carve life out of chaos. Tyranny thrives on vengeance. Freedom thrives on mercy. Celebration binds us to cycles of cruelty. Rejoicing in death teaches our hearts to love destruction.

Remembering the Living

And we must remember the living. Charlie Kirk was loved. People are mourning him. Their grief is real…and it does not vanish because he was controversial. Whatever relief we feel, we cannot mock or diminish their sorrow. Sympathy for those left behind is not weakness. It is the tether that keeps us human. It reminds us that life is real, that grief is real and that compassion matters even when we disagree.

The Price of Free Speech

Free speech is risk. We will hear words that disgust us. We will hear words that glorify violence. That is part of freedom. But its promise is greater than the risk…no government can dictate what we may utter. That promise is worth protecting…even when it challenges our morality.

Yes, you should have the right to celebrate Charlie Kirk's assassination. Protect that right. Defend it. Let words exist. Let the law stand. But of course, you shouldn't celebrate. Celebration is corrosive. Celebration is a lie. Celebration confuses liberty with vengeance. Celebration abandons compassion for cruelty. Protect the right…yes…but rise above the temptation. Choose words that give life instead of poison. Choose mercy. Choose sympathy for the living. Refuse to ever celebrate an assassination.

We live in a time of great tension. We must endure. Thus, is the price of freedom.

9.18.25

Richard Djerf and the Crucifixion of Christ in Arizona

On October 17, 2025, the state of Arizona will strap Richard Kenneth Djerf to a gurney and carry out an execution on death row. Arizona officials will call it justice. They will say the death penalty is closure for the 1993 Luna family murders. But it will not be justice. It will be another crucifixion. It will be another execution of Christ.

I've walked with the condemned. I've been there when the straps cut into their flesh. I've been there when the poison burned through their veins. I've watched the light leave their eyes. I've felt Christ leave with them. I know what crucifixion looks like. I've watched it. On October 17, the crucifixion will happen all over again. This time in the body of Richard Djerf, a man who unleashed terrible violence on the Luna family in 1993.

The 1993 Luna Family Murders and the Original Sin of Richard Djerf

Djerf didn't just kill. He staged a grotesque parody of life. He carried artificial flowers into the Luna home…a hideous gift that hid death. With cold calculation he slaughtered the entire family…Patricia, Albert Sr., Rochelle and five-year-old Damien. Four images of God erased in one night.

The crime was monstrous. We cannot minimize it. The Lunas' blood still cries out from the ground. Their absence remains a wound that has never healed. Their loss matters. Their suffering matters. And yet…this is the scandal of the Gospel. Richard Djerf is also made in the image of God. That is what grace demands. Not cheap sentimental Christianity. Not the soft theology of comfort. The raw dangerous love of Jesus that dares to find God even in the very worst among us.

Richard Djerf's Thirty Years in the Tomb on Arizona's Death Row

For thirty years, Djerf has sat in a concrete tomb on death row. Thirty years of waiting for the state to finish what he started. In 1995, he pled guilty, took responsibility and accepted a sentence of death. The system calls it justice. I call it torture…a slow-motion execution stretched across three decades.

By 2021, the courts had washed their hands. The appeals dried up. But the machinery of death kept grinding forward one gear after another.

Richard Djerf, Attorney General Kris Mayes and the Resurrection of Violence

In May 2025, Attorney General Kris Mayes filed the motion for an execution warrant. She used the familiar words prosecutors always use…"victims deserve justice." But let's be honest. This is not justice. It is vengeance dressed in robes and carried out with a syringe.

We keep telling ourselves the lie that killing a killer honors the dead. That somehow Patricia, Albert, Rochelle and Damien will rise when Djerf falls. That is not resurrection. That is a lie we sanctify. That is delusion.

When Arizona kills Richard Djerf they will not be closing wounds. They will be ripping them open wider and deeper.

Richard Djerf's Final Gospel and Last Statement Before Execution

Earlier today, Djerf released a handwritten statement. He admitted remorse. He refused to beg for clemency. He wrote…"If I can't find reason to spare my life what reason would

anyone else have?" He also wrote…"I hope my death brings some measure of peace."

That first line is devastating. It is not arrogance. It is not manipulation. It is the resignation of a man who knows the weight of his crimes. But it is also more than that. It is a mirror turned toward us. If Richard Djerf cannot find a reason to live… maybe it's because the state has never offered him one…maybe it's because the courts have never offered him one…maybe it's because the church has never offered him one.

"If I can't find reason to spare my life what reason would anyone else have?" That question cuts like a blade. It's not just about Richard. It's about us. We have failed to embody the Gospel in such a way that even the condemned can believe they are redeemable. We have left him in the dark so long that he cannot see the light. We have let the logic of death replace the promise of resurrection.

This is the scandal of grace. God offers redemption even when we cannot see it. Christ sees worth when we declare worthlessness. The Spirit breathes life when we demand death. If Richard cannot find reason to live…it is because we have abandoned him to the grave. His despair is not proof of his unworthiness. It is proof of our refusal to believe in the God who makes all things new.

Repentance is real. Transformation is possible. But America does not want redemption. The state does not want it. The courts do not want it. And far too often the church does not want it. We want blood.

The Theology of State Murder and the Death Penalty

Christ said it plainly in Matthew 25…"Whatever you do to the least of these, you do to me." And who is more "least" than the condemned strapped to a gurney and pumped full of poison?

The death penalty is heresy. It denies redemption. It spits on forgiveness. It bows before vengeance. It dares to claim there are sins God cannot forgive, people God cannot redeem.

When the chemicals burn through Djerf's veins…Arizona will not be preaching the Gospel of Christ. Arizona will be preaching Pilate's gospel. Rome's gospel. The gospel of empire… egomania, torture and death.

The Crucifixion of Christ in Modern Executions

I will not be able to make it to Arizona. But I will be praying. For Richard. For the Luna family. For the guards. For the technicians who push the poison. For the witnesses forced to watch. Because this system crucifies us all.

When Djerf dies…the blood will be on every one of our hands.

A Different Way Beyond the Death Penalty in Arizona

It doesn't have to be this way. We could choose life without parole. We could let Djerf live out his days in prison…carrying his guilt…carrying his remorse…continuing to be transformed. We could honor the Lunas by preventing future violence…not multiplying it. We could put our resources into mental health… into our communities…into life.

We could choose grace. We could choose resurrection. But we will not. Because we are addicted. We believe state murder is holy.

The Resurrection We Reject and America's Refusal of Redemption

The tragedy is not only the four lives stolen in 1993 or even the one about to be taken in 2025. The deeper tragedy is our refusal to believe in redemption at all.

Richard Djerf could continue being a witness to transformation, a counselor, a living testimony to the scandal of grace. But Arizona will not allow it. Arizona demands blood. Arizona insists on killing redemption itself.

And the church…which should be the loudest voice against execution…too often stands silent…or worse yet…cheers for the straps and the syringe. The crucifixion goes on with the blessing of the very people who claim to follow the crucified one.

And when it happens Christ will weep. Again.

9.20.25

Blaine Milam: Justice Is Not Just for Robert Roberson

Remembering Amora Bain Carson and the Role of Blaine Milam

Amora Bain Carson. She was only 13 months old when Blaine Milam murdered her. Her death was sudden, violent and unimaginable. A life so small and so full of potential was stolen before it had a chance to bloom. We cannot let her name fade. We must speak it. We must remember her.

Why Executing Blaine Milam Is Not Justice

Honoring Amora does not mean that killing Blaine Milam will bring justice. It will not. Blaine was barely an adult…18 years old…when this tragedy occurred. He is intellectually disabled… and was still developing and deeply vulnerable. Toxic religion had poisoned his mind. The murder itself was framed as an "exorcism"…a horrifying ritual in which a child's death was twisted into a spiritual battle. In such spaces of lunacy… Fear becomes sacred. Violence becomes holy. Killing becomes salvation. Executing him now would only repeat this insane cycle of delusion that first claimed Amora's life.

How Society Failed Blaine Milam

Blaine Milam is responsible for his actions. There is no escaping it. But before placing all the blame on him…we must recognize a harsher truth…society failed him first. He was abandoned…left without care, guidance or protection (which also created space for drug use to enter into his life). Then, the world fed him the worst kind of religion. His youth, intellectual disability and the toxic beliefs he absorbed collided in the most tragic way imaginable. We cannot separate the crime from the context in which it occurred…nor ignore our own role in shaping it.

Intellectual Disability

Blaine Milam is intellectually disabled. This is not a minor detail. It is central to understanding him, his actions and the question of justice. Intellectual disability affects reasoning, impulse control and the ability to understand consequences. It makes abstract concepts like morality, legality and the permanence of death difficult to grasp. Blaine did not commit his crime as a fully rational adult might. He acted as a vulnerable impressionable young man whose mind was shaped and distorted by fear, manipulation and toxic religious beliefs.

The law recognizes that individuals with intellectual disabilities cannot be held to the same standard as those who are fully competent. Courts across the country have repeatedly affirmed that executing someone with intellectual disabilities is cruel, inhumane and violates constitutional protections. It is not a question of excusing behavior. It is a question of recognizing that the moral and legal responsibility of someone like Blaine Milam is different. He is less culpable precisely because his capacity to fully understand right and wrong and the consequences of his actions is impaired.

Blaine's disability amplified his vulnerability to manipulation, distorted spiritual authority and fear-driven decisions. Ignoring his disability is not just a legal error. It is a moral one. It says we are willing to punish a person without considering the factors that shaped him, the failures that led to the tragedy and the humanity that still exists within him.

Executing Blaine Milam while also acknowledging his intellectual disability would double down on cruelty. It would punish a mind never fully equipped to navigate the choices it faced. Justice, morality and decency require that we respond thoughtfully…not with execution…but with reflection, accountability and humane restraint.

Legal Stays

In 2021, the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals stayed Blaine Milam's execution. This was not an act of mercy. It was a recognition of the law, science and human decency. Experts and organizations including The Arc of the United States, The Arc of Texas, Disability Rights Texas and the AAIDD all testified that Blaine's case required careful clinical consideration. They made it clear…the law must follow established clinical standards, not stereotypes or arbitrary definitions of impairment.

Yet despite these clear expert opinions, the courts have refused to act decisively since. The State insists Blaine Milam is "impaired but not impaired enough"…as if there is some cruel measurement stick for intellectual disability that justifies execution. This reasoning is both legally and morally indefensible. It ignores decades of constitutional precedent establishing that executing individuals with intellectual disabilities is unconstitutional. It dismisses the clinical consensus that Blaine's cognitive limitations significantly reduce his culpability.

The experts are unanimous. Blaine Milam is vulnerable, impaired and profoundly influenced by his environment. His intellectual disability is not a technicality. It is central to whether he can be fairly held accountable in the same way as a competent adult. The failure of the courts to honor this expert guidance is not just a legal oversight. It is a moral failure, an abdication of responsibility and a signal that convenience, punishment and public optics are placed above justice, fairness and human dignity.

Every stay, appeal and expert report is a reminder that law and morality should intersect. They should protect the most vulnerable, not abandon them to a system eager to execute without understanding. Ignoring these interventions is not just a violation of Blaine's rights. It is a betrayal of the principles we

claim to hold dear…that justice should be rational, humane and measured, not cruel, arbitrary and vengeful.

The Hypocrisy Surrounding Blaine Milam

Here is a further moral outrage we cannot ignore. Robert Roberson‘s case has dominated headlines. Public figures, advocacy organizations and media outlets have rallied around him…eager to cast him as the perfect victim of an imperfect system. To be fair, Roberson’s claims are very compelling and he very well could be innocent. But…that doesn’t excuse the fact that Blaine Milam has been largely abandoned. Both cases involve the death of a small child. Both raise significant questions of law. Both demand moral attention. Yet the abolition industrial complex has chosen which story is worthy of outrage…which human is worthy of saving. That choice reveals something deeply hypocritical about the work of those who say their purpose is to save.

Blaine Milam’s guilt is not in question. He did this. He must face responsibility. But the question before us now is whether execution is the answer. The law, morality and public conscience are failing him. His intellectual disability, youth and the toxic religion that shaped his actions are ignored in favor of simplistic punishment. Yet because Robert Roberson claims innocence, he has been lifted up, given attention, resources and advocacy that Blaine Milam has been systematically denied. This is hypocrisy at its rawest. We claim to fight for justice, yet our outrage is selective.

With regard to Blaine Milan and Robert Roberson, to cheer for one and abandon the other is to endorse injustice while pretending to oppose it.

Blaine Milam matters. He is guilty, but his guilt does not erase his humanity or the failures of the society that produced him. Ignoring him because his case is complicated, inconvenient or

uncomfortable is not justice. It is cruelty. True justice requires confronting both the crimes and the systemic failures that shape them…without hypocrisy, selective outrage or continued cycles of violence.

The Irony of Executing Blaine Milam

The bitter irony is unbearable. Blaine Milam killed Amora under the delusion that violence could cast out evil. Now the State plans to kill Blaine Milam under the same delusion, that execution will cleanse, that death will bring justice and that society can somehow correct tragedy by repeating it. Both are lies. Both are violence cloaked in righteousness.

Executing Blaine Milam does not cleanse anything. It does not make Amora's death meaningful. It does not comfort a grieving family in any authentic way. It only repeats the pattern of fear, misbelief and brutality that led to her murder. A system that claims to uphold justice using methods that mimic the original crime risks turning itself into the same kind of agent of violence it claims to oppose.

Execution in Blaine's case is not a corrective act. It is a symbolic echo of the same harm…a ritual of vengeance that ignores reason, mercy and the truth of human frailty. The irony is not just bitter. It is morally corrosive, poisoning the very notion of justice we claim to defend. It shows that vengeance can masquerade as law, cruelty as righteousness and spectacle as morality.

What Executing Blaine Milam Would Mean

Killing Blaine Milam will not bring back Amora. Execution does not rewrite the past. It doubles down on its mistakes. By killing Blaine, society participates in the same cycle of violence that destroyed Amora's life, affirming fear and cruelty over care and understanding.

It would signal that vengeance is the ultimate measure of justice…that intellectual disability, youth and manipulation are irrelevant and that systemic failures can be punished by taking the life of a vulnerable man. This is not justice. It is moral abdication. It is complicity.

A Call for Justice and Humanity

This is cruelty masquerading as justice. The system made Blaine Milam who he was. Society abandoned him. Toxic religion poisoned him. Intellectual disability shaped his choices. To kill him now is to punish a man already a victim of forces far larger than himself.

To honor Amora truly, we must refuse to replicate her loss in the life of another. We must distinguish accountability from vengeance, responsibility from cruelty and justice from ritualized punishment. Justice is not served by death. It is served by facing truth, understanding harm and taking steps that protect humanity rather than destroy it.

The Moral Imperative of Protecting Blaine Milam

Surely, justice is more than killing. Morality is supposed to be more than vengeance. Decency demands we confront the full truth. We fed Blaine Milam toxic religion. We failed him. Now we are poised to kill him for it. That is not justice. That is hypocrisy. That is cruelty.

Stopping the execution is not weakness. It is moral clarity. It recognizes human complexity. It affirms life even in the guilty. It shows that justice is measured by more than revenge. It proves we are capable of mercy, reflection and moral courage. We cannot honor Amora's life by perpetuating the same cycle of violence that took her. We cannot claim justice while selectively condemning one human being and elevating another based on convenience or narrative appeal.

No matter what anybody says. Blaine Milam matters. As long as we ignore this inconvenient fact for better narratives, we will be no different than the evil that we claim to be fighting.

*sign the petition! https://actionnetwork.org/petitions/stop-the-execution-of-blaine-milam-in-texas

9.20.25

Mammon or God: Empire or the Cross: Trump or Humanity

Mammon or God

Luke 16:10–13

September 21, 2025
Homily at St. Oscar Romero Old Catholic Church
Jesus said: “The one who is trustworthy in very small matters is also trustworthy in great ones and the one who is dishonest in very small matters is also dishonest in great ones. If you are not trustworthy with dishonest wealth who will trust you with true wealth? If you are not trustworthy with what belongs to another who will give you what is yours? No servant can serve two masters. You cannot serve both God and mammon.”

The Judgment of Mammon

Not polite. Not soft. Not negotiable. That is fire. That is judgment. That is a line drawn in the dust that we either step over or stand behind. Jesus calls us to extraordinary discernment. He begins with the small because the small reveals the heart. The small matters are not trivial. They are prophetic. They are revealing. They are tests of fidelity that show which master we truly serve.

Seeking Empire

Mammon is never content with the small. Mammon always seeks empire. Empire is not just money. Empire is the hunger for control. Empire whispers… Rule. Command. Conquer…Crush whoever stands in your way. Empire is in politics, business, culture and even in churches that protect their power rather than their people. Empire demands allegiance. Empire silences truth. Empire sacrifices justice for survival. And yes…we see it in the

tyrannical leader of our empire…Donald Trump…a man whose career has been an exercise in empire-building whose wealth, power and influence were hoarded at the expense of others. But he is not the disease. He is a mirror. He is a symptom. The real disease is the worship of mammon and empire itself. Empire loves division. Empire loves lies. Empire convinces us that comfort is loyalty that obedience to power is morality and that the truth can wait until it is convenient.

Small Matters

Jesus begins with trustworthiness in small matters for a reason. Small actions, small choices, small betrayals…they reveal the heart. Empire is built on small betrayals. Small lies. Small compromises. Small acts of greed tolerated in silence. They multiply. They expand. They build empires that crush truth and silence the poor. America is full of people unfaithful in the small things excusing dishonesty because it serves empire because it keeps them comfortable. And it is destroying our nation…even our world.

Mammon in the Church

Even the church is not untouched. Too often, we mistake power for piety. Too often, we mistake wealth for blessing. Too often, we bow to empire…political, financial, cultural…while whispering Jesus' name. We build towers while the poor sleep on the street. We fund ministries that protect influence while ignoring hunger and suffering. We cheer politicians as if they were messiahs forgetting that empire crucifies justice daily. Jesus sees it… "If you are not trustworthy with dishonest wealth who will trust you with true wealth?" True wealth is justice, mercy, compassion and truth. Until we are faithful there, empire crucifies the Gospel all around us.

The Fruits of Mammon

Every time we bow to empire, excuse corruption or prioritize power over people…we crucify God again. Every act of silence or compromise is another nail in the cross. Empire kills. Empire blinds. Empire demands blood. And we…in our silence or complicity…hand over the hammer and nails. Look at the fruits of empire…families torn apart by greed, streets soaked in violence, refugees demonized, the poor abandoned, truth trampled under the weight of ambition, lies celebrated. Wars that consume the innocent. Immigration policies that punish the vulnerable. Attacks on LGBTQ+ rights. Climate devastation ignored. Economic inequality growing unchecked. This is not just Trump. This is the empire of the world we inhabit…policies and practices that sacrifice the vulnerable for profit, corporations that destroy lives for gain, churches that trade integrity for influence. Empire is everywhere. It wants your loyalty. It wants your soul. And it will take both if it can.

No Servant Can Serve Mammon

Jesus warns us… "No servant can serve two masters. You cannot serve both God and mammon." There is no neutrality. There is no compromise. There is no waiting for a better moment. Today, your loyalty is demanded. Today, your heart is on trial. Will you serve the fleeting, destructive power of empire, or the eternal, redeeming power of God?

Serving God Instead

To serve God is to resist empire. To serve God is to lift the poor. To serve God is to welcome the stranger. To serve God is to speak the truth when lies are profitable. To serve God is to take up the cross and follow the One who never betrays…even when the empire rages against us. To serve God is to see through the illusions of power and wealth and recognize that the kingdom of God is not built on fear, corruption or conquest…but on justice, mercy and love.

Rise Against Mammon

Jesus begins with the small because the small matters. Faithfulness in the minor, seemingly invisible acts…simply doing our best to love our neighbors…that is the soil in which the kingdom grows. If we cannot be trusted in these small things…empire will claim our hearts…and true wealth will never be ours. Empire is built on the abandonment of small moral responsibilities. It grows through our silent compromise. Rise up! Tear down the altars of empire. Stop confusing politicians, corporations, celebrities…all false masters…with God. Stop thinking power is salvation. Stop hiding behind excuses. There is only one God. Only one kingdom worth serving. Only one treasure that lasts beyond the grave. His name is not mammon. His name is not America. His name is not the king of mammon. His name is Jesus Christ, The Christ. His kingdom comes not in wealth, not in power, not in fear…but in justice, mercy and love.

The Empire of Mammon

The empire is everywhere. It seduces, enslaves, kills. But Christ is stronger. The cross stands taller than every throne. The kingdom of God cannot be shaken by human ambition. The choice is before you. You will be tested in the small things…in honesty, in generosity, in courage, in faithfulness. Will you betray your neighbor for comfort? Will you bow to power for profit? Will you let empire claim your soul? Or will you stand, even when it is unpopular, even when it costs you, even when it is dangerous…and serve the God who has given everything for you? Hear the words of Jesus again… “No servant can serve two masters. You cannot serve both God and mammon.” There is no neutrality. There is no compromise. There is no waiting for a better moment. Today, your loyalty is demanded. Today, your heart is on trial. Will you serve the fleeting, destructive power of empire or the eternal, redeeming power of God?

Faithfulness Amidst Empire

Rise up! Rise from your silence. Rise from your fear. Rise from your compromise. Take up the cross. Refuse the hammer of empire. Speak the truth, even when it costs you. Lift the poor, defend the vulnerable, protect the widow and the orphan. Let your life be a witness that the kingdom of God is not built on lies, not built on greed, not built on domination…but on justice, mercy, and love. Do not walk quietly while the idols of mammon reign. Do not whisper consent while the empire crushes the poor and silences the righteous. Stand! Speak! Act! Let your faithfulness in the small matters become a fortress that no empire can topple. Let your courage in truth become a sword that cuts through every lie. Let your love for God and neighbor become a fire that consumes every idol…even the idols embodied in the king of mammon.

Choose God Over Mammon

As for me and my house, as for all who dare to follow the call of Christ…we will serve the God who is faithful, who redeems, who calls us to justice, mercy and love. We will serve the cross over the throne. We will serve God over mammon. And in that choice, the gates of empire will fall, the lies will be exposed, the poor will be lifted, the truth will shine and the kingdom of God will rise… unshakable, eternal, victorious. Stand now. Choose now. Serve God. Reject mammon. Follow the cross. And may the King of Mammon…Dopnald J. Trump…tremble at your faithfulness.

9.22.25

Anthony Boyd, Alabama & Execution: Notes on a Revolutionary

Anthony Boyd & The Death Penalty: The Last Revolutionary

September 22, 2025

If you are holding this book, it is because you care…or at least, because you are willing to look. I am not writing this as a detached observer…or as someone who reports from a safe distance. I am writing this as a man who will be in the execution chamber with Anthony Boyd if he is executed…holding his hand, whispering prayers and witnessing the last moments of a life that has already preached more than most ever will. I have walked the halls of prisons, I have felt despair press against my chest and I have watched courage bloom in the most unlikely places. Anthony Boyd is that courage made flesh.

This book is my attempt to tell his story…not just the story of a man condemned to die…but of a revolutionary leader who fights for everyone on death row. It is a story of hope, of moral resistance and of the power of one life to challenge an entire system. I do not promise easy answers or simple resolutions. I promise honesty, witness and a perspective you will not find in court transcripts or news headlines. If you are willing to see the human behind the sentence, then you are ready to meet Anthony Boyd.

The Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood

Anthony Boyd & The Death Penalty: A Life Condemned, A Life Transformed

A Revolutionary in Chains

I have walked into prisons more times than I can count. There is always a certain smell…sweat, bleach, dust…but beneath it all, there is the scent of despair. You can feel it pressing against the concrete walls. You can feel it in your throat. You can feel it in the silence between clanging doors. I never get used to it. I hope I never do.

When I walk through those gates at Holman Correctional Facility, I know I'm not just walking into a prison. I'm walking into a kind of Golgotha. It is the hill where Alabama drags men to die. I know, because I've sat with them. I've prayed with them. I've listened to their trembling breaths before execution. The state calls it justice. I call it crucifixion.

Anthony Boyd is one of the men waiting. He has been waiting for decades, held under a sentence of death. But Boyd is not like anyone else I've met on the row. He is not merely surviving, though surviving alone is a miracle in a place designed to crush. Boyd is leading. He is shaping. He is daring to stand up and organize in the belly of the beast. He is the chairman of the board of directors of Project Hope to Abolish the Death Penalty, a prisoner-led organization that has for decades been the conscience of the fight against the death penalty in Alabama. Imagine that… a condemned man serving as the head of a movement to end the very punishment aimed at his own throat. That is not irony. That is revolution.

When I talk about Anthony Boyd, I'm not talking about some abstract figure. I'm talking about a man who calls me, a man who prays with me, a man who trusts me to be there when Alabama straps him down. I will stand in that chamber with him. That is not an easy sentence to write. I do not know how to describe the weight of such responsibility. To know that one day soon I may be holding his hand and whispering prayers…as the state of Alabama fills his lungs with nitrogen and starves him of breath. To know that I may be the last human face he sees before the machine takes over. How do you prepare for that? How do

you steady your voice to sing when you know the song is being drowned by the hiss of gas?

Anthony has prepared me more than I have prepared him. He does not carry himself like a man doomed. He carries himself like a man called. When I listen to him speak about the death penalty, I hear conviction. When I hear him talk about others on the row, I hear compassion. He is a revolutionary…yes…but he is also a pastor in his own right. He fights for others. He teaches the law to men who never believed they could fight back. He carries their cases like burdens on his shoulders. He refuses to be only a victim. He has made himself into a vessel.

What does it mean to watch a man the state wants to kill lead a movement for life? It means contradiction lives in the very heart of Alabama's system. It means Boyd embodies the failure of the logic of execution. If men can change, if men can lead, if men can heal, then execution is nothing but the destruction of living testimony.

I cannot pretend this book is written from some detached position. I am inside it. I am walking into the chamber. I am holding my friend's hand. I am bearing witness with him and for him.

Anthony Boyd has become to me…and to many who know him…a Christ figure. I do not mean he is sinless. He would never make such a claim. But I mean he is carrying the weight of others on his back. He is fighting battles for people who cannot fight. He is preparing to die in a way that unmasks the cruelty of the system itself. His life…and perhaps his death…will preach. He is not walking away from that cross. He is walking toward it.

This is not a story about abstract arguments alone. Yes, there are legal questions. Yes, there are moral philosophies. Yes, there are debates about nitrogen hypoxia and the cruelty of death. But at the center of this story is a man. A man who leads. A man who

prays. A man who suffers. A man who dares to resist the machinery of death.

When the day comes, if Alabama insists on its ritual of killing, I will be there. Not to bless their violence, but to stand in defiance. I will be there because Anthony asked me to. I will be there because Anthony taught me what courage looks like. And when the gas fills his lungs, I will not see him simply dying. I will see him preaching the last sermon of his life.

A Story Under Shadow

The story of Anthony Boyd's conviction is tangled in shadows. I hesitate to even touch it, because the system has already declared its verdict, already pressed its seal into his flesh, already assigned him a number that ends with death. But the truth is, I cannot write about Anthony without writing about the shadows that follow him.

The state says that in 1993, Boyd drove a car full of men to a place where a terrible crime was carried out…the killing of a man named Gregory Huguley. The prosecutors insisted he knew, insisted he was part of a conspiracy and insisted that his life must be forfeited. That is the story the jury accepted. That is the story the courts upheld. And yet…when you press against it…the story shifts. Some testimony is inconsistent. Some motives are unclear. Some evidence is fogged by time and by memory.

The death penalty thrives on narratives. Prosecutors weave them, juries cling to them and the media sells them. But human beings are not narratives. They are complicated, broken and often redeemable. Anthony Boyd is not a character in Alabama's morality play. He is a man. He is a man who has now lived more years behind bars than he ever did outside. He is a man who has organized, studied, prayed and fought. And the shadow of the trial still hangs above him, threatening to collapse into final darkness.

What if the story told at trial was bent? What if the witnesses remembered wrong? What if the jury saw what they wanted to see? What if the state…desperate for closure, eager to show force…rushed to a conclusion that could not carry the weight of truth? I do not have all the answers. But I do know this…a death sentence under such questions is not justice. It is reckless.

In the end, Anthony's trial cannot be divorced from the larger theater of Alabama's criminal justice system. This is a state that has executed people with intellectual disabilities. A state that has executed children. A state that has sent men and women to die on the basis of junk science and jailhouse snitches. A state that clings to the death penalty like a relic of a past it cannot let go.

The shadow is not just over Anthony's trial. It is over the entire system. His case is one thread in a bloody tapestry woven out of error and vengeance.

Anthony Boyd & The Burden of Waiting

If you want to understand death row, you cannot just study the executions. You have to study the waiting. Execution is the punctuation. Waiting is the sentence.

Anthony Boyd has been waiting for more than half of his life. He wakes up every morning to the same walls, the same bars, the same noise of men coughing in their cages. He hears the guards banging doors. He hears the keys rattling. He knows the sound of another man being taken away, the shuffle of footsteps, the heavy silence that follows. He lives with it. He breathes it. It is the rhythm of his existence.

The cruelty of death row is not just that it kills. It is that it kills slowly, piece by piece, day after day. Time is stretched into torture. You are condemned not only to death…but to decades of anticipation. Every knock on the door might be the one. Every

letter might contain the date. And while you wait, you watch others go before you.

I have asked Anthony what it feels like to live under that constant shadow. He told me it is like being buried alive in a coffin with a clock ticking above your head. You know the lid will open one day…and when it does…it won't be for freedom. It will be for the final walk. You train yourself not to think about it, but you can never stop hearing the ticking.

And yet, in the midst of that torment… He creates. He writes. He calls. He organizes. He mentors. He teaches men the law. He prays. He takes the weight of waiting and somehow bends it into action. This is the part of Anthony Boyd that astonishes me…the refusal to let the system define him solely as a condemned man. He is condemned…yes…but he's also a revolutionary behind bars.

Still, I cannot romanticize this life. Death row is hell. It is sweat that never dries because the prison does not care to fix the heat. It is food so foul it feels like another form of punishment. It is men screaming in the night. It is silence when those screams are suddenly gone. It is the ache of bodies denied touch. It is the erosion of mind and spirit.

Every so often, Anthony's voice cracks when he speaks of time. He is not made of steel. He is flesh. He is memory. He is longing. He tells me about the years he will never get back. About the children he never raised. About the friends who died outside while he sat inside. About the toll of waiting for death. He says the system punishes twice…once by taking your freedom…and again by forcing you to live for decades with the terror of your own ending.

And yet, here is the contradiction…Anthony has turned waiting into witness. He refuses to let his suffering be wasted. He insists that the world hear from inside the waiting room of death. He

insists that the world know what it is to sit under a sentence of execution for thirty years. He insists that his voice matter, even when the state tells him it doesn't.

The burden of waiting has carved him into something fierce. It has shaped his theology. It has sharpened his vision. It has pressed him closer to the suffering of Christ, who knew what it was to live under the shadow of the cross. And when I talk with Anthony, I realize that his waiting is not passive. It is active resistance. Every breath he takes on death row is a refusal to give the state the last word.

Anthony Boyd: Revolutionary Spirit Fighting the Death Penalty

Anthony Boyd did not set out to become a revolutionary. Prison shapes people…often into silence…sometimes into monsters… occasionally into prophets. In Boyd's case, the death row cage became his pulpit.

The early years were rough. Angry. Isolated. Full of the raw ache of betrayal, confusion and fear. Like many condemned men, he could have folded in on himself, allowed the sentence to swallow him whole. Instead, he began to study the writings of those who resisted empires before him. From those hours hunched over pages under a dim prison bulb…he emerged sharper, harder and yet softer in the places that mattered.

Anthony became a jailhouse lawyer. Not the kind who peddles cheap motions to desperate men, but the kind who studies the intricacies of the law until he can argue with the best of them. He took on cases for those who had no one else. He drafted appeals for men who could barely read. He taught others how to fight. When he won, the victories were communal. When he lost, the fight itself became the lesson.

The revolution Anthony embodies is not abstract. It is daily. It is carried out in the most degrading of conditions. It is born of

sweat and bars and years that blur together. The state wants him silent…he insists on speaking. The state wants him to despair… he insists on hope. The state wants him erased..he insists on legacy.

When I speak with him, I often forget he is on death row. His voice is too alive. His vision too wide. He talks about abolition not as a dream but as a strategy…something within reach if we push hard enough…organize long enough…sacrifice deeply enough. He refuses to let the cage shrink his imagination.

The revolutionary spirit is not just in his words. It is in his posture toward the men around him. He lifts them. He refuses to step on their backs to save himself. He insists that their cases matter as much as his own. It is as though he has taken up a basin and towel in the middle of a place built for destruction. In that way, he is not only revolutionary. He emulates Christ.

Revolutions often begin in small rooms. Anthony Boyd is proof. A cage can become a headquarters. A condemned man can become a leader. A death sentence can become a summons to life.

Anthony Boyd's Conversations with Esther Brown

Esther Brown is ninety-two years old. Her voice cracks with age, but her conviction is steel. For decades, she has stood as one of the most consistent voices against Alabama's death penalty. When Project Hope needed an Executive Director, Esther became its link to the outside world. Together, she and the men have built a bridge that has carried the truth of abolition into churches, conferences and living rooms around the state.

Anthony calls her often. Their conversations are not just business…though they do talk strategy, organizing, who to write and what to say. They laugh. They argue. They dream. A man on

death row and a woman in her nineties, bound together by a common cause.

When I first heard them on the phone together, I felt like I was eavesdropping on history. Anthony's voice strong and steady, Esther's voice wise and weathered. They spoke like comrades who had spent lifetimes in the same struggle. And in many ways, they had. Anthony fights from the inside, Esther fights from the outside…and together they form a single chorus.

Anthony has told me that Esther is one of the reasons he keeps going. She reminds him that the fight is bigger than his cell.

Esther, for her part, often calls Anthony "my son." She speaks of him with a mixture of affection and awe. At her age, she could have retired from the struggle long ago. Instead, she answers the phone when Anthony calls. She types up the words he dictates. She carries his voice into rooms he cannot enter.

There is something almost biblical about their partnership. Like Moses and Aaron. Like Paul and Timothy. One outside, one inside. One old, one young. One free, one chained. Yet both bound by the same Spirit of resistance.

If you want to understand the human core of abolition in Alabama, listen to Anthony Boyd and Esther Brown talk on the phone. It is the sound of defiance. It is the sound of family. It is the sound of hope surviving in the cracks of despair.

Death Row as the Cross

Death row is not just a punishment. It is a crucifixion stretched across years. The condemned man is nailed not once…but again and again…every time the lights flicker off, every time another execution date is set and every time a neighbor is led away. The cross is carried daily, long before the final walk to the chamber.

Anthony Boyd understands this. He does not sugarcoat the torment. He does not deny the agony. But he has come to see death row as a cross he is called to carry…not because he wants to, not because he deserves to, but because this is where he finds himself and this is where he has choosen to resist.

When I sit with Anthony, I often hear echoes of Christ's journey to Golgotha. The betrayal. The false witnesses. The mocking. The waiting. The public spectacle. The sense that the state itself has aligned to crush him. And yet…like Christ…Anthony has turned the cross into a witness.

He is not naive. He knows that Alabama may kill him. He knows the machinery rarely malfunctions in the favor of the condemned. But he also knows that if he must die, his death can preach. His cross can expose the brutality of the system. His breath…even as it is stolen from him…can become a sermon.

To describe Anthony Boyd as a Christ figure is not to claim he is divine. It is to claim that he participates in the same pattern of sacrificial witness. He stands before the machinery of empire and refuses to give it legitimacy. He carries the suffering of others on his back. He loves his brothers on the row even as they are mocked and discarded. He keeps faith even when the world tells him he should give up.

Death row is the cross. And Anthony Boyd carries it with a strength that shames the state.

Anthony Boyd & The Death Penalty: Against the Machinery of Death

The Machinery and Its Gears

The death penalty does not fall from the sky. It is constructed. Engineered. A machine assembled piece by piece by lawmakers,

prosecutors, judges and voters. Each bolt tightened by fear. Each gear greased with racism. Each switch powered by vengeance.

Anthony Boyd has spent his life inside that machine. He has seen it grind men down into nothing. He has heard its gears whine with the sound of steel doors and the thud of boots in the hallway. He knows its rhythm.

The machinery does not just kill at the end. It kills daily in smaller doses…in solitary confinement, in medical neglect, in endless appeals that promise relief but deliver despair. Every bureaucrat who stamps a paper, every guard who slams a door and every judge who denies a motion…each is part of the machine.

Anthony refuses to accept the inevitability of its movements. He studies the gears. He names them. He calls out the lies of "justice" and "closure" that keep the machine humming. He insists that if people could see the machinery clearly…see its bolts rusted with racism, its gears spinning on blood…they would rise up against it.

It is a prophetic vision: to see the machinery as it is, not as it claims to be. To name the execution chamber not as justice but as ritualized slaughter. To call the gurney not a bed but an altar of state violence. Anthony has made that his task.

The Struggle Inside

Resistance is not only against the system outside…it is also against despair inside.

Anthony once told me that the hardest battles he fights are not against prosecutors or judges but against himself. Against the gnawing temptation to give up. Against the nights when he hears the machine grinding and wonders if it will ever stop. Against the voices that whisper he is already dead.

Death row is designed to destroy a man from the inside out. The steel, the concrete, the endless repetition…they are weapons of psychological warfare. Some men crumble. Some grow cold. Some retreat so far into themselves they are barely human when you look into their eyes.

Anthony fights back by building community. He organizes study groups. He teaches men to read. He listens when they break. He tells jokes when the silence grows too heavy. He refuses to let the cage win.

But even revolutionaries have nights of doubt. He has confessed to me that there are mornings when it's hard to get out of bed. Afternoons when the legal mail arrives and crushes him. Evenings when another man's execution leaves the tier in stunned silence. He has learned to let those moments come…to name them and to sit with them…but not to be ruled by them.

The struggle inside is never finished. But Anthony is still standing. That in and of itself is a victory.

Prophets in Prison Uniforms

To see Anthony Boyd in his prison uniform is to confront the absurdity of the system. A man who carries wisdom, courage and vision reduced to a uniform .

Yet that uniform has become prophetic. It marks him not as disposable but as chosen. Like sackcloth in the Bible, it is both humiliation and witness. Anthony wears it like a prophet's robe.

He is not the only one. Many on the row have voices that cut like scripture. Men who can preach with clarity, who can pray with fire and who can speak truth to power better than most pastors I know. Alabama has locked its prophets in cells and dressed them in unifroms.

The irony is sharp. The state thinks it has caged its worst. In fact, it has gathered some of its most powerful preachers in one place. When they speak, they do so from the depths of empire's cruelty. Their words do not float from pulpits padded with comfort. They rise from concrete floors stained with blood. That is why their voices matter. That is why they cannot be ignored.

Anthony has often said, "If people want to hear God…they should come to death row." He is right.

Anthony Boyd's Theology of Resistance

Anthony'Boyd's theology is not drawn from textbooks. It is forged in survival, sharpened by injustice and baptized in grief. It is a theology that refuses neutrality. It is a theology that says God stands with the condemned…not with the state.

He rejects the false comfort of a God who blesses executions. He names such a God as an idol, a golden calf dressed in a flag. His God is the one who was executed by the empire, not the one who sat on its throne.

For Anthony, resistance is worship. Filing a motion is prayer. Refusing despair is praise. Teaching another man to read is sacrament. Writing letters to activists is evangelism. Organizing the condemned is liturgy.

This theology leaves no space for complacency. It does not allow pastors to hide behind polite sermons. It does not let politicians mask their violence in scripture. It demands that faith cost something…that believers stand where Christ stands, which is never with the executioner.

Anthony's theology of resistance is dangerous to the state. Because if enough people believe it, the machinery of death will grind to a halt.

The Witness of the Condemned

The condemned are not simply victims. They are witnesses.

Anthony Boyd has become one of the clearest voices exposing the cruelty of the system. But he insists he is not alone. Every man on the row has a story. Every man carries a sermon. Every man's survival is a testimony.

I have watched as Anthony lifts those stories out, makes sure they are heard. He does not hog the spotlight. He shares it. He knows that a single voice can be dismissed, but a chorus is harder to ignore.

The witness of the condemned is uncomfortable. It reminds the public that executions are not clean. That behind every "case" is a breathing, thinking and suffering person. That the death penalty is not an abstract debate…but a daily horror inflicted on bodies and souls.

Anthony has chosen to turn his life…even in chains…into witness. His words, his friendships, his teaching and his resistance. All of it preaches. All of it testifies. All of it demands that we stop the killing.

Anthony Boyd & The Death Penalty: The Moral and Spiritual Case

Anthony Boyd Fights for The Inherent Dignity of The Condemned

We live in a world that confuses punishment with erasure. To be condemned is not to be erased…yet society often treats men like Anthony Boyd as if their humanity can be stripped away, layer by layer, until only a number remains.

I have watched him in his cell. I have watched him organize, write and teach. I have seen him laugh, even under the threat of imminent death. I have seen him cry, and in that vulnerability, I have witnessed a depth of humanity most people never encounter. Boyd is fully human…broken, brilliant, flawed, courageous. And in every cell, every hour, every struggle, he insists that humanity cannot be canceled.

The state pretends that execution restores justice. It does not. It destroys. It not only kills a body…it assaults the dignity of all who bear witness. Anthony Boyd…in refusing to allow despair to dominate…demonstrates the radical truth that dignity cannot be stripped by law, by bars, by gas or by fear.

Justice or Vengeance?

People often confuse vengeance with justice. They wear it like a badge and call it law. In Alabama, the machinery calls it "capital punishment," and the courts nod solemnly. But vengeance does not weigh evidence. Vengeance does not consider transformation. Vengeance does not care if a man has led, taught, healed or reformed.

Anthony Boyd's life is an argument against vengeance. He is living proof that a man can be condemned…yet still contribute, still change and still elevate others. To execute him is not justice. It is ritualized retaliation. It is the state asserting that power matters more than morality.

We pretend justice is blind, but it is not. Justice can see, but it often chooses what it wants to see. Boyd has chosen to hold the state accountable anyway, even as it ignores him. In his refusal to bow to vengeance, he teaches a lesson that no courtroom ever will…true justice requires mercy, not the shedding of blood.

Transformation is Possible

The possibility of transformation is why executions are immoral. If the state can kill without accounting for growth, redemption or rehabilitation…then it is not pursuing justice. It is pursuing dominance. Anthony Boyd embodies the contradiction…a man condemned as dangerous…yet morally, intellectually and spiritually alive…and profoundly capable of leading others out of despair. To execute him now is to erase not just a life, but a living testament to change.

Anthony Boyd as Christ Figure

Christ was executed under an empire that feared truth. He carried a cross that was not his own invention, a burden imposed by others, yet he bore it with clarity, mercy and purpose. Anthony Boyd is walking a parallel path.

He is condemned by a state that cannot forgive. He is mocked, humiliated and threatened with death. Yet he continues to carry the weight of others…the men on death row, the voiceless, the frightened and the forgotten. His suffering becomes witness… and in that witness…the system's cruelty is laid bare.

I watch him pray. I watch him teach. I watch him organize. He carries the cross not because he wants to, but because it is placed before him. And like Christ…he transforms suffering into a message…a living sermon for those willing to listen.

Mercy as Revolution

Anthony Boyd has taught me that mercy is not weakness. Mercy is rebellion. Mercy is refusal to participate in cycles of violence. Mercy is courage.

By practicing mercy…by choosing life for others even as the state imposes death…he demonstrates the only path forward for our society. The death penalty is not merely cruel…it is a system designed to destroy hope. Boyd has made hope his weapon.

To honor his life is to honor mercy as revolutionary. To honor his struggle is to refuse the logic of killing. And to bear witness to his life…as I do now…is to insist that mercy can overturn even the most entrenched machinery of death.

Anthony Boyd's life, his leadership, his resistance and his cross…they are all a challenge. Not just to the state of Alabama…but to every conscience with ears to hear. He insists that we choose life…measured not in vengeance…but in mercy.

Anthony Boyd & The Death Penalty: Beyond

The State's Power to Kill

The machinery of death is seductive. It promises closure. It promises justice. It promises… But power does not come without cost. And the cost of the state's authority to kill is incalculable.

Alabama wields this authority like a hammer. It strikes with confidence, indifferent to the moral, philosophical or spiritual consequences. It is a power rooted in fear, sustained by bureaucracy and justified by tradition. The state's capacity to kill is not evidence of righteousness…it is evidence of control.

Anthony Boyd stands as a reminder that power can be resisted even from within the belly of its own machinery. He has studied the law. He has traced the motions. He has navigated the courts. He has built bridges to the outside world. And still…the state moves forward as if his life is just another cog.

To watch it operate is to witness a cruelty that is systemic, ritualized and normalized. The state claims authority over life… but it cannot claim morality. Authority does not equal righteousness. Anthony Boyd's presence…his voice, his witness…remind us that the power to kill is not the power to define.

If the state kills Anthony Boyd, it will be not merely the death of a man… but an attempt to silence a movement. To erase decades of leadership, mentorship and hope. To stamp out the fire that has burned quietly, fiercely and steadily behind the walls of Holman.

And yet, the revolution he embodies cannot be extinguished by gas, straps or steel doors. Even if Boyd is executed, the ideas he nurtured, the courage he inspired and the mercy he practiced will outlive him. Every man who learned from him. Every activist who read his letters. Every soul whose hope was lifted — they carry his legacy forward.

A revolutionary death is not a silent one. It echoes. It informs. It challenges. And in Boyd's case, it is likely to ignite more than the state intends. That is the paradox the state cannot control: life cannot be fully canceled…even when the body is removed.

Resurrection

Even in the face of execution, hope cannot be extinguished. Anthony Boyd has built his life around the possibility of resurrection…not just in the spiritual sense, but in the social, moral and revolutionary sense. His life preaches that the condemned are not dead until we forget them. His leadership teaches that movements cannot be contained by walls or gurneys. His witness affirms that mercy and grace can overturn systems built on blood.

9.23.25

Will Berry: Alabama's Prophet of Forgiveness

Alabama's Idol of Death

Alabama knows death. From the lash of slavery to the ropes of lynching to the quiet hum of the execution chamber, the state has long baptized violence as justice. Governors consistently smile as they sign death warrants. The Alabama Department of Corrections parades its machinery of death as though it were holy. People gather in pulpits and pews to bless the whole bloody mess. Death is the idol of Alabama.

God Raises Up a Prophet: Will Berry

Yet, at every altar of death…God raises up a prophet.

The sound of prophecy is echoing in Alabama. It's coming from an unlikely source.

Will Berry was only eleven when his mother was murdered. Margaret Parrish Berry was shot in the head while working at a gas station. Her killer…Geoffrey West…was young, reckless and enraged. One bullet ripped the Berry family apart. Violence stole a mother from her children and left a boy to grow up in grief.

The State Counts on Vengeance

The state counts on such grief to harden into vengeance. Alabama has built its machinery of execution on the assumption that victims' families demand as much blood as they can extract from the condemned. Will Berry could have become that kind of voice. No one would have blamed him. But grief did not calcify his soul. Instead…in the shadow of his mother's grave…he found the road less traveled.

Will Berry's Letters of Mercy

As West's execution date approached, something truly holy broke open. Letters began to pass between the condemned and the son of his victim. West wrote with remorse…confessing the weight of his crime…the daily torment of wishing he could take it all back. And Berry answered not with curses, not with a demand for blood…but with mercy. He wrote back, I forgive you.

Forgiveness Is Resistance

Make no mistake…forgiveness is not a slogan. It is not some passing fad or sentimental posture. Forgiveness costs something…something great. Forgiveness demands that you walk back through the fire of grief and decide…again and again and again…not to let violence dictate the terms of your life. Forgiveness does not erase what happened. Forgiveness does not make the pain disappear. Forgiveness is resistance…resistance to a world that insists that death is the only answer.

Will Berry Exposes Alabama's Lies

Berry's voice exposes the lies of Alabama. For decades, politicians and prison officials have defended executions as a way of giving "closure" to families. But here is the family. Here is the son who lost his mother. And he says with stunning clarity…I don't want this man to die. I don't want the state to take revenge in my name or in my family's name for the killing of my mother.

Alabama Silences Mercy

So, what has Alabama done with this voice of mercy? It has done its' level best to silence him. Governor Kay Ivey and the Department of Corrections have even refused to allow Berry and West to meet, even though both men pleaded for the chance. A

grieving son wanted to look his mother's killer in the eye…not to condemn him…but to bless him with forgiveness. The state slammed the door. Why? Because forgiveness unmasks the truth…executions are not about families at all. They are about vengeance. They are about power. They are about keeping the altar of death alive.

Will Berry: The Prophet

This is why Will Berry is a prophet. He stands in the ruins of violence and declares another way. His witness reminds us that forgiveness is not weakness. Forgiveness is the fiercest form of resistance. Forgiveness says…You cannot define me. You cannot make me your excuse. You cannot drag me down into your pit of violence. Forgiveness throws back the curtain and reveals Alabama's rituals of death for what they are…hollow, cruel and godless.

The Cost of Prophecy

This is not easy. Prophecy never is. Prophets bleed before they bless. Prophets grieve before they sing. And Will Berry has grieved more than most. But he has chosen to become the voice Alabama most needs and least wants.

Forgiveness as the Future

Forgiveness is the future Alabama cannot yet imagine. Forgiveness is the road away from prisons, needles and gas chambers. Forgiveness is the only way to break the cycle that keeps repeating itself in this bloody land. Will Berry is the hope of Alabama because he has dared to speak mercy where everyone expected vengeance. His life proves that even in the hardest places…another way is possible.

Alabama at a Crossroads

Alabama now stands at a crossroads. It can harden its heart and march deeper into the bloody plague of executions. Or it can stop…listen to one of its greatest contemporary prophets…and repent.

There is hope for Alabama…and his name is Will Berry.

9.23.25

Alabama's Death Penalty & Anthony Boyd's Explosive Filings

Boyd and Legal Papers

"Alabama's Death Penalty is Death By Lawlessness."

Anthony Boyd, a prisoner on Alabama's death row, is calling out the machinery of death that has ground down justice in this state for decades. Through filings in both Talladega County and the Middle District of Alabama, Boyd exposes that Alabama's Death Penalty apparatuses treat the Constitution as an obstacle, not a safeguard. His claims are not technical tricks. They are life-and-death truths about how Alabama bends the law to its own advantage while men like him are left without protection.

Alabama's Death Penalty: AEDPA Betrayal in Talladega County

In Talladega County, Boyd has laid bare Alabama's misuse of the federal Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act (AEDPA). Enacted in 1996, AEDPA limited habeas petitions but also required states to meet strict certification requirements before enjoying its protections. Alabama did not comply until 2016. For over twenty years, the State reaped AEDPA's benefits without honoring its safeguards.

Yet during those same years, defendants like Boyd were held to AEDPA's strictest standards. Their appeals were cut off as if Alabama's Death Penalty systems had been certified all along. Boyd's words are clear: "Had AEDPA not been unconditionally applied to my case, I would not be in this situation." This is not a quibble. It is a profound constitutional violation…a State twisting federal law until it becomes a weapon against the condemned.

Alabama’s Death Penalty: Silenced in Court

Boyd’s filings also reveal the daily indignities of Alabama’s courtrooms. In a recent proceeding, the State filed a motion to change venue. The judge granted it immediately, without giving Boyd a chance to respond.

The adversarial system rests on one basic principle…both sides must be heard. Denying Boyd even the opportunity to reply strips that principle away. It is not a trial; it is a performance. This silencing is part of a broader pattern where Alabama courts tilt so heavily toward the State that the condemned have no voice at all. Truth stumbles in the streets when a man’s life can be redirected without his words ever being heard.

Alabama’s Death Penalty: Separation of Powers Violations

In the Middle District of Alabama, Boyd is pressing a deeper challenge…the State has unlawfully shifted the power to schedule executions from judges to the executive branch.

Historically, courts set execution dates. That responsibility carried the weight of judicial oversight. But now Alabama politicians, not judges, decide when executions will take place. Governors and their appointees hold the calendar of death, free from judicial review.

This change shatters the separation of powers. The executive branch prosecutes, pushes for death, and now sets the time of execution. That concentration of power is not only dangerous…it is unconstitutional. Alabama has turned executions into political theater, stripping the courts of their role as guardians of justice. Alabama’s Death Penalty is proven lawless once more.

Alabama’s Death Penalty: Equal Protection Torn Apart

Boyd also challenges the arbitrary geography of death in Alabama. The state's death penalty is not applied evenly. In one county, a kidnapping-murder results in life without parole. In another, the same crime ends in execution. Justice here is not determined by the facts but by the county line and the prosecutor's zeal.

This violates the Fourteenth Amendment's promise of equal protection. Alabama's death penalty is a grotesque lottery where geography speaks louder than law. Equal justice cannot survive when outcomes depend on politics and location rather than truth.

A Prophetic Challenge

Together, Boyd's filings…AEDPA in Talladega County, separation of powers in the Middle District, and his broader challenges to due process and equal protection…paint a picture of systemic corruption. Alabama silences defendants, twists federal law, hands executions to politicians and metes out death by geography.

These are not minor flaws. They strike at the heart of the rule of law. A state that denies defendants the right to reply, that misuses federal statutes, that strips power from the judiciary and that practices arbitrary justice is not administering the death penalty. It is administering lawlessness.

Anthony Boyd's filings are more than legal documents. They are prophetic cries from the row. They demand transparency, fairness and accountability. They remind us that justice cannot be built on injustice, law cannot be built on lawlessness and life cannot be built on death.

The question is no longer only whether Anthony Boyd will live or die. The question is whether Alabama's death penalty has any legitimacy left at all.

9.24.25

Reconciliation of Love: Origins of Christian Universalism

The Story of Christian Universalism: Love That Refuses to Let Go

Whispers of Universal Reconciliation in Christian Universalism

Christian Universalism is the story of love refusing to let go. From the beginning, there were whispers in the gospel that God's mercy would not stop short of anything less than the reconciliation of all things. The Book of Acts dares to speak of the apokatastasis…the restoration of all things (Acts 3:21).

Origen and the Fire of Mercy

Origen (185-253) was the first to seize this hope with both hands. He saw love as a fire that would purify every soul…not to annihilate but to restore. "God is all in all," he wrote, insisting that divine mercy was not partial…not temporary…not conditional (Origen, On First Principles).

Gregory of Nyssa: Cosmic Healing

A few generations later, Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335-c. 395) carried the vision further. For him, reconciliation meant nothing less than the undoing of evil itself…a cosmic healing that would not cease until every wound was bound up. "For it is evident that God will, in truth, be 'in all' when there shall be no evil in existence" (Gregory of Nyssa, On the Soul and the Resurrection).

Isaac of Nineveh: Even Hell Is Not Beyond Christ's Love

Centuries later…on the other side of empire…Isaac of Nineveh (c. 613-c. 700) sang the same truth with mystical tenderness. He declared that even hell was not beyond the touch of divine

compassion. “As a handful of sand thrown into the great sea, so are the sins of all flesh in comparison with the mind of God” (Isaac, Ascetical Homilies). For Isaac, the reconciliation of love was not speculation but vision…God’s mercy flooding even the deepest pit.

The Church Turns from the Hope of Christian Universalism

The church grew uneasy with these voices…and they were whispered against, condemned and hidden. Fear built walls around hope. But the ember of reconciliation never went out. It smoldered in the shadows of history until…in the eighteenth century…a new world in upheaval gave it breath again. The Enlightenment was shaking old certainties, revolutions were unraveling empires and the thunder of revival preachers echoed into the new world. Out of this ferment rose a chorus of unlikely figures…the pioneers of modern universalism. They were not bishops backed by imperial power…but preachers, healers, mystics and radicals…each in their own strange way bearing witness to the reconciliation of love.

Pioneers of Modern Christian Universalism

James Relly: Union in Christ

James Relly (1722-1778) was among the first. A Welshman with a scandalous gospel, Relly insisted that the union between Christ and humanity was not a possibility but a reality. If all were in Adam, then all were in Christ. “As all mankind were in Adam, so all mankind are in Christ” (Relly, Union). In those few words, he leveled the machinery of conditional salvation. For Relly, the reconciliation of love was already accomplished in Jesus… waiting not to be earned but to be trusted. His vision was too much for polite pulpits…but it planted a seed that would grew wild.

John Murray: Proclaiming Christian Universalism

One who caught Relly's fire was John Murray (1741-1815). Wounded by loss, he left England for America and brought with him nothing but the conviction that God's mercy had no limit. In the raw landscape of the colonies, he proclaimed a message that many called heresy…"The salvation of all men… is most certainly the doctrine of God our Savior" (Murray, Letters and Sketches). For Murray, preaching itself became an act of rebellion. He stood before congregations steeped in fear and declared that hell had been undone. Where Relly spoke of reconciliation in Christ, Murray proclaimed it aloud…making it a scandal that could not be ignored.

George de Benneville: Healing with Love

But universalism was never just thunder…it was also tenderness. George de Benneville (1703-1793) embodied that gentler side. A mystic who crossed oceans, he told of descending into the depths of hell only to discover that there too was the presence of God's mercy. "The Love of God is stronger than all the powers of hell" (de Benneville, Life and Trance). As a physician, he practiced what he preached. Every wound he tended…every life he comforted…was a testimony that the reconciliation of love was not reserved for some distant eternity but was already breaking in wherever compassion took flesh. Where Murray proclaimed reconciliation, de Benneville healed with it.

Elhanan Winchester: Scripture as a Witness

Then came Elhanan Winchester (1751-1797), who turned his fierce attention to Scripture. A Baptist preacher with the voice of a prophet, he refused to surrender the Bible to fearmongers. With boldness, he declared, "The doctrine of the universal restoration is most certainly the doctrine of the Bible" (Winchester, The Universal Restoration). He traced the great arc of Scripture from beginning to end and found not damnation but restoration…not wrath but mercy. In his hands, the Bible ceased to be a weapon and became a witness to reconciliation itself. He built a bridge

for ordinary believers…showing them that to trust the Bible was to trust the reconciliation of love.

Hosea Ballou: Theology of Christian Universalism

Still, a movement needs more than proclamation and proof texts. It needs theology deep enough to stand against the currents of fear. That was the work of Hosea Ballou (1771-1852). Ballou tore apart the very heart of retributive Christianity…the doctrine of substitutionary atonement. In A Treatise on Atonement, he wrote, “The doctrine of atonement… is no more or less than the manifestation of the love of God” (Ballou, Treatise). No more could the cross be seen as divine wrath appeased by blood. Instead, the cross revealed what had always been true…love reconciling the world to itself. With Ballou, universalism gained a backbone. He dismantled theologies of cruelty and rebuilt Christian faith on the foundation of reconciliation alone.

Adin Ballou: Living Christian Universalism

But ideas are never enough. The reconciliation of love must take form in how we live, how we resist, how we build communities. This was the genius of Adin Ballou (1803-1890). They there were unrelated, Adin was certainly Hosea’s spiritual heir. For Adin, universalism was not speculation about heaven or hell…it was a mandate for how we treat each other. If God’s love reconciles all, then how can we shed blood or wage war? “The kingdom of Christ excludes revenge, war and violence of every kind” (Adin Ballou, Christian Non-Resistance). He gave universalism an ethic. He insisted that nonviolence, justice and community were not optional extras but the very shape of reconciliation lived out in the present. Where Hosea reconciled theology, Adin reconciled ethics. Together they made universalism into a way of life.

A Continuous Song of Christian Universalism

When we trace this line…from Origen to Gregory to Isaac, from Relly to Murray to de Benneville to Winchester to Hosea Ballou and finally to Adin Ballou…we see not disconnected voices but a continuous song, each note amplifying the hope of love. Origen dared to believe that all would be restored. Gregory declared that evil itself would be undone. Isaac whispered that even hell was not beyond love's reach. Relly proclaimed union in Christ. Murray carried the proclamation across the sea. De Benneville healed with mercy. Winchester found reconciliation inscribed in the Bible itself. Hosea Ballou tore down false theologies to reveal love at the center. Adin Ballou lived reconciliation as nonviolence, making it flesh. Together they bear one witness… love reconciles all.

Our Inheritance: Living the Reconciliation of Christian Universalism

Embodying Mercy in a Broken World

And so the question turns to us. What will we do with this inheritance? If we believe that God's love reconciles all, then we cannot stop at speculation. We must live it. The reconciliation of love is not a doctrine to admire but a calling to embody. To trust this gospel means to heal where others wound, to proclaim where others terrify, to resist where others bow and to love where others hate. The pioneers of modern universalism did not risk everything so we could repeat their words like a creed. They risked everything to show us how to live reconciliation in flesh and blood.

The Call to Bold and Courageous Living

This is why their witness matters now. The reconciliation of love demands that we stop imagining hell as a distant place and start noticing the hells around us. And then, like de Benneville binding wounds or Adin Ballou rejecting the sword…we must

dare to embody the gospel that hell cannot last, that cruelty cannot win and that love has the final word.

The reconciliation of love is not sentimental. It is not safe. It is scandalous, costly and urgent. It calls us to trust that God has reconciled all in Christ…and to live like it is true, even when the world rages against it. Look around…prisons overflowing with bodies crushed by systems of oppression…borders fortified against the desperate…wars that turn brothers and sisters into enemies…forests burning and seas rising because of human greed…communities broken by fear, hatred and indifference. These are the hells we walk through every day, the ones the pioneers of modern universalism fought to heal with word and deed.

And still, the call comes. To live in a way that proclaims…even in the midst of injustice and violence…that love is stronger, mercy is deeper and reconciliation is inevitable. Origen gave us hope, Gregory shaped its breadth, Isaac whispered of its patience, Relly declared its reality, Murray proclaimed it aloud, De Benneville tended it in the flesh, Winchester anchored it in Scripture, Hosea Ballou made it doctrinally unshakable and Adin Ballou made it an ethical path.

The ember passes to us. The world will not wait. Love will not be postponed. To embrace the reconciliation of love is to step into the fire, to risk every comfort, to confront every injustice and to bear witness that no wound is too deep, no system too corrupt and no heart is too hardened for the mercy of God. This is the gospel we inherit, the task we cannot evade and the hope the world is starving to see made real. The reconciliation of love is here, and it demands that we live it…boldly, courageously, without compromise…until the last tear is wiped away, and every creature rests in the embrace of the One whose name is Love.

9.27.25

No One Left Outside: On Lazarus and the Rich Man

On Luke 16:19–31: Lazarus and the Rich Man

There was a wealthy man who lived in luxury, wearing fine clothes and enjoying lavish meals every day. At his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered in sores, who would have been grateful for even the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table. Dogs would come and lick his wounds.

Eventually, both of them died. Lazarus was carried to a place of comfort, while the rich man ended up in torment. From where he was, he saw Lazarus with Abraham and begged for a drop of relief, but a huge chasm separated them—there was no way to cross it.

The rich man asked that Lazarus be sent to warn his brothers (family), so they wouldn't make the same mistakes. But Abraham reminded him that his family already had the teachings of Moses and the prophets. If they didn't listen to that, then they won't listen to anything.

Lazarus and the Rich Man as a Mirror for Today

Beloved,
When Jesus tells the story of Lazarus and the rich man, most people rush to make it about heaven and hell. That's how it's been preached for generations…as fear, as threat and as control. "Straighten your ass up or you'll burn like the rich man." But Jesus isn't giving us a road map of the afterlife. He's giving us a mirror of the world that we're living in right now.
This story isn't about what happens later. It's about what happens now. A man feasts every day while Lazarus starves on his doorstep. That's not a distant memory. That is the reality of our

world. That is the inequity in our neighborhoods…our cities… our systems that favor the rich over the poor.

Hell Begins in Life

And notice something…the rich man's torment doesn't begin when he dies. His torment begins in life. It begins the moment he decides Lazarus doesn't matter. It begins the moment he convinces himself he can live in comfort while another human being is wasting away just outside. That's when the walls go up. That's when the chasm opens. That's when hell begins.

Because hell is not some fiery pit where God throws people. Hell is the separation we choose when we cut ourselves off from love. Hell is the loneliness of life behind locked gates. Hell is what happens when we refuse communion.

God's Relentless Mercy in the Story of Lazarus and the Rich Man

But here's the good news…God will not leave us there. God will not give up on us…not the poor, not the rich, not anyone. God is relentless in mercy. The God revealed in Jesus Christ is the one who crosses boundaries…bridges divides…and will not rest until every single one of us is reconciled.
That's why I believe in universal reconciliation. I don't believe in a God who abandons anyone forever. I don't believe in a God whose love runs out. I don't believe in a God who is less merciful than parents who keep praying for their children no matter how far they wander. No…I believe in a God who is love without end, who will not quit until every last one of us is gathered home.

Loving the Rich Man…The Hardest Lesson of in the Story of Lazarus and the Rich Man

And here's where the parable stretches us. We know we're supposed to love Lazarus. That feels obvious. But the Gospel asks even more…we are called to love the rich man too. That's the hard part, isn't it? To love the one who causes harm. To love the one who hoards while others starve. To love the one who benefits from the chasms the world creates. It feels impossible. But if universal reconciliation is real, then it must include the rich man too.

Seeing Ourselves in the Rich Man

Because here's the truth…the rich man isn't just "out there." He's in here…in our temptation to close the door, in our need to protect what's ours, in our moments of looking away from suffering. If God can't reconcile him…then God can't reconcile us either.
So yes… We love Lazarus. We stand with Lazarus. We feed Lazarus. But we also pray for the rich man. We also keep a seat open for him. Not because the harm doesn't matter. Not because injustice isn't real. But because God's love is that big. Because reconciliation means everyone. Because we are not whole until all are made whole.

The Eucharist, Lazarus and the Rich Man

And this is exactly what the sacrament shows us. At this table, the divisions of the world collapse. Rich and poor eat the same bread. Powerful and powerless drink from the same cup. No hierarchy. No exclusion. Just grace.

Living the Eucharist Beyond the Table

But don't misunderstand…this table doesn't stop here. The bread we receive becomes bread we are called to share. The cup we drink becomes mercy we are called to pour out in the world. The Eucharist is not just ritual…it's training for a new way of living.

A way of life that loves Lazarus. And yes…a way of life that learns to love the rich man too.

The Prophets

Jesus ends the story with Abraham saying, “They have the prophets…let them listen.” And the prophets are still speaking. They are still crying out for bread to be shared, for the poor to be welcomed, for justice to flow like a river that never runs dry. And Jesus still comes to us in the faces we would rather ignore. Lazarus is still waiting at the gate. The voices still echo. The only question is whether we will finally hear them.

Compassion in the Rich Man

And notice this…even in his torment, the rich man thinks of his brothers. Even at his lowest, he longs for them to find a better way. If compassion can stir in him there, then surely the compassion of God can never be exhausted. If mercy flickers even in the depths, how much more will the mercy of God shine without end?

The Vision of Reconciliation in the Story of Lazarus and the Rich Man

Beloved, this is why I cannot preach eternal damnation. The God I know is not finished until every Lazarus is lifted up, every rich man learns the joy of communion and every one of us is gathered into the feast that has no end.
And here is the vision…one day, at God’s table, Lazarus and the rich man will sit side by side. The chasm will be gone. The gates will be opened. The divisions will fall away. And the bread will be broken for both. The cup will be shared by all. Because God’s table is wide enough to hold every single one of us. That’s not wishful thinking. That’s the promise of reconciliation. That’s the Gospel.
So come to the table today. Receive the bread. Drink the cup. But

don’t stop here. Go out and see Lazarus. Go out and pray for the rich man. Go out and live as people who know that God’s mercy will not quit until every last one of us is reconciled.
Because here’s the truth…there is no chasm God cannot cross. There is no hell God cannot harrow. There is no one…not Lazarus, not the rich man, not you, not me…who will be left outside the overwhelming embrace of God’s eternal love.
Amen.

9.27.25

The True Executioners: Procedural Bars

Procedural Bars: The Hidden Executioners of the American Death Penalty

What Are Procedural Bars?

People think executions happen in a chamber. They think the violence begins when the straps tighten, when the syringe pierces the skin or when the mask is strapped on. They're wrong. The killing begins long before the body is laid out on the table. The real executioners do not wear hoods. They wear robes. They do not strap people down. They shuffle papers. They do not speak last words. They write…in neat lines…"procedurally barred." The instrument of death are these cold technicalities called…procedural bars. This is the death penalty in America. We pretend that guilt and innocence decide who dies. That is a lie. What really decides is whether a claim was filed on the right day…in the right court…in the right format. If not, the system slams the door…no matter what truth is trying to get in.

The Language of Paperwork as Instruments of Death

These rules have names that sound technical…harmless even… procedural default, statute of limitations, successive petition. The words dull the senses. They sound like accounting. But make no mistake…they are the instruments of death. They are the knives hidden under the robe. They cut off the possibility of justice…the possibility of life. The justification is always the same…finality. We are told that the courts must move on, that families need closure, that the system cannot tolerate endless litigation. But "finality" is a blood-soaked word. It actually means…we will end the case even if the truth has not been heard. We will dig the grave even if the body is still breathing. We will silence a life so that the paperwork looks clean.

When Evidence Is Too Late…and Blocked By Procedural Bars

Again and again, men and women come forward with new evidence: confessions from others, recantations from witnesses, DNA tests that did not exist at trial. Again and again, they are told: too late. The deadline has passed. The door is shut. The law says…you should have spoken sooner. The condemned loudly reply…I was never heard at all. And the state calls that justice.

Herrera v. Collins: A Moral Abyss

The US Supreme Court decision that exposes this cruelty most clearly is Herrera v. Collins. Leonel Herrera protested his innocence. He had evidence…but it came after the deadlines. The question before the Court was simple: Does actual innocence itself demand relief? A moral system would not hesitate. Innocence is enough. But the Court said no. Innocence…by itself…was not enough. Procedure mattered more. What kind of law admits the possibility of killing an innocent person and declares it acceptable? What kind of system insists that the clock carries more weight than the truth? Herrera revealed that this was not about justice…it never was. This was about efficiency, order, and power. Protecting the machinery of death from interruption became the priority.

The Illusion of Clemency

When the Court in Herrera gestured toward clemency…it only deepened the cruelty. Clemency is not a safeguard. It is politics. It is chance. It is the hope that a governor might choose mercy in a culture that celebrates toughness. To call clemency a safety valve is to mock the condemned. It is to tell them…the judges will not save you…but maybe a politician might miraculously give a shit.

Procedural Bars: The True Executioners

The real executioners are not found in the death chamber. The needle or gas or gun is just the final performance. The killing has already happened. It happened when a court wrote "procedurally barred." It happened when deadlines expired. It happened when innocence was weighed against order…and order won. The execution chamber is just a burial. The death has already taken place long before. The public sees only the instruments of the process. They do not see the years of denials, the clerks stamping files, the judges repeating the word "final." They do not see how many times a person can die before their body is even lowered into the ground. If they did, they would recognize the banality of the system…and just how ordinary, bureaucratic, and polite killing has become.

The Moral Stakes

If innocence does not matter, then nothing matters. If the law can extinguish life because a claim is late, then the law is no longer law at all…it is just killing with a signature. If the courts can wash their hands and say…"too late"…then the system is just ritualized murder. Procedural bars are not neutral. They are violence disguised as order. They are the sacrifice of flesh and blood on the altar of deadlines. Until we name this for what it is, we will continue pretending that executions happen only in the chamber. Death by procedure is still death. It may be the most terrifying death of all, because it teaches us that truth does not matter, innocence does not matter, life does not matter. Only paperwork matters. In such a system, murder is not carried out by monsters…it's carried out by the letter of the law itself.

9.29.25

The Eternal Eucharist: Cosmic Reconciliation in Christ

Cosmic Reconciliation in Christ

The Eucharist is the eternal reconciliation of all things. Bread and wine are not merely symbols…they are the reconciliation itself made present. To consume the Body and Blood of Christ is to enter the harmony of the universe. The fractured cosmos is restored. The estranged…the forgotten…and the broken…all are enfolded in the eternal unity that Christ embodies. Every act of the manifestation of the Eternal Eucharist enacts what scripture names as the reconciliation of all creation (Col. 1:20).

To receive Christ is to receive reconciliation itself. The Body we eat is not a fragment…it is the Body that binds galaxies, angels and humanity into unbroken unity. The Blood we drink flows through every reality restoring all that is sundered. Whoever communes with Christ participates in the Eucharist as the living eternal reconciliation of all creation. Nothing is outside. Nothing remains apart.

Scripture and the Cosmic Vision of the Eternal Eucharist

From the earliest texts the reconciliation of all creation is evident. Jesus breaks bread with sinners and outcasts as though the unity of all things were already manifest (Matt. 9:10–11). John declares, “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). Paul expands the vision, “As in Adam all die so also in Christ shall all be made alive…that God may be all in all” (1 Cor. 15:22 28). In Colossians, Paul writes, “God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things whether on earth or in heaven making peace by the blood of his cross” (Col. 1:19–20).

Paul proclaims mercy that will not be withheld, “For God has consigned all to disobedience that he may have mercy on all” (Rom. 11:32). Every knee will bow every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord…and in this eternal confession all creation is reconciled (Phil. 2:10–11). Revelation states, “God will wipe every tear from their eyes…death shall be no more… mourning and crying and pain will be no more” (Rev. 21:4). The Eucharist is the living enactment of this reconciliation…present and operative in the eternal now.

The Eternal Eucharist as Cosmic Harmony

The manifestation of the Eternal Eucharist does not point to reconciliation…it is the Reconciliation. Christ gives without reserve. The bread is the Body that restores all being. The cup is the Blood that harmonizes the cosmos. Estrangement dissolves. Hostility ends. Divisions vanish. Every morsel and every drop heals all of creation itself.

Absence is impossible in the Eucharist. The poor…the horrible… the selfish…the broken…the imprisoned…the sick…the outcast….the hungry…the left out…all are gathered. Participation enacts the eternal reconciliation of all things. Joy is unbounded. Presence is complete. Every fragment contains the fullness of the reconciled cosmos.

Eternal Union of All Things

Every Eucharist opens into the eternal now where “God will be all in all” (1 Cor. 15:28). The Reconciliation is not deferred…it is operative. Grace is infinite. Its fullness enfolds everything. Nothing is left outside. The Eucharist itself reconciles all. Just as five loaves and two fish fed thousands with abundance overflowing (Matt. 14:13–21)…so the Eternal Eucharist manifests abundance without end…reconciling all creation in Christ.

To commune is to enter Christ's eternal life…and Christ's life is the reconciliation of all things. Saints…monsters…martyrs…the depraved…the departed…and the forgotten…are united in the Eternal Eucharist. Participation is mystical orientation at the axis of the cosmos where separation ceases and all that is scattered is gathered in Christ.

The Eternal Eucharist as Vision of Universal Reconciliation

To call the Eucharist the vision of the Gospel is to see that every image of salvation converges here. Liberation…forgiveness… healing…adoption…new creation…all are consummated in the Eternal Eucharist. Creation itself is transformed. Enmity is dissolved. Bread is broken for all. The cup is poured for all. Christ is given for all. Anything less diminishes the reality of the Reconciliation.

The Eucharist, Eternal Reconciliation of All Things

The Eucharist is the eternal reconciliation of all things in Christ. All beings are already united…without absence…without end. Every morsel…every drop…enacts the healing of the cosmos. Christ is present not in time but as reconciliation itself… enfolding all…restoring all…drawing all…into divine unity. There is no separation from God. There is no residue of discord. There is no one left out. There is nowhere else. There is only the eternal universal reconciliation of all things. That is the Gospel. That is the Eucharist.

9.29.25

Ritualized Indifference: The Execution of Victor Tony Jones

Ritualized Indifference & The Illusion of Justice in Florida's Death Chamber

In just a few hours, Florida will execute Victor Tony Jones. The official words will sound orderly and familiar…justice served, closure granted, punishment complete. But beneath the sterile language, what is about to unfold is not justice. It is ritual. It is ceremony. It is a rehearsed liturgy of ritualized indifference.

Ritualized Indifference: Why Jones's Case Is Not Unique

The Common Script of Capital Punishment

What makes Jones's case terrifying is not its uniqueness but its sameness. The very problems raised by his lawyers…mental illness, abusive childhood, non-unanimous jury…are not anomalies at all. They are the common script of capital punishment.

His intellectual disability claim was dismissed, just like so many before him. His history of abuse at Florida's reform schools was procedurally barred, just like countless others. His death sentence rested on a non-unanimous jury recommendation that would not stand in most states today, just like case after case we have seen before. The courts continue to simply declare that none of these issues really matter anymore.

If you have followed executions in Florida…or in any other state…you know this story already…and the ending has already been written. Jones is simply the next name on the list.

The Ritualized Indifference of Death in Florida

Choreography of an Execution

Look closely at the choreography. The governor signs the warrant. The courts issue their final denials. Prison officials rehearse their roles. Reporters prepare their stories in advance. Families dust off statements they've carried for decades. The condemned is weighed, measured and dressed in the finest prison clothes.

The clock ticks down. Witnesses file in. Curtains rise. And then…before the eyes of a select few chosen witnesses…the state performs the sacrament of ritualized indifference. Then, the curtain falls. Everyone leaves having played their part.

Built to Numb, Not to Shock

The ritual does not provoke horror. It is built to numb. And that is the point. This is why Jones's particular issues don't matter. In the logic of ritual, they can't matter. If they mattered…if his abuse mattered, if his mind mattered, if the broken jury mattered…then the ritual would collapse. The machine can only function by refusing to see.

So…every case is described as if it is unique…when in fact ritualized indifference has made them all the same.

Florida's Year of Ritualized Indifference

Twelve Before Him, Jones Makes Thirteen

Think about this year alone. Twelve men executed in Florida before Jones. Twelve headlines. Twelve families. Twelve death warrants signed. Put them side by side and the stories blur. Every man had claims of trauma, mental illness and botched trials. Every man raised questions that should have stopped the machine. And every time the courts answered with the same response…untimely, barred, denied. The sameness is crushing.

It is the sameness that protects the ritual. By the time the poison flows, the public has already been lulled. Another man, another case and another execution…without incident. That phrase has become the state's prayer…without incident. As long as there is no incident…the horror can continue unabated. The killing is carried out as if it was nothing more than turning off a light.

What Ritualized Indifference Says About Us

Florida will tell us the story of Victor Tony Jones…his crimes, his guilt and the supposed necessity of the ultimate punishment. But this is not really about the faceless voice of government. It is about us…the citizens who permit it, the people who learn to be soothed by the ritual. We allow sameness to pass as justice. We let repetition disguise horror. With each execution, we are catechized into indifference.

The Terrifying Ordinary

Twelve times this year Florida has performed this ritual. Twelve gurneys. Twelve poisons. Twelve curtains lifted and dropped. Twelve official times of death. Twelve polished press releases. And now…Victor Tony Jones will make thirteen. Thirteen repetitions of the same liturgy of death. Thirteen rehearsals of forgetting. Thirteen lessons in indifference.

We are told the death penalty is about justice. But the truth is simpler…and darker. It is about sameness. It is about ritual. It is about making killing so ordinary that no one trembles anymore.

So, when Jones is strapped to the gurney, there will be no shock, no interruption and no horror that pierces the silence. There will only be the perfection of indifference, one more body left cold on Florida's gurney…who will be forgotten by the conclusion of the next news cycle.

And that should terrify us all.

9.30.25

Post-Execution Prophecy: The Voice of God Amidst Horror

Post-Execution Prophecy

In the aftermath of an execution the loudest voices belong to governments, prison officials and news outlets. They speak of justice served, debts paid and closure granted. I have watched this ritual so many times and have heard the same words repeated over and over. But rarely do we ask the deeper question…What is God saying? What would a post-execution prophecy even sound like?

I believe if we listened closely to scripture and to the heart of God we might hear a prophecy like this:

“Even here, even in the killing, I will not let go. The one you executed is still mine and I will redeem. I take no pleasure in the death of anyone for I am the God of life not death. You call this justice but it is not my justice. You lift up death as order but I am the One who calls you to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with me. My heart weeps for my image has been destroyed again by your hands. The blood of my children cries out from the ground. Yet even now my mercy will not fail for I desire that all be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. But woe to you who harden your hearts against mercy, who choose indifference over compassion, for I will not cease until every captive is set free.”

This prophecy is not just a spiritual exercise…it is a mirror. It shows us what is at stake when we take a life in the name of justice. I have seen how easily society can normalize this violence…how people learn to call it order, fairness or even necessity. But God’s voice does not allow us to look away.

Post-Execution Prophecy: God’s Grief Over Violence

The first note of the prophecy is grief. God mourns every killing because every human being is made in God's image (Genesis 9:6). To take a life is not just to silence a person but to diminish the reflection of the divine in our midst. In Genesis 4:10, God tells Cain that his brother's blood cries out from the ground. That cry rises from every execution chamber today.

I cannot pretend it is different. No matter how clinical the procedure an execution is still bloodshed. It wounds God's heart and it wounds ours if we allow ourselves to feel.

Post-Execution Prophecy: Justice Redefined

The second theme is God's rejection of our definitions of justice. States and courts insist that executions represent balance, fairness and closure. But God says plainly…

"You call this justice but it is not my justice."

Scripture defines justice not as retribution but as restoration. Micah reminds us to "Do justice, love mercy and walk humbly" (Micah 6:8). True justice seeks repair not annihilation. Isaiah 1:17 exhorts us to defend the oppressed not destroy them. Executions silence the very possibility of healing…cutting short any chance of repentance or reconciliation.

When society embraces death as justice it mistakes vengeance for righteousness. God's justice is always restorative…never terminal.

Post-Execution Prophecy: Mercy for All

At the heart of the prophecy lies an unshakable truth…

"Even here, even in the killing, I will not let go."

God's mercy is not thwarted by execution. The condemned person remains God's child still embraced by divine love.

Paul wrote, "God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all" (Romans 11:32). And 1 Timothy 2:4 declares that God desires all people to be saved. This means that no one…not even the executed…is beyond redemption.

This matters profoundly in a culture that too often writes people off as monsters. God refuses to abandon them. Where we see the end…God insists on a future.

Post-Execution Prophecy: A Warning to the Living

Yet this prophecy does not stop at comfort. It delivers a sharp warning…

"Woe to you who harden your hearts against mercy."

God's judgment here is aimed at those who participate in or accept the killing. The danger lies in the hardness of heart that normalizes execution…making it feel like order, safety or justice. Each act of sanctioned death catechizes us into indifference. We learn to look awa… to numb ourselves…to believe that taking life is ordinary.

This prophecy disrupts that numbness. Executions not only harm the condemned but deform the soul of the community that carries them out.

Post-Execution Prophecy: Hope Beyond Death

The final word is not grief or judgment but hope…

"I will not cease until every captive is set free."

Here the echo of Jesus in Luke 4:18 resound…freedom for the oppressed, release for the captives.

This hope redefines even the execution chamber. Though society pronounces death as final…God promises liberation beyond it. The executed are not lost. The story is not over. The last word belongs to life not death.

Why It Matters

Why should we imagine what God might say after an execution? Because executions are not only legal procedures…they are spiritual events. They force us to confront what kind of justice we truly believe in, what kind of God we trust and what kind of people we are becoming.

If God's voice is grief, then we cannot pretend that executions are neutral. If God's voice is mercy, then we cannot believe that anyone is beyond redemption. If God's voice is warning, then we cannot let indifference harden our hearts. If God's voice is hope, then we must question every system that insists death has the final say.

I write this because I have seen too many people accept executions as normal. I have watched society look away. But God's voice does not allow us to look away. To imagine God's response is to expose the contradictions at the heart of the death penalty. It unmasks the false god of retribution and reveals the true God of life, mercy and liberation. It calls us to turn away from ritualized killing and toward restorative justice.

Every execution wounds the heart of God. But every prophecy of mercy assures us that God's love will not fail. In the end God's voice assures us that life…not death…will always have the final word.

Scripture references:

Genesis 4:10 –“The blood of your brother cries out from the ground.”

Genesis 9:6 – Humanity made in God’s image.

Ezekiel 18:32; 33:11 – “I take no pleasure in the death of anyone.”

Micah 6:8 – “Do justice, love mercy, walk humbly.”

Isaiah 1:17 – “Seek justice, defend the oppressed.”

Romans 11:32 – “God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.”

1 Timothy 2:4 – God “desires all people to be saved.”

Luke 4:18 – “To proclaim freedom for the captives.”

10.1.25

Charles Crawford Deserves Life: Tate Reeves Hungers to Kill

Life for Charles Crawford

On October 15, Mississippi plans to kill Charles Crawford. The state calls it justice. I call it what it is…state-sanctioned murder…wrapped in the lie of righteousness, a cruel spectacle staged by a system that profits from human suffering and thirty years of relentless torment. At the center of it all, Governor Tate Reeves is ready to give the command. Of course, Reeves could stop this execution. But… He refuses. He chooses vengeance. He chooses cruelty. He chooses to make himself the arbiter of life and death. Secretly, I suspect he loves the role.

Stealing Charles Crawford's Voice

Charles Crawford told his lawyers what he wanted…no concessions of guilt, no insanity defense, no surrender. He asked for a fight. And yet, from the opening words of his trial, his lawyers confessed his guilt over his objections. They handed his life to the state before the first witness even spoke. This was not defense…it was execution by proxy. McCoy v. Louisiana reminds us that the rights guaranteed by the US Constitution belong to the accused…not their attorney. Crawford's choice to assert innocence was stolen. The court allowed it. And Governor Reeves? He stands ready to make that theft permanent with one signature.

The state ignored the human reality of Charles Crawford. He has lived with epilepsy, blackouts and brain injury. That is not an excuse…it is evidence. Evidence of a mind fractured by circumstances that demand understanding, not punishment. The jury never saw the human being shaped by trauma, suffering and survival. They saw only the monster the state painted. Justice

was replaced with cruelty. And yet, Governor Reeves still looks the other way. He refuses to see the man, refuses to see the transformation and refuses to see mercy. He sees only the power to kill.

Charles Crawford & Thirty Years of Vengeance

For thirty years, Charles Crawford has lived with death hanging over him. Capital punishment is sold as swift, decisive, protective. But decades of waiting…decades of uncertainty, despair and relentless psychological torment…mock this so-called justice. Life without parole already protects society. What remains is not protection…it is vengeance. And Reeves treats vengeance as duty. He refuses reason. He refuses conscience. He refuses humanity.

A few weeks ago, I spoke to Charles Crawford. I did not speak to the man from thirty years ago. I spoke to a grandfather, a man trusted by prison staff and a steadfast disciple of Jesus. I found hope. I found redemption. I found a human that has been profoundly changed. And yet Mississippi is preparing to kill a man who no longer exists. Governor Reeves leads the way. He refuses to stop and think. He chooses to weaponize the state against a life redeemed.

Supporters of the death penalty claim it brings closure. Killing Charles Crawford will not bring back Kristy Ray. It will not heal her family's grief. Executions do not heal. They prolong suffering. Closure is a lie told in the name of vengeance. Governor Reeves may pretend he is delivering justice…but what he is really doing is legitimizing cruelty, firming it up with his signature and claiming morality while orchestrating murder.

Stand Down, Governor Reeves

To kill Charles Crawford now is to assert that the state's power is the final arbiter of human worth. It is to declare that redemption

has limits, that transformation is meaningless. It is to say that a man cannot rise from the shadows of his past…that faith, repentance and change are illusions. I have heard his voice. I have touched his soul. I have felt the weight of the life he has rebuilt behind walls of concrete and metal. To kill him now is not justice. It is cruelty. It is vengeance masquerading as law.

Charles Crawford is guilty…guilty of living in a corrupt system, guilty of being betrayed by those entrusted to defend him and guilty of being a psychologically broken person. But he is not beyond redemption. I heard it. I believe it. To kill him now is to strike against the very idea of justice. To tell every human being that no matter how profoundly they change, the state reserves the right to erase their life. This is not law. This is a cruel tyranny. And Reeves is leading the way in the insanity of it all.

If justice means anything, it means mercy. If justice means anything, it means the courage to stand down. Governor Reeves, you can taste courage for the first time in your entire life. Somewhere in there, I do believe you have the ability. Now, you have to have the courage to make the choice. Stand down. Stand down for Charles Crawford. Stand down for justice itself. Stand down before history writes your name as the man who killed mercy again…who murdered redemption again…who chose vengeance over humanity again.

10.2.25

Anthony Boyd is God's Test for Alabama

God's Test for Alabama

Anthony Boyd is God's test for Alabama. Make no mistake, Anthony Boyd is not the Savior. He's not Christ. He bears no mantle of redemption for the world. And yet…in his life, in his suffering and in the shadow of his impending execution…he becomes the instrument of a higher judgment. He is the test that Jesus places before Alabama…a living measure of whether the state understands mercy, justice and the fear of God. In Boyd, the moral and spiritual condition of Alabama is laid bare. Every choice made by those in authority…every act of indifference or cruelty…becomes a reflection not merely of law, but of the state's knowledge of the Divine.

Scripture's Prophetic Warning: Anthony Boyd is God's Test for Alabama

For over thirty years, Boyd has endured confinement on death row, a life suspended between existence and the machinery of death. Though questions remain, the crime that he was convicted of is severe…taking the life of Gregory Huguley. Yet in the divine economy, justice is not measured by punishment alone. The Scriptures warn that nations and communities are judged not only for the sins of individuals…but for the systems they perpetuate that permits injustice to persist. Amos (8:4-7) declares: "You trample the poor and take from them levies of grain. Therefore, the Lord says, 'I will not forget your deeds.'" Boyd's situation functions in this prophetic pattern…the man himself is not the central figure…he is the question, the test. The state's response to him reveals its moral and spiritual orientation. Anthony Boyd is God's test for Alabama.

Does Alabama Have Any Concept of Mercy?

The method of execution…nitrogen hypoxia…is stark, experimental and torturous. It is a mechanized act of death, a tool through which the state exerts absolute control. If Alabama proceeds without reflection or hesitation…it reveals that it has not discerned the love of God. It demonstrates a reliance on bureaucratic power over conscience…on procedure over mercy. But if the state fails to consider the humanity of the man it holds in its hands…it fails to acknowledge that God's justice operates above human law…that authority is accountable to a higher standard than expediency. Boyd's life is thus a test…a living instrument through which Jesus asks Alabama whether it understands the sacredness of life, the necessity of mercy and the weight of conscience.

Boyd is not a redeemer. He is a mirror. In every legal appeal, in every public outcry, in every whispered prayer for clemency, the state encounters the question God places before it. Will you act justly? Will you acknowledge the humanity or will you continue to dehumanize? Every decision made in the coming days carries spiritual weight. The execution…or its halt…will testify not only to Boyd's fate, but to the conscience of the state itself. Anthony Boyd is God's test for Alabama.

Hardened Hearts?: Anthony Boyd is God's Test for Alabama

The prophetic nature of Boyd's test is stark and unavoidable. He is a warning, a judgment in motion, a living echo of the biblical tradition in which God tests nations through the lives of the oppressed and marginalized. Scripture repeatedly emphasizes that the measure of a community is found in how it treats the least, the imprisoned and the condemned. To ignore Boyd's suffering and humanity is to harden the heart against God and answer the call for mercy with defiance. Anthony Boyd is God's test for Alabama.

Does Alabama Know God?

Anthony Boyd's case is a moral crucible. He stands between the state and God, a living measure of Alabama's knowledge…or ignorance…of the Divine. He is not a messiah, but he is the instrument Jesus uses to test the hearts of those in power and each who exist under such power. The state's choice will not erase his life, nor will it alter the past. But it will reveal whether Alabama governs with wisdom rooted in justice tempered by mercy…or whether it continues in pride and indifference. Boyd is the lens through which God's question becomes unavoidable… Does Alabama know God? Does Alabama fear God? Does Alabama act with moral sight…or does it act in darkness?

The urgency of this test cannot be overstated. Boyd's life is a summons. Every official who signs the papers, every judge who permits the machinery to move forward, every citizen who watches silently and any other who participates in this foolishness becomes part of this divine inquiry. Boyd is the warning. Alabama cannot escape the moral questions before it. Will Alabama kill the one sent by God to test it?

In the end, Anthony Boyd is not Christ. He is simply the test. The outcome will speak louder than any law, louder than any argument and louder than any courtroom decision. Boyd's life is the lens through which God asks the State of Alabama… Do you know me?

10.2.25

Innocence Ignored: Save Lance Shockley

The Beginning of Injustice in the Case of Lance Shockley

In Missouri, the execution chamber waits for Lance Shockley. The state insists the case is settled, that justice demands his death. But the truth is far more troubling. No physical evidence connects him to the crime…no fingerprints, no DNA, no clear link at all. His conviction rests instead on coerced witness testimony, discredited forensics and a justice system that abandoned fairness long before delivering its verdict. From the start, innocence was ignored.

When innocence is ignored, morality erodes. Efficiency begins to matter more than truth, conviction more than careful deliberation. Shockley's trial became not a search for justice but a demand for closure. Missouri chose certainty over honesty, punishment over fairness. Now the machinery of death prepares to deliver its final act of denial.

Lance Shockley's Trial Without Truth

The details of Shockley's trial expose a hollow performance of justice. Witnesses were pressured by law enforcement until their stories matched the prosecutors' script. Ballistic and forensic claims once paraded as proof have since been revealed as junk science. The trial was never about truth…it was about persuading twelve jurors at any cost.

When truth is discarded, a counterfeit takes its place. In Shockley's case, that counterfeit succeeded. The jury was swayed not by evidence but by manipulation. The state called it justice, but what it delivered was deception. Innocence wasn't overlooked…it was slaughtered and buried.

Philosophically, this is the danger of weak trials…once truth bends to serve power, justice collapses. The courtroom becomes theater, and guilt is performed rather than proven. Shockley's conviction was nothing more than a performance convincing enough to kill.

The Broken Scales of Justice in Lance Shockley's Case

Even beyond the evidence, the process itself was poisoned. His defense failed to challenge key points of law. Juror misconduct went unchecked…the jury foreperson introduced a fictional tale of vigilante revenge during deliberations, warping the process with bias and imagination.

When the jury reached sentencing, they were deadlocked between life and death. By any fair standard, that should have meant life without parole. Instead, a Missouri loophole allowed the judge to impose death. What was meant to safeguard fairness was twisted into a weapon.

This is not balance. This is engineering an outcome. In such a system, innocence has no chance. To call it justice is not just dishonest…it is obscene.

The Weight of Lance Shockley's Innocence Ignored

Nearly two decades have passed since Lance Shockley was condemned. In that time, he has not lived as the monster the state described but as a counselor and peacemaker inside prison walls…a man whose life testifies to growth and humanity rather than guilt.

Yet Missouri clings to its narrative. To admit doubt would unravel the fragile illusion of justice it has built. It is easier to ignore innocence than to confess error. But innocence ignored does not vanish. It festers. It wounds not only the condemned but the conscience of the society that condemns.

A state that ignores innocence warps its own soul. It becomes a machine ruled not by fairness but by fear and vengeance. When that machine turns toward execution, it corrodes the very meaning of justice.

The Witness of Another Execution and a Chance Encounter with Lance Shockley

I know the horror of an execution in Missouri because I've witnessed it. I was there when Missouri executed David Hosier. I saw the ritual of death, the cold precision of a state taking life in the name of justice. It was not righteousness…it was violence sanctified by law.

While ministering to Hosier, I briefly met Lance Shockley. What I saw was not the caricature painted by prosecutors but a man deeply burdened by false condemnation. That encounter made one truth inescapable…if Missouri kills Shockley…it will not be executing justice…it will be executing a man whose conviction rests on lies, misconduct and error.

These repeated killings do not cleanse Missouri. They stain it deeper and deeper.

Lance Shockley: Missouri's Test of Conscience

The execution of Lance Shockley is not his test…it is Missouri's. A test of whether the state can be honest, admit error and value life over vengeance. If Missouri ignores the innocence before it, then the state itself stands condemned.

That is what innocence ignored means…not just the destruction of one life but the destruction of the moral credibility of an entire society. If Missouri proceeds, the question will not be whether Shockley was guilty. The question will be whether Missouri has any claim left to justice at all.

The time has come for Missouri to face itself. Will it commit another killing in the name of corrupted justice? Or will it recognize the weight of innocence ignored and step back from the brink?

Indeed…

If Missouri kills Lance Shockley, it will not prove his guilt. It will prove its' own.

10.3.25

St. Esther Brown: The Greatest Death Penalty Abolitionist

Some lives are ordinary. Some lives are remarkable. Some lives are holy. The Life of Esther Brown is fire.

At ninety-two, she is still here. Frail in body…but unbowed in spirit. To stand beside her is to stand in the presence of a holiness. A prophet. A living testament to mercy no words can contain.

Keep Watching

2

She was born in Nazi Germany, a world burning with cruelty. Neighbors vanished. Evil was codified into law. She saw the machinery of death made righteous. Most would have hardened. She did not. She carried in her heart a vision of mercy. She carried a vow…she would fight injustice wherever she found it. Incessantly…she has done just that.

Compassion Forged in Shadows, Love Forged in Death

When Esther came to America, she devoted herself to healing. As a social worker, she entered homes filled with grief, families abandoned by the world. She stayed. She listened. She healed. Every act of compassion was a rehearsal for the battle to come… the fight against death itself.

Then, she met Willie. Not in safety. Not in light. She met him on death row in Florida. The shadow of execution stretched over them…and in that shadow…love was forged. Fierce. Covenantal. Defiant. Most would have fled. Esther did not. She saw the humanity the world had tried to erase. She loved Willie with all that she had.

When Willie was condemned to die, most assumed that the end had already been written. Enter Esther. She fought. She prayed. She labored with relentless courage. And she won. She saved him. Amidst reporters shouting questions, Willie walked off of death row a free man. Esther had stared down the executioner and said…not today.

Decades of love followed. When Willie passed two years ago, her grief was profound. Yet her love did not fade. It remains eternal, unbroken and undying. She still carries him. She still carries the proof that mercy can triumph. That devotion can outlast despair. That life can rise even when death seeks to claim all that still has breath.

Her heart did not stop with Willie. She joined moved to Alabama and took on the state's murderous and bloody death penalty system. She carried the names of all of those on death row… including Brian Baldwin, executed despite overwhelming evidence of innocence. She never let their memory fade. Their deaths became fire in her soul, holy embers she bore for decades. She carried the suffering of the condemned like sacred flame. She bore it, she lived it and she was transformed by it.

Standing With the Condemned, Speaking Truth to Power

For decades, Esther served as the Executive Director of Project Hope to Abolish the Death Penalty, the longest-running prisoner-led abolitionist organization in the nation. She didn't found it. It was born on death row. But she became its lifeblood. She carried the voices of the condemned into courts, legislatures, churches and the press. Indeed, she lifted their voices anywhere and everywhere the world tried to silence them.

To the men on Alabama's Death Row, Esther has been more than a director. She's been… Mother. Prophet. Companion. She's never abandoned them. She's never stopped fighting. For them…

in every sense of the word…has been a living personal saint for each prisoner.

Esther did not fight from afar. She entered the execution chamber. She spoke words of comfort as men were taken to be strapped down. She transcribed and broadcast their last words. She bore witness as the state extinguished life. Most would have crumbled. She transformed grief into testimony. Every execution became a sermon. Every death a prophetic warning for all with ears to hear. She carried death itself as a holy burden. She held the suffering of the condemned like sacred flame.

Her courage towers even among the most famous modern abolitionists. Sister Helen Prejean moved hearts. Bryan Stevenson changed laws. And yet, Esther's witness is different… she empowered the men on death row to speak for themselves. Where others spoke from pulpits, she gave the condemned a microphone. Where others prayed, she enlarged the platforms from which the condemned could be heard. Where others hesitated, she raced to share the stories of the condemned. The empowerment of the condemned has been her life's work. She is among the giants…in fact…I think she even towers above them all in the sacred task of uplifting the voices of the voiceless.

Just weeks ago, Esther stood with me at a press conference for Anthony Boyd in Montgomery, pleading once more with Alabamians to choose mercy. Frail in body but unshakable in spirit, she refuses to abandon the condemned. Her fire has not dimmed. Her voice has not faded. She is still a prophet…a saint.

Esther Brown: The Greatest Abolitionist to Ever Exist

Some hesitate to call anyone the greatest. Not me. Esther Brown's life is a case study in holy defiance. As a child, she saw the cost of unchecked power. As a social worker, she practiced holy compassion. As a wife, she loved Willie with courage forged in the shadow of death. As an activist, she bore the names

of the innocent. As executive director, she amplified the voices of the condemned for decades. As a witness, she entered death row, the execution chamber and transformed grief into testimony. As a saint, she continues to plead for mercy with every breath.

Her life preaches: No one is beyond mercy. No one is beyond dignity. No one is beyond hope. When the death penalty falls… and it will…history will trace its collapse back to Esther Brown. She has lived he abiding belief that love is stronger than death.

Some may ask… How can one person matter so much? Esther proves that one person can matter enough to bend history. She's born witness in a way that has changed hearts and minds. She's spoken in a way that can never be forgotten. Indeed, she is a living breathing sermon. A prophet. A saint. Her work, her love, her courage and her faithfulness…all of it stands as a fierce monument against the death penalty that can never be shaken. Every person she has saved, every life she has defended and every imprisoned voice she has set free is an eternal testimony to the power of humanity to do something that makes a difference. Esther Brown has carried the weight of human suffering and turned it into hope.

For me, Esther is… More than a friend. More than a partner. More than a mentor. She is the saint we didn't know we needed. Fierce resistance in this hour of oppression. Her presence radiates holiness. Her love for Willie is an icon of fidelity. Her defiance of death proclaims the greatness of love more powerfully than any sermon I could ever preach. At ninety-two, her steps are increasingly slower, her voice is increasingly softer and yet her witness has lost none of its fire. To stand with her now is to stand at the edge of eternity. Her life has already broken through the borders of time. I thank God for Esther Brown. I thank God for her witness, her courage, her tenderness. I thank God for the path she has walked and the lives she has touched. St. Esther Brown is…and always will be…the greatest abolitionist to ever exist.

So go…and be like St. Esther. Dare stare into the abyss and carry mercy in your hands. Dare love amid hate. Carry love where love seems impossible. Embody the suffering of the condemned and turn death into testimony. Set the world on fire.

10.4.25

Practical Universalism: Pope Francis and Mercy in Action

All Scripture citations are from the New American Bible, Revised Edition (NABRE).

Pope Francis's papacy was marked by a relentless emphasis on mercy, hope and pastoral care. He never issued a formal declaration that all souls will ultimately be saved, yet his words, gestures and daily practice seemed to move in that direction. Again and again, Francis acted as if God's love had no limits. This essay explores ten key statements and encounters from his pontificate…among them his reassurance to a child who feared his father was in hell…and sets them against a biblical backdrop. The claim here is that Francis lived out a form of practical universalism…not a system of doctrine, but a way of leading and ministering in which mercy is always the first and last word.

The election of Pope Francis in 2013 signaled a pastoral change of tone for the Catholic Church. From his first homilies onward, his language was not guarded or abstract but warm, insistent and rooted in mercy. He did not take up the mantle of a systematic universalist. He never wrote definitively that all are going to be saved. But if one looks at his homilies, encyclicals, interviews and encounters, a pattern becomes clear…Francis carried himself as though God's mercy extended to every soul. By examining his words alongside Scripture…and by paying close attention to the stories and images he favored…we see how practical universalism functioned as both a theological horizon and a pastoral strategy.

Mercy as the Core of Francis's Vision

Practical Universalism: God Never Tires of Forgiving

In his very first Angelus address, Francis remarked, “God never tires of forgiving; it is we who tire of seeking his mercy” (Angelus, March 17, 2013). The emphasis is subtle but striking. The problem is not God’s limitation but our hesitation. Lamentations 3:22-23 expresses the same…“The LORD’s acts of mercy are not exhausted, his compassion is not spent; They are renewed each morning-great is your faithfulness!” Again and again, Francis framed mercy not as an optional trait of God but as God’s very nature.

Jesus as the Face of the Father’s Mercy

In Misericordiae Vultus (2015) he went further…“Jesus Christ is the face of the Father’s mercy.” John 14:9 echoes this directly…“Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.” For Francis, mercy was not theory but the very texture of God’s relationship with humanity.

Judgment Deferred, Hope Embraced

“Who Am I to Judge?”

Some of his most memorable words came in an offhand remark about gay priests…“Who am I to judge?” (Papal Plane Interview, July 28, 2013). Matthew 7:1-2 places the same demand before us…“Stop judging, that you may not be judged. For as you judge, so will you be judged, and the measure with which you measure will be measured out to you.” Francis’s refusal to claim the role of ultimate judge opened space for accompaniment rather than condemnation. He lived as though reconciliation was always possible.

Practical Universalism: The Hope of an Empty Hell

That same hope appeared in his 2022 interview when he admitted, “I liked to think of hell as empty…I’ve hoped it was” (Interview with Fabio Fazio, 2022). The hope echoes 1 Timothy

2:4: “who wills everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth.” Francis gave this hope pastoral shape in encounters like the moment he had with the boy who feared his father was in hell. Rather than speculate, Francis invited the child to trust in God’s mercy.

Practical Universalism: The Church as Field Hospital

Evangelii Gaudium and the Mission to the Margins

Francis called the church “a field hospital after battle.” In Evangelii Gaudium he declared, “I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets” (§49). Luke 4:18-19 captures the same mission…“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.” For Francis, the church was not a fortress of the pure but an instrument of mercy for the wounded. He often repeated, “The Church does not grow by proselytism but by attraction” (Address in Assisi, October 4, 2013), a claim in line with 1 Peter 3:15…“Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope, but do it with gentleness and reverence.”

Reconciliation, Not Condemnation

This orientation shaped his most controversial exhortation, Amoris Laetitia, where he wrote, “No one can be condemned forever, because that is not the logic of the Gospel” (§297). The text resonates with 2 Peter 3:9…“The Lord…is patient with you, not wishing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.” Romans 5:18-19 broadens the point…“Just as through one transgression condemnation came upon all, so through one righteous act acquittal and life came to all.” For Francis, mercy redefined the church’s pastoral practice. Condemnation is never the last word.

Mercy Without Limits

Confronting Indifference

Francis named indifference as one of the gravest sins of the modern age…"In this world of globalization we have fallen into a globalization of indifference" (Homily at Lampedusa, July 8, 2013). Isaiah 1:17 gives the antidote…"Learn to do good. Make justice your aim: redress the wronged, hear the orphan's plea, defend the widow." For Francis, mercy required social engagement as much as personal conversion. Practical universalism was not a free pass but a summons to solidarity.

Practical Universalism: Love Stronger than Any Sin

Perhaps his most consistent refrain was, "Mercy will always be greater than any sin, and no one can place limits on the love of God" (Homily, Divine Mercy Sunday, April 7, 2013). Romans 8:38-39 echoes with power…"For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor present things, nor future things, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." Francis embodied this conviction by visiting prisoners, washing the feet of migrants and embracing those at the margins. For him, mercy had no boundaries.

Francis never claimed to settle the debate on universal salvation. What he did was live as if reconciliation was infinitely possible…if not inevitable. His papacy treated mercy as the starting point, judgment as provisional and hope as the eternal operative. In his words, his gestures and his pastoral presence… especially with the boy grieving his father…Francis gave shape to a theology of mercy that was not abstract but embodied. In this sense, practical universalism was not a doctrine but a lifestyle. His pontificate suggested what it might look like for the church to embrace the limitless possibilities of God's love. We would do well to go and do likewise in our own lives.

10.4.25

The Rhythm of Faith: The Explosion of the Realm of God

The Realm of God in Motion: The Rhythm of Faith

Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

October 5, 2025

"If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you." – Luke 17:6

They Were on the Road with Jesus

They were on the road with Jesus when one of them said, "Lord, we don't have enough faith. It feels so small. Can you give us more?" Jesus stopped…looked at them…dusty, tired, unsure. "You think you need a lot? You don't. Even a speck can move the impossible." He went on… "Faith isn't a stunt. It's a rhythm…breath by breath, step by step, heartbeat by heartbeat. Small. Steady. Daily." Beloved. This is a word for us. We keep thinking faith must be spectacular…lightning strikes…miracles. But Jesus says…no…faith is quiet persistent motion.

Faith as Courage

The rhythm is courage that refuses to bend. It's showing up when fear shouts. It's loving when the world chooses cruelty. It's confronting those who build walls while others starve, who drop bombs while children scream, who exploit the poor for their own gain. Oppressors surround us. Families torn apart by raids. Leaders twisting truth while chaos spreads. In Gaza…explosions continue amid promises of peace. Trump…still doing all of his bullshit. Across the globe…journalists vanish, protests are

crushed, forests burn, oceans rise, wealth accumulates for a few while billions suffer.

The problems feel unshakable. Dense, hidden in the shadows, immovable. Yet a single act of faith can ignite change. One choice to act with courage can alter everything. One small defiance can bend reality.

The Rhythm of Faith

Faith is the force through which the realm of God enters our world. Each step of integrity, each gesture of compassion, each whispered prayer and each hand extended to the hurting bends creation toward justice. Loving your neighbor as yourself is not just moral theory…it is the rhythm of God that ushers in the realm of God. Every act of care, every sacrifice for another and every refusal to let another suffer without aid accelerates the arrival of God's eternal presence.

We feel inadequate, tiny. Jesus says…start where you are. Take one breath. Make one move. Follow one heartbeat. That is enough to shift the balance. It is exhausting. Comfort, reputation, safety…all are challenged. But nothing else grants meaning as profoundly. Faith is not a display. It is quiet insurgency with unstoppable determination.

The Rhythm of Faith : Responding to Everyday Atrocities

Everyday atrocities confront us. Children taken, homes destroyed, communities uprooted. Lies overwhelm truth. Jesus says…Begin immediately. Engage courageously. Love consistently. Love your neighbor as yourself. In this love, heaven presses down, oppression trembles and the realm of God surges forward.

One action inspires another. One expression of care affirms existence. One refusal to submit exposes false power. Even

hidden deeds ripple outward…destabilizing structures built on cruelty.

The Rhythm of Faith : Prayer and Devotion as Faith Maintenance

Faith carries divine pulse. Courage rises when despair commands stillness. Defiance erupts when the world declares us powerless. Invisible forces shift. Chains loosen. Mountains respond. Life surges. The realm of God manifests through human obedience and risk.

But faith must be maintained. Prayer is the engine, personal devotion the rhythm that sustains courage to act. Each morning whispered to God, each quiet reflection, each hour spent in communion with the Spirit strengthens the soul for the challenges ahead. Prayer aligns the heart, tunes the mind and fuels the courage that bends reality. Devotion is not separate from action…it nourishes it. Without it, the rhythm falters…with it, even the smallest act becomes unstoppable.

The Ordinary as Extraordinary

This rhythm starts in kitchens where meals are shared, in quiet prayers, in classrooms nurturing minds, in hospital rooms holding pain. Ordinary acts collide with eternity and create rupture lines where justice emerges. Environmental crises demand attention. Rising waters, raging fires, collapsing ecosystems call for action. Health inequities threaten countless lives. Systems of racial injustice persist. Faith mobilizes advocates, protects communities, amplifies voices, and challenges those in authority.

The unseen are no longer ignored. We go where they are. Streets where hunger sleeps. Cells where innocence suffers. Camps where refugees wander. We commit ourselves to be…to work there…to pray there…until such places exist no more. This is

the realm of God appearing. God moving through ordinary humans with extraordinary consequence. Every act of neighborly love, strengthened by prayer and devotion, accelerates the realm of God. Each reflection, each whispered prayer, is a doorway through which earth becomes heaven.

The Rhythm of God : Daily Dedication and Global Impact

Daily dedication is essential. Not once…not for show…but as steady commitment. Protecting the vulnerable, offering sustenance, confronting injustice, fostering hope…this is the method by which reality shifts and life blooms for all. The smallest measure within you is sufficient. Your courage, your hands, your voice, your presence…all contribute to God's intervention. Every choice matters. Every act counts. Every love transforms.

Oppressors stumble. Those who thrived on fear falter. Systems built on cruelty fracture. Natural and social structures respond. The rhythm of God surges forward. It begins with the tiniest commitment. Each act releasing energy that transforms darkness into light, oppression into liberation, despair into hope. Divine presence is tangible, advancing visibly in and through human action, nourished by prayer, devotion and the relentless love of neighbor.

The Realm of God Explodes

Oh God! Thy realm come! Thy will be done on earth! On earth as it is in heaven! Can you feel it? The realm of God is about to explode. Now. Here. Through you. Through your hands, your words, your heartbeat. Do you feel it? Surging? Trembling? Chains shattering? Towers of injustice crumbling? Rivers of justice flooding the earth? The realm of God is erupting. It cannot be stopped. It will not wait.

So… Rise, people of God. Rise, Beloved. Embrace the rhythm of faith. Stand. Speak. March. Feed. Shelter. Protect. Comfort. Confront. Challenge. Resist. Persist. Persevere. Now. This second. Through you. Through us. The realm of God bursts forth. It begins. It erupts. It will not be contained.

10.6.25

Modern Lynching in Alabama: On The Execution of Anthony Boyd

The Execution of Anthony Boyd : A Modern Lynching in Alabama

The scheduled execution of Anthony Boyd on October 23 is not simply the death of one man. It is a wound inflicted upon the moral soul of Alabama. To execute a black man in this state is to summon the ghosts of centuries past…to stir the air thick with the memory of terror, humiliation and ritualized violence. The blood of those lynched publicly…those left dangling from oaks while crowds cheered…is still puddled on the ground throughout Alabama. The names are innumerable. Imagine these persons as the horror was unfolding. Eyes wide with panic. Voices choked out with body fluid. Pain shooting throughout the nervous system. And still, the crowd calls it justice. Then again, if you can justify this then anything can be called justice. These were spectacles of terror…designed to assert control, to humiliate, to deny dignity and to enforce the social order of white supremacy.

Modern Lynching in Alabama as Historical Continuity

Anthony Boyd will die not by mob violence…but rather by the violent suffocation of nitrogen gas in secret. The mechanics differ…but the meaning does not. Both acts assert the same power over Black bodies…and strip the condemned of all agency and humanity. The rope crushed throats and hearts…the gas will steal enough breath to do the same. Like lynchings of the past…this execution asks Alabama to bear witness with cold acquiescence. Both communicate the same unflinching message…this one is no longer human…this life is expendable.

The Carnival of Dehumanization

Even as the state claims “justice”…there is a disturbing celebratory undercurrent in how Alabama interacts with executions. Headlines trumpet closure. Commentators applaud efficiency. The machinery of death becomes entertainment…a perverse measure of social order. Like the crowds who cheered lynchings of old…applauding the spectacle…present society sanitizes cruelty and calls it law. Justice is measured not by mercy or human dignity…but by conformity, closure and the satisfaction of seeing punishment executed…or “justice” served. This applause…literal or metaphorical…indicts every citizen who participates by watching, reading or even ignoring. From a theological perspective, this is blasphemy against the image of God in humanity…celebrating or ignoring cruelty is nothing short of idolatry…worshipping the false god of punitive justice over mercy and compassion.

Alabama’s Haunted Past

To understand this, one must see Alabama’s past as more than history…it is a living inheritance. In the streets of Alabama towns large and small, once lined with signs declaring “White Only,” the ghosts of lynchings linger. The courthouse steps where Black men were paraded and tried before being summarily killed echo in today’s death chambers. Jim Crow laws, segregated schools and buses and the terror that enforced “their place” for Black bodies were not isolated horrors…they were part of a continuous system of racialized power. The execution of Boyd is a continuation of that story. It enacts the same violent hierarchy…now veiled by procedure and technology…but still grounded in the same moral failure…the denial of the intrinsic worth of a human life.

Modern Lynching in Alabama & The Mechanics of Suffering

The mechanics may differ, but the physical and symbolic suffering overlap. Imagine the rope coiling, tightening around a man’s neck, his last gasps filling the humid air, echoing down

streets where signs once read “White Only.” Now, imagine Boyd in a nitrogen chamber. Air thins. Breath fails. Silence falls. The terror is different…but the message identical…the state can decide whether a Black man lives or dies. Whether masked mob or bureaucrat, the executioner is the instrument of a system that has long sought to dehumanize Black bodies.

Moral and Theological Dimensions

There is a profound moral and theological dimension to this continuity. The absence of mercy echoes the absence of mercy in lynchings past. Every act of watching…every nod of consent… every look in the other direction…participates in the denial of the human dignity of Anthony Boyd. When a society sanctions the deliberate taking of life under the banner of legality…it reveals not the triumph of justice…but the fragility of conscience and the ease with which moral reasoning can be subverted. The ethical failure is collective…it is not merely in the hands of those on the execution team…but in the hands of every citizen who allows indifference, fear or habit to mask the gravity of what is done.

Modern Lynching in Alabama as a Performance of Power

Executing Boyd is not merely about ending one life…it is the reenactment of a narrative that has long defined Alabama…that Black lives are vulnerable, that the law can be wielded with cruelty and that justice is a performance rather than a principle. In both historical lynchings and modern executions, the Black body becomes a site for projecting societal fears, prejudices and assertions of dominance. The moral injury extends far beyond the condemned…it infects the community…distorting its understanding of justice and corrupting its collective conscience. It normalizes the idea that the innocent…or the marginalized… can be sacrificed in the name of order, ritual or procedural formalism.

What Every Alabamian Loses

Every Alabamian will lose something if Boyd is executed. Beyond the immediate tragedy to Boyd and his family, the state forfeits its moral authority, undermines the credibility of its institutions and signals that the lessons of history are not fully grasped. The ritual of execution, however methodical…carries a psychological and moral weight that echoes past atrocities. The ghosts of lynching victims…hover over the present…a reminder that societal violence is never eradicated but merely transformed. To participate in Boyd's death is to deny the possibility of moral growth, to privilege cruelty over conscience and to fail the ethical imperative to interrupt cycles of violence.

Continuity, Not Progress

This is not progress…it is continuity. The rope has been replaced by gas, the mob by bureaucrats, the public spectacle by procedural formality…but the underlying moral calculus remains the same…a Black man's life is expendable, and the community is asked to sanction that expendability. Every moment that passes without critique…every acquiescent glance from a citizen or official…is a complicit act in the erosion of collective morality. Violence dressed in legality is no less brutal…it is merely more insidious, allowing societies to believe they are just while committing acts that undermine the very foundations of justice…morality…itself.

Modern Lynching in Alabama = Alabama's Moral Reckoning

Alabama faces a moral reckoning. To execute Boyd is to choose repetition over redemption, cruelty over mercy, symbolic violence over genuine justice. It asks citizens to sit with the uncomfortable truth that the specter of lynching is not a relic of the past but a force alive in the present, now cloaked in legality. Until that reckoning is embraced, the suffocation of Anthony Boyd will stand as a modern lynching…a testament to a state still struggling to reconcile its past with its conscience, a reminder that moral courage demands more than adherence to

procedure or to what is legal. Humanity is not measured by the efficiency of its punishments…but by the fidelity of its compassion, the courage of its mercy and the seriousness with which it upholds the sanctity of all life. In failing these tests…the state offers not justice…but a hollow performance of it…a ritual that sacrifices the moral health of the community while perpetuating cycles of fear, pain and dehumanization. You can't recoil in horror at the lynchings of the past…while being silent about the lynchings of the present.

10.9.25

“Why I March for Anthony Boyd” : Liturgical Free Verse

I march for Anthony Boyd
because death has become ordinary
in this country
because the state whispers it to us like a lullaby
because justice now wears a mask of vengeance
because our silence has become consent

I march because somewhere
we began to confuse punishment with virtue
we began to believe that killing
could cleanse the world
that a mask could baptize our sins away
that a ritual of death could sanctify our fear

I march because I know better

The execution of Anthony Boyd
is not law…it is ritual
an altar of cruelty
a liturgy of a religion
that calls itself justice
but worships only the blood it pours
Alabama may control the gas
but the poison flows through all of us
each killing cuts a piece
from the collective body
from the heart of God
and leaves us hollowed,
blind,
a people who have forgotten mercy

I march because I refuse to look away

Anthony Boyd has lived thirty years
in the harsh shadows of a sentence
that should shame us all
thirty years of waiting
of counting days
of wondering if the next knock
will be the last
thirty years of slow dying
of learning to breathe under the weight of fear
of imagining each night that death waits
like a patient visitor
ready to claim him

That is not justice
that is cruelty with a calendar

I march because I have seen him
because I can testify
to his flesh, his breath, his laughter
because the God I know
does not stop at the prison gate

The state tells us executions bring closure
but closure is a myth
a polished lie
that hides the hunger beneath
Every execution feeds the hunger
and it always returns
There is no peace in killing
only the illusion of control
and the forgetting of mercy

I march because mercy
is the last truth left
it says what the state cannot
that every person
is more than their worst moment

that the image of God
cannot be erased
by violence…ours or theirs

The commandment is unedited
unyielding
Thou shalt not kill

We can legalize it, pray over it, dress it in white gloves
but we cannot make it holy

I march because the cross
has already spoken
the Romans killed Jesus in law's name
they called it order, stability, peace
but God called it murder

The divine response
was not vengeance
but resurrection
God keeps raising
those we try to bury

Every time we kill
we crucify again
Every time we show mercy
we roll the stone away

Justice has become a sport
and the crowd roars
"Justice served"
but I call it a carnival of dehumanization
the bloodlust of spectators unchanged
since Golgotha

I march because I believe
we are better than our horrors

I march because I cannot live life
and stay silent
while the machinery of death
turns in the heart of the nation

I march because I have seen what killing does
to watchers, executioners, the nation
It corrodes the soul
teaches that compassion is optional
blinds us to God in the condemned
It teaches obedience to cruelty
as if cruelty were holy

I march because I believe
in the resurrection of the human heart
I have seen the condemned pray for their executioners
I have seen remorse bloom
in places the world forgot
I have seen hope
where we were told hope was dead

The execution chamber is not the end
it is the place where redemptive violence
reveals itself as a lie

I march for possibility
the possibility that we will learn
what the cross has been teaching
for two thousand years
you cannot kill your way to redemption

The blood we spill in the name of justice
does not cleanse
it multiplies

I march for Anthony Boyd
because his death will not make us safer

or purer, or whole
It will remind us
how deeply we have forgotten ourselves

Every act of state killing
reaffirms the heresy
that some lives are expendable

I march because no one is beyond grace
because the gospel I know is not neutral
it kneels beside the condemned
whispers into the dark
“You are not alone”

I march because to do nothing
is to bless the killing
I march to be counted
among those who refused to sit still
I march because love is stronger than death

I march for Anthony Boyd
because the breath in his lungs is sacred
and so is mine
and yours
To march for him
is to march for the world
to remember
the meaning of mercy
to remind a nation
that the work of justice
is never complete
until the condemned
are lifted from the shadow of death

10.10.25

Anthony Boyd is Innocent: The Extended Case

Preface

Anthony Boyd is scheduled to be executed on October 23, 2025…making this document a matter of profound legal and moral urgency. I serve as Anthony's spiritual advisor and will be with him in the chamber if his execution proceeds by the horrific means of nitrogen hypoxia. My role brings both a personal and spiritual responsibility to witness the process, support him and affirm his dignity in the face of a punishment that is irreversible. This analysis outlines critical flaws in his trial, including reliance on incentivized testimony, exclusion of exculpatory evidence, lack of forensic corroboration and marginalized alibi witnesses. The following examination is intended not only to present legal arguments…but to underscore the enormous human stakes involved…and the constitutional and moral imperatives demanding urgent reconsideration. Indeed, if Anthony Boyd is innocent then the State of Alabama is rushing to execute an innocent man.

Keep Watching

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The Conviction

The conviction of Anthony Boyd for the 1993 kidnapping and death of Gregory "New York" Huguley represents a deeply troubling intersection of testimonial fragility, procedural rigidity and constitutional oversight.

Tried in an era when capital cases in Alabama often relied heavily on the testimony of co-defendants and informants, Boyd's case underscores the dangers inherent in a system where

conviction depends more on narrative than on verifiable evidence.

Anthony Boyd is Innocent: The Problem of Incentivized Witness Testimony

The central narrative against Boyd relied almost entirely on testimony from co-defendants who entered plea agreements in exchange for cooperation with the prosecution. These witnesses…some of whom were facing serious criminal charges themselves…provided accounts of an abduction, binding and burning of the victim. One co-defendant testified that…"The defendant, Anthony Boyd, taped [the victim's] feet … Marcel Ackles taped New York's hands and mouth, and the defendant, Anthony Boyd, taped his feet …" (Boyd v. State, 715 So. 2d 825, 828 (Ala. Crim. App. 1997)). Another witness recalled the victim pleading…"Another witness, one of the codefendants, testified that the victim pleaded for his life saying, 'Please don't kill me. Just beat me.' The codefendant testified that, just before the victim's mouth was taped shut at the ball field, he pleaded, 'Please don't kill me'" (id.). While compelling on a human level…these statements were never corroborated by physical evidence…leaving the jury to rely almost exclusively on the credibility of self-interested witnesses.

Legal Precedents on Witness Credibility

The Supreme Court has long recognized the dangers of convictions resting on the testimony of incentivized witnesses, especially in capital cases. In Napue v. Illinois, 360 U.S. 264 (1959), the Court held that a conviction obtained through a witness's false testimony…even if inadvertently allowed by the prosecution…violates due process. In Giglio v. United States, 405 U.S. 150 (1972), the Court emphasized that any promise or understanding made to a witness that could affect their testimony must be disclosed to the defense to preserve fairness. In Boyd's case…although the jury was informed of the plea

arrangements…the reality is that the defense's ability to cross-examine these witnesses effectively was constrained by the overwhelming narrative the prosecution constructed. When a capital conviction relies so heavily on testimonial consistency among self-interested parties, the risk of wrongful conviction rises dramatically. Chambers v. Mississippi, 410 U.S. 284 (1973), underscores that exclusion of potentially exculpatory evidence…especially when it challenges testimonial reliability… can infringe on a defendant's constitutional rights. The appellate record reflects precisely this tension…the State's narrative prevailed not because of corroborative proof, but because it was repeated and reinforced by witnesses with personal stakes in Boyd's conviction.

Anthony Boyd is Innocent: The Absence of Forensic Corroboration

A critical pillar of any robust criminal case is forensic evidence, particularly when eyewitness accounts are contested or self-interested. In Boyd's trial, forensic evidence failed to link him to the scene, the vehicle or the materials allegedly used in the crime. The State's own latent print expert testified: "No prints were found of Boyd or others subsequently charged with him, including Quintay Cox, Shawn Ingram, and Monique Marcel Ackles" (Boyd v. State, 715 So. 2d at 832). This absence of fingerprint evidence or other trace materials is a decisive factor. In capital cases, the Supreme Court has emphasized that convictions must be founded on reliable evidence. Jackson v. Virginia, 443 U.S. 307 (1979), holds that the evidence must be sufficient for any rational trier of fact to find guilt beyond a reasonable doubt. When physical evidence is wholly absent… and the conviction depends solely on testimonial accounts from potentially biased witnesses…it is difficult to reconcile the verdict with this constitutional standard.

Lack of Physical Evidence

Medical evidence in Boyd's case further illustrates the gap between physical proof and attribution of guilt. The medical examiner confirmed that the victim suffered burns and soot inhalation consistent with being alive during the fire (Boyd v. State, 715 So. 2d at 830), but this evidence did not implicate Boyd personally. It established the manner of death, not the actor. The Supreme Court in In re Winship, 397 U.S. 358 (1970), underscores the importance of proof beyond a reasonable doubt, especially when liberty or life is at stake. Here, the record demonstrates that Boyd's life sentence…ultimately a death sentence…was imposed without independent corroboration tying him to the fatal act…a scenario the Court has repeatedly warned against in capital contexts.

Anthony Boyd is Innocent: Overlooked Alibi Testimony

One of the strongest indications of reasonable doubt comes from alibi witnesses, whose accounts place Boyd elsewhere during the critical time frame. Multiple individuals…with no apparent motive to fabricate…testified to his presence at social gatherings: "Ms. Willie Watson … saw him [Boyd] at her party at around 10:00 or 11:00 that night" (Boyd v. State, 715 So. 2d at 833). "Catherine Jones … observed Boyd at the party. The last time she saw him that evening was around 10:30 or 11:00 p.m. when she left to go home" (id.). Defense affidavits from Rule 32 proceedings reiterated this timeline, reinforcing the claim that Boyd could not have been present at the alleged crime scene. In Chambers v. Mississippi, 410 U.S. 284 (1973), the Supreme Court emphasized the constitutional importance of permitting defendants to present witnesses whose testimony could create reasonable doubt. The Court ruled that procedural barriers should not obstruct the introduction of reliable exculpatory evidence. In Boyd's case, alibi testimony was marginalized in favor of the more dramatic narratives from co-defendants. Yet the credibility of these witnesses remains intact and their testimony directly challenges the State's theory of presence and opportunity. This failure to give weight to untainted credible alibi evidence

demonstrates a systemic imbalance…one that the courts have recognized as potentially violative of due process (Brady v. Maryland, 373 U.S. 83 (1963); Giglio v. United States, 405 U.S. 150 (1972)).

Anthony Boyd is Innocent: Recantation and Exclusion of Exculpatory Evidence

Another serious flaw in Boyd's trial was the suppression of a signed recantation by a key witness, Sharon Bush. "One statement by Sharon Bush recanting her trial testimony is signed by her and dated September 19, 1999" (Boyd v. State, 715 So. 2d at 835). Bush had testified that she overheard Boyd and co-defendant Marcel Ackles discussing the murder, implicating Boyd in the crime. However, in a signed recantation dated September 19, 1999, Bush stated that her trial testimony was false and that she had been coerced into providing it. She claimed that law enforcement officers pressured her to testify against Boyd, threatening her with arrest and promising leniency in unrelated legal matters if she complied. This recantation was presented during Boyd's post-conviction proceedings…but the trial court ruled it inadmissible…citing procedural issues related to the timing of its submission. The court emphasized that the recantation was dated several years after the trial and was not timely filed in accordance with procedural rules. As a result, the court did not consider the recantation as part of the evidence in Boyd's case. The trial court deemed this evidence inadmissible, and the appellate court upheld the ruling on procedural grounds rather than disputing the factual content of the statement. The Supreme Court has consistently recognized the due process implications of excluding exculpatory evidence. In Napue v. Illinois, 360 U.S. 264 (1959), the Court noted that even inadvertent use of false testimony or suppression of recantations undermines the fairness of a trial. Similarly, Brady v. Maryland, 373 U.S. 83 (1963), establishes that withholding material exculpatory evidence violates constitutional guarantees of a fair trial. By excluding Bush's recantation, courts were prevented

from assessing the credibility of testimony that formed a central component of the prosecution's case. This procedural exclusion effectively insulated the State's narrative from scrutiny, a practice at odds with the principles articulated in Chambers and Napue. It created a scenario where courts weighed only inculpatory statements against Boyd, without the benefit of fully informed evaluation.

Anthony Boyd is Innocent: Hearsay, Emotionally Charged Evidence and Narrative Guilt

The trial included emotionally charged statements from witnesses, admitted under hearsay exceptions like "spontaneous utterance" or "res gestae." The appellate court summarized Boyd's objection…"The appellant argues that the prosecutors obtained this conviction and sentence of death with inadmissible hearsay … [and] complains that this evidence was again used by the prosecutors in their closing argument" (Boyd v. State, 715 So. 2d at 837). Although technically admissible, the use of such statements risks conflating emotional resonance with probative value. The Supreme Court has warned that trial practices which amplify prejudicial impact over evidentiary value can constitute a violation of due process (Darden v. Wainwright, 477 U.S. 168 (1986)). In capital cases, the stakes magnify…reliance on hearsay to construct a narrative of guilt without corroboration strains the constitutional standard established in Jackson v. Virginia and In re Winship. The cumulative effect of testimonial hearsay and co-defendant testimony effectively constructs a narrative of guilt that…while persuasive to the jury…lacks independent verification. This imbalance illustrates why courts have repeatedly stressed that procedural propriety alone does not satisfy constitutional requirements when the evidence is weak or improperly weighted (Giglio v. United States, 405 U.S. 150 (1972)).

Anthony Boyd is Innocent: Ineffective Assistance of Counsel and the Rental Van

A critical omission in Boyd's defense was the failure to thoroughly investigate the rental van allegedly used in the commission of the crime. The van represented a tangible link to the alleged events and could have provided physical evidence capable of corroborating…or undermining…the State's narrative. Forensic testing of vehicles is a standard investigative tool… capable of revealing fingerprints, fibers, hair or other trace materials that situate a defendant at the scene. In Boyd's case, no comprehensive analysis was conducted…destroying one of the few opportunities for objective verification.

Impact on Alternative Timelines

The absence of forensic inquiry into the van also deprived the defense of the chance to construct an alternative timeline. If Boyd had no access to the van…or if it contained no evidence tying him to the alleged crime…this would have created substantial reasonable doubt about his presence and participation. In capital cases, where the stakes are life and death, the Supreme Court has repeatedly emphasized that convictions must rest on evidence that is reliable, not merely narrative or testimonial (Jackson v. Virginia, 443 U.S. 307 (1979); In re Winship, 397 U.S. 358 (1970)). The failure to analyze the van underscores the fragility of the conviction. Boyd's trial relied heavily on the consistency of co-defendant testimony, emotionally charged hearsay and uncorroborated narratives. The absence of physical proof from the van magnified the risk that the jury's determination of guilt was based more on persuasion than verifiable fact…directly implicating the constitutional principles of due process and proof beyond a reasonable doubt.

Materiality of Excluded Evidence and Reasonable Doubt

The Supreme Court in Brady v. Maryland, 373 U.S. 83 (1963), established that suppression of material evidence favorable to the accused violates due process, even if done in good faith. Excluded evidence capable of materially affecting the outcome…

alibi witnesses, untested forensic avenues, and recantations… meets this standard because it directly undermines the prosecution's timeline and narrative. In Boyd's case, potential witnesses were not called and critical evidence…including the rental van…was untested. The cumulative effect of these omissions deprived the jury of information capable of creating reasonable doubt. Supreme Court jurisprudence affirms that capital defendants are entitled to every reasonable opportunity to challenge the State's case. When the State fails to provide material exculpatory evidence, the constitutional guarantee of a fair trial is compromised. Supreme Court precedent emphasizes that proof beyond a reasonable doubt is both procedural and moral. In re Winship, 397 U.S. 358 (1970) establishes that the government bears the burden entirely and any doubt must benefit the defendant. Examining Boyd's case, the aggregate of unreliable witnesses, absent forensic evidence, ignored alibi testimony and excluded recantations cannot satisfy this mandate. If the mandate is not satisfied, then Anthony Boyd is innocent.

The Interplay Between Legal Procedure and Substantive Justice

A recurring theme in Boyd's case is the tension between procedural correctness and substantive justice. Appellate courts repeatedly affirmed procedural integrity, focusing on whether rules were technically followed rather than whether the outcome was just Chambers v. Mississippi, 410 U.S. 284 (1973) highlights that rigid procedural rules cannot block the admission of evidence critical to the defense, especially when it could create reasonable doubt. Boyd's excluded recantations, unexamined alibi witnesses and untested forensic leads illustrate this precise tension. While the courts maintained procedural legitimacy, the trial outcome relied on uncorroborated, emotionally charged and potentially biased testimony. Constitutional protections… including due process, confrontation rights (Crawford v. Washington, 541 U.S. 36 (2004)) and effective assistance of counsel…were undermined. This imbalance strengthens the

argument for recognizing reasonable doubt and…by extension… Boyd's innocence.

Conclusion: Constitutional and Legal Imperatives for Reconsideration

The case against Anthony Boyd highlights the intersection of testimonial unreliability, procedural rigidity, and constitutional safeguards designed to protect defendants. Multiple Supreme Court precedents…
including Napue, Brady, Giglio, Chambers, Jackson v. Virginia, In re Winship, Strickland, and Darden…provide a framework for evaluating whether convictions…particularly in capital cases…meet the rigorous standard required to justify execution. In Boyd's case, absence of forensic evidence, reliance on incentivized witnesses, marginalization of alibi testimony and exclusion of recantations collectively demonstrate that the constitutional standard of proof beyond a reasonable doubt was not met. Procedural correctness alone cannot cure the absence of substantive reliability. The cumulative legal analysis strongly supports the conclusion that Boyd's conviction is unreliable. Anthony Boyd's case serves as a stark reminder of the weight of procedural and substantive justice in capital cases. Law requires adherence not only to rules but to the truth, fairness, and the highest evidentiary certainty. When these standards are unmet, continued enforcement of the conviction risks violating constitutional protections and moral imperatives. Justice, in its fullest sense, demands that Anthony Boyd's innocence…or the profound reasonable doubt surrounding his guilt…be acknowledged and acted upon. There is no possible justification for the execution of Anthony Boyd to proceed.

10.11.25

The Samaritan Returns: Healing, Indifference & The Gospel

Sight, Mercy and Grace

The Samaritan Returns is a story about sight..about mercy… about what we do when grace finds us. Most people take their healing and run…but one turns back. The difference between the nine and the one isn't just gratitude…it's justice. This is Luke 17:11-19 as it lives in our world today.

Keep Watching

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The Samaritan Returns or On the One Who Turned Back

On the way to Jerusalem, Jesus walked the borderlands…the places in between…where the forgotten live. Ten people stood at a distance, their skin diseased, their lives discarded. They had been pushed out by law, by fear, by the comfort of others.

They lifted their voices. "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us."

And Jesus saw them. Really saw them. Not as problems or as unclean, but as people.

He said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests."

And as they went, they were healed. Their bodies restored, their dignity returning with every step.

But only one turned back. Only one refused to keep walking away. Shouting praise, falling to the ground, his gratitude poured out at Jesus' feet. He was a Samaritan…an outsider…the one everybody else had already written off.

And Jesus asked, “Weren’t there ten healed? Where are the other nine?” His words cut deep—not just for them, but for every generation that runs from the pain of others.

“Only this stranger came back to give glory to God?”

Then Jesus said, “Get up and go. Your faith has made you whole.”

A Mirror for Our Time

It’s not just a healing story…it’s a mirror. The nine are still among us…those who take grace and run, who find wellness and forget the wounded. But the Samaritan still calls from the borderlands, reminding us that faith is not an escape…it’s a return. It’s coming back. It’s running toward the suffering until everyone is made whole.

The Cry of the Marginalized

Ten people lived on the edges of society. They were lepers… ostracized by law, fear and custom. Their suffering was visible… yet they were invisible. Today, the cries of the marginalized take new forms…but the message is the same. Most just want their healing…and run when asked to give a damn about anybody else.

The Samaritan Returns

Only one returned…a Samaritan…an outsider…a leper… someone already marginalized twice over. Shockingly, he returns to the horrors from which he’d been delivered. He is desperate to be where he can help those he left behind.

And Jesus asks, “Ten were cleansed were they not? Where are the other nine?” That question is not gentle. It is sharp. It slices through indifference. Who are the nine in our time? Who gets

their healing and runs in the opposite direction? Who allows their own comfort or convenience to determine how far they are willing to go to help other people?

The Warning of the Nine

The nine lepers are warnings. They represent everyone who gets healed and runs in the opposite direction. They scroll past headlines, avoid uncomfortable truths and rationalize silence. They see the flames of injustice and run. They leave the vulnerable to burn…while they soak up their healing. Every day their inaction costs lives. Every day the oppressed suffer alone while the world debates from the safety of distance…from the comfort of their healing. Everybody just wants to keep their own wellness and not share it with anyone else…yet the Samaritan returns.

Faith in Action

The Samaritan leper shows the other path. He embodies courage and action. He does not simply walk away. He steps into both engagement and accountability. Faith in this story is not a private sentiment. Faith is not safe or comfortable. Faith moves toward suffering. Faith confronts injustice. Faith demands that we use our voice, our conscience and our influence to stand with the least of these.

The Samaritan Returns : The Gospel

The nine who walked away exemplify the cost of indifference. The Samaritan shows courage, gratitude and persistence. The Gospel is clear. Step forward and speak out…insist that life and dignity are not negotiable.

The Question for Us

People are crying out. Their humanity cannot be ignored. And the question Jesus asks echoes louder than ever. Will you be among the nine…turning away? Or will you be like the Samaritan? Running toward the suffering is the measure of our faith. Lifting our voices…demanding life and dignity for the marginalized and oppressed…that is how we follow Jesus today.

Running Toward the Oppressed

Faith is a verb…and running toward the oppressed is how we live it. Hope is not enough…the cries of the marginalized will not wait…and neither can we. It is our responsibility to make sure justice becomes reality…not just words on paper.

10.12.25

The Execution of Grace & Anthony Boyd

The Execution of Grace : Grace on the Scaffold

The State Prepares to Kill

In Alabama, the execution of grace is scheduled again. The state prepares to execute Anthony Boyd and in doing so places grace itself upon the scaffold. The machinery of death stands polished and ready, humming with bureaucratic precision, yet beneath its gleam lies a wound that cannot heal. Each time Alabama kills, it rehearses an old liturgy of violence, a ritual that confuses justice with vengeance and turns human hearts to stone. “For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings” (Hosea 6:6). Yet here we stand again, sharpening the instruments of sacrifice to deny the source of grace.

The Execution of Grace : Grace in the Chamber

In the quiet, sterile chamber where the state carries out its rituals, grace is still present, fragile, trembling, and ignored. It hides in the hands of the condemned, in the final prayers whispered into the air. And yet sometimes, grace demands to be seen, to be heard, in the rawest way. Imagine a man strapped to the gurney, body tense with fear, veins searched and pricked in the name of law, yet still breathing, still alive. The mask hides his face, concealing the distortion of pain and desperation, but it cannot muffle the cry that rises from the deepest chamber of his soul.

The Execution of Grace : The Cry for Mercy

“Mercy! Mercy!” he gasps, words muffled, fragmented, swallowed by the machinery of death. He is insistently human, pleading with the God whose image he still bears, negotiating with the world that has declared him expendable. Grace is both

his voice and his substance in that instant. Grace presses out of him like air forced through the narrowest opening, like water breaking through a cracked dam. And yet the state moves forward, indifferent, recording the efficiency of its work while the very air quivers with a life that cannot be contained. This is the paradox of grace: it is most alive where it is most denied. And it insists, Look. See. This is the life you deny when you act as executioner.

The Execution of Grace : Life Transformed

Transformation Behind Walls

Grace is not an idea, it is a life. It is the breath of God stirring in the lungs of the condemned. Anthony Boyd, like so many before him, has lived decades behind walls, years spent in repentance, growth, and service. His transformation bears the marks of grace's long patience. But in Alabama, transformation has no currency. Redemption earns no reprieve. The state moves with unbending resolve, determined to master even God's prerogative to forgive.

A Mirror to the Conscience

Boyd's scheduled execution is more than the extinguishing of one life, it is a shadow cast over the conscience of every Alabamian. Scripture teaches that all humanity is bound together by God's image, by sin, by mercy, and by judgment. "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them" (Genesis 1:27). Each heartbeat in Alabama echoes the divine spark Boyd carries. To witness his death is to watch a light snuffed out, not only in him but within ourselves.

The Mandate of Mercy

Mercy is not optional, it is a living mandate. “He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” (Micah 6:8). Boyd has lived decades in transformation, planting seeds of hope and change within prison walls. His life is a mirror to Alabama: shall we harden our hearts, letting vengeance tip the scales, or shall we walk in mercy as God commands? Every citizen bears the weight of this choice. Once denied, mercy leaves an echoing emptiness reverberating through every street, home, and heart.

The Execution of Grace : The History

Past Executions and Botched Deaths

Grace has already been executed in Alabama, again and again. Joe Nathan James Jr.’s execution in 2022 lasted more than three hours, veins hunted like prey, punctured and pierced repeatedly. Reporters called it “torture,” yet officials spoke of “protocol.” Grace gasped that night, hidden behind curtains and silence. Kenny Smith, the first man to die by nitrogen hypoxia, struggled against the very air meant to sustain him. The state called it humane, grace called it crucifixion. Grace failed in the courts. Grace failed in a law that allowed racial bias to weigh heavier than truth. Grace failed when mental illness was ignored, when the incapable were executed, and when human frailty was treated as irrelevant. Grace failed when mercy was denied because it did not fit the machinery of closure.

Lynching and the Electric Chair

History itself bears witness to the repeated failure of grace. Grace failed in the long shadow of lynching, where Black bodies swung from trees and mobs cheered. Grace was silenced. Before lethal injection, Alabama used the electric chair, a contraption designed to kill and terrify. People were burned, convulsed, and shocked. Grace failed visibly then, in a blaze and a scream.

Universal Need for Mercy

All have sinned and stumbled in the dark. “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Every Alabamian, in quiet moments, knows the ache of imperfection, the tremor of guilt, the desperate need for grace. If we ourselves rely on God’s mercy, how can we demand that another be stripped of it? Boyd’s life and the state’s impending act are a mirror for the moral state of the entire community. Denying him mercy is to deny it to ourselves. “Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2). His chains are our chains, his suffering flows through the veins of the community.

The Execution of Grace : Boyd as a Testament to Redemption

Redemption Alive

Redemption is alive, and Boyd embodies it. “For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). Within prison walls, Boyd nurtured hope, teaching and guiding others as a testament to God’s power to redeem even the lost. To execute him is to rip a vibrant thread from the tapestry of divine grace, leaving a ragged hole in Alabama’s moral fabric. Each citizen is called to witness this redemption, to let it illuminate the darkness of our collective conscience. When grace dies in one heart, it casts long shadows over everyone.

The Communal Stain

Execution is a communal stain. “Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body” (Hebrews 13:3). Each Alabamian is spiritually tied to Boyd. To permit his death is to pour the ink of violence into the well of the community, clouding judgment, hardening hearts, and leaving moral corrosion in

classrooms, workplaces, and homes. Grace, once surrendered, does not easily return.

The Execution of Grace : Human Overreach

God alone holds perfect judgment. “Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord” (Romans 12:19). By executing Boyd, Alabama arrogates a power not given to men, turning human hands into instruments of judgment. “Behold, the Lord’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear” (Isaiah 59:1). Each citizen becomes a participant, morally and spiritually. Shall we obey God’s command to grace, or stand mute as it dies?

Forgiveness Suppressed

Forgiveness is at the heart of God’s call. “Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” (Ephesians 4:32). Denying Boyd grace rejects this calling, replacing forgiveness with vengeance, hardening hearts against God’s instruction.

The Execution of Grace : The Communal Cost

Mercy as Covenant

Mercy is a covenant, binding all creation. “Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy” (Matthew 5:7). Boyd’s execution tests Alabama’s collective soul. To deny him grace casts a shadow across every heart, dimming love, restoration, and reflection of God’s character. His death would not be isolated; it would be the death of grace itself.

Life Sacred

Life is sacred, and God alone is the giver and taker. “The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the

Lord" (Job 1:21). Every Alabamian is morally connected to this act. Execution marks the hearts of all citizens.

The Cost of Execution

If Anthony Boyd is executed, Alabama will lose more than a man. They will lose a mirror of conscience, a witness to grace, and a living reminder that repentance and change are possible. Every person loses the chance to see themselves in him. His transformation shows we are capable of change; his forgiveness reveals that chains of sin can be loosened by God's grace.

Moral Corrosion

Execution will corrode the community's moral fabric. Children will learn vengeance is more righteous than grace. Neighbors will harden. Boyd's life could have sparked good works, but execution snuffs that spark.

Another Path

Alabama can choose another way. The machinery of death can be silenced. Grace has been executed before, yet it lives. "Seek good, and not evil, that you may live" (Amos 5:14). To spare Boyd would allow grace to rise among the people, to breathe life into a weary land. Justice and mercy need not be enemies.

The Execution of Grace : A Call to Conscience

Grace Calls

Grace cries in the cells, streets, courts, and halls of power. Grace shudders in the shadow of the scaffold. If we listen and act, grace will answer. Grace will rise. Alabama may yet be made new.

Responding to Mercy

Witnessing is not enough. Each heartbeat, each choice matters. Boyd's life is a mirror for all. Will we harden our hearts, or choose grace? Will we participate in its death, or let it breathe through courage and conscience? The answer rests in the hearts of those who still believe grace is possible.

10.13.25

Samuel Lee Smithers: The Deacon of Death

The Deacon of Death

There are crimes so brutal and intimate in their cruelty, that to remember them is to feel the ache of the world itself.
The murders committed by Samuel Lee Smithers, once a church deacon and self-professed man of faith, belong in that category. They are not merely crimes…it is as if something demonic moved through him and left its stain upon the earth.

For nearly thirty years, the people of Florida have waited for justice. Now, as his execution approaches, the state prepares to close the book on one of its most haunting chapters. Many say it is time. And they are not wrong.

Samuel Lee Smithers: A Life Built on Lies

Smithers lived behind a mask of holiness. He was a church deacon…a man who led prayers, read scripture and helped mop the floors of his local Baptist church. His neighbors called him dependable. His friends enjoyed spending time with him. His wife thought she'd married a man of faith.

But that faith was a costume. Beneath the gentle voice and church clothes was a man consumed by lust, deceit and violence. The same hands that once folded in prayer would one day lift an ax.

When sheriff's deputies arrived at a quiet property in east Hillsborough County on May 28, 1996, they found what no one should ever have to see…two lifeless female bodies submerged in a pond…with skin bearing the testimony of great violence.

Smithers had been seen in the garage, hosing down a bloodied ax, his face calm, his story already rehearsed. When a neighbor noticed the puddle of blood on the concrete, he smiled and said a squirrel must have died.

It was a lie spoken with the composure of a man who had already decided that the truth no longer mattered.

The Women He Killed

The victims were women the world too easily forgets.

Christy Cowan, 31, was once an honor student who dreamed of becoming a nurse. She'd fallen into addiction and a dangerous cycle of prostitution in Tampa. She had two children who will never see her again.

Denise Roach, 24, was called "New York" on the streets. Born in Jamaica, she was fighting her own war against drugs and poverty. She, too, was a mother of two.

They were human beings…flawed, struggling and precious…not statistics, not shadows. Smithers saw them not as people but as prey. He knew their vulnerabilities. He used their need to survive as an invitation to kill.

Samuel Lee Smithers: The Horror of What He Did

When the truth came out, it was almost too much to absorb. Smithers admitted that he struck Christy in the head with an ax during an argument about money. She fell. She gasped. She begged.

He dragged her by the feet across the ground, her blood leaving a trail that led to the pond. She was still alive when he threw her in. She drowned beneath the surface, fighting for air while the

man who once called himself a servant of God washed his weapon and prepared his alibi.

Denise's death came in another moment of rage and cruelty. He shoved her against a wall…her head struck wood and concrete. Whether she died instantly or later, we cannot know. What we do know is that Smithers left her where she fell…and returned the next day to finish the cover-up.

Smithers changed his story over and over. It's possible that the details are even worse.

The bottom line is that his crimes were brutal beyond imagination. *This before you get to the arsons in Tennessee that he admitted to…and other murders he is suspected of.

This was not a crime of passion. It was the methodical, systematic destruction of life…deliberate, prolonged and godless.

Samuel Lee Smithers: Why the State Must Act

There are moments when words like "rehabilitation" and "mercy" feel obscene.

How do you speak of redemption in the face of such depravity?

How do you weigh an old man's fragile breath against the screams that filled that pond?

Some say, "He's old now. Let him die in prison." But he already lived decades beyond his victims. He ate, slept and aged… luxuries Christy and Denise never had.

Surely, there are crimes that forfeit the right to walk this earth?

Perversely, Smithers baptized his violence in the language of God.

Surely, the state must rid the earth of this man forever?

Samuel Lee Smithers: The Mirror

And yet…

The gurney will gleam under the fluorescent lights. The straps will be fastened with quiet precision. The IV will slide into a vein. The witnesses will watch. Somewhere behind glass, a clock will mark the hour. The men and women who carry it out will not rage or sneer. They will be calm, professional and certain. And in that very calmness lies an identical terror.

Because this is what Smithers looked like too…calm, composed and convinced that what he was doing made sense.

He killed with justification of his own making. We kill with justification written on state letterhead. The rituals are different only in setting. Both exist to make the act feel necessary…even holy.

But both are executions…deliberate, sterile and final.

The Cycle We Refuse to Break

When we kill Samuel Lee Smithers, we will not have undone the murders of Christy Cowan and Denise Roach. We will only have performed them again…slowly, bureaucratically, in the name of order instead of chaos.

We will tell ourselves it's different because it's legal, because it's clean, because it's deserved.

But the heart of the act is identical…one human deciding another's life is expendable.

That logic…that dark arithmetic…is the same that moved Smithers to raise his ax.

When the chemicals still his breath, the room will fall silent. Some will call it peace. But it will be the peace of a pond gone still after violence…the same false stillness that once covered the bodies of Christy and Denise. We will not have purified anything. We will have proven that killing still feels like control.

Only this time when we look into that quiet, polished glass of the death chamber, the reflection staring back will not be Samuel Lee Smithers.

It will be us.

10.13.25

Samuel Smithers: The Age of Mercy

The Age of Samuel Smithers

The Day Approaches

On October 14, 2025, Samuel Lee Smithers, 72, is scheduled to die by lethal injection at Florida State Prison. Convicted in 1999 for the murders of Christy Cowan and Denise Roach in Hillsborough County, he has spent more than 26 years on death row. The world outside has turned…seasons have passed…generations have changed…and yet the machinery of death remains ready, cold and unyielding. We are called to ponder what justice demands when decades have passed…when the offender has aged…and when the purpose of punishment has been diminished by time itself.

Remembering the Samuel Smithers' Victims

We must remember Christy Cowan and Denise Roach, whose lives were violently taken. Their families continue to live with grief that no sentence can erase. The wounds remain raw. The memories vivid. Justice must honor them. But even in honoring their lives, the state must discern whether executing a frail elderly man decades after the crimes fulfills the true purpose of justice…or simply enacts symbolic wrath. To execute an elderly man who has lived decades behind bars risks turning society's response into a spectacle rather than a righteous act.

The Weight of Time

When Smithers was sentenced, he was 45. Since then, he has grown older within the confines of stone walls and iron doors, trapped in endless repetition and deprivation. Time has bent his body and mind. At 72, he is frail, removed from the life he once

knew…and unlikely…even unable…to harm anyone again. Capital punishment is meant to serve deterrence and retribution. Yet decades later, deterrence falters…and retribution loses clarity. The years have made Smithers a shadow of the man who committed these crimes. His execution can no longer prevent harm, shape behavior or restore what was lost. Time itself has rendered the act morally and practically different from the punishment intended at sentencing.

Samuel Smithers: Life at 72 on Death Row

Envisioning life at 72 behind the walls of death row is to step into a hell most will never know. Every day stretches endlessly in silence, punctuated by the clanging of doors, the monotony of regimented routines and the extended absence of outside human interaction. The body that once moved with strength and purpose now aches with infirmity…muscles stiffen, joints protest and energy wanes. Memory and mind bear the wear of decades… cycling through old regrets, fleeting joys and the haunting awareness of one's own mortality.

Every day presses down with silent futility, where even the simplest choices…selecting a book, sharing a word or choosing a meal…are stripped away. The mind can spiral into reflection on what was lost, what might have been and the inevitability of further horrors. Each meal, each sound and each flicker of light is a reminder of the slow passage of time in a space where freedom is forever denied.

Samuel Smithers' Age and the Limits of Retribution

Retribution is intended to balance moral scales, yet advanced age transforms the measure. Smithers' life is already profoundly constrained by his confinement. Executing him now risks crossing the line from proportionate justice into ritualized cruelty. Even punishment for the gravest crimes…when decades have passed and the offender has aged into frailty…demand

reconsideration. When justice disregards the passage of time and the frailty of age, it quickly risks sliding into cruelty.

Society's Evolving Standards

Society recognizes vulnerability in the young, the disabled and the elderly. Across the country, it is almost unheard of for those over 70 to be executed…only a handful, fewer than two dozen, have faced the death penalty since 1976, representing a fraction of a percent of all cases (Death Penalty Information Center, 2025). This rarity is not incidental…it reflects an ethical intuition that some lives…by virtue of age, vulnerability and distance from their crimes…merit mercy and measured restraint. To execute Smithers is to flout the evolved conscience of society… and to ignore the principle that justice must be righteous and tempered with care.

Ethics, Mercy and Justice for Samuel Smithers

Smithers has lived much of his adult life behind bars. Each day has added layers of experience and reflection, humanizing him in ways the trial could never account for. At the same time, Cowan and Roach's families continue to carry grief and trauma that no sentence can erase. Their suffering is real. Their pain is visible. Yet ethical judgment demands that punishment retain purpose and proportion. To execute a frail elderly man for crimes committed decades earlier risks trampling on the principle that justice should be measured, meaningful and humane. Accountability and mercy are not opposites…they are complementary. Justice that ignores time and age ignores both accountability and mercy.

Closing Reflection

In the quiet weighing of justice, we must hold both grief and humanity in balance. Christy Cowan and Denise Roach's lives were stolen…their absence leaves wounds no passage of time

can heal. Yet to execute a man who has spent decades confined, whose body and mind have been worn down by years of isolation, is not only to punish…it is to risk transforming justice into spectacle, retribution into ritual. True justice honors the victims without compounding suffering. It recognizes that accountability does not require cruelty, and that time itself alters the meaning of punishment. In Smithers' final hours, society faces a test…to act out of symbolic vengeance or to exercise measured humane judgment that preserves both conscience and compassion. The choices we make in such moments reveal not only our sense of justice but our humanity itself.

10.13.25

Justice Beyond Killing: Mr. Crawford & Moral Responsibility

Confession of Honest Rage

"If my daughter had been abducted, tortured, abused, killed, I'd want to kill Mr. Chuck Crawford with my own hands."

I took some heat from the anti-death penalty crowd for saying those words at a press conference in Mississippi last week. Mr. Crawford is scheduled to be executed this Wednesday, October 15 for the 1993 rape and murder of Kristy Ray. But the truth of what I said stands. I'd say it again without apology.
The rage that rises in a parent at the sight of monstrous harm to their child is real. It's raw. It's human. I know that impulse. I won't hide it behind pious language or false purity.

Grief and the Refusal of Retaliation

Yet, I refuse to let grief harden into a doctrine of sanctioned reprisal. I've knelt across from those condemned. I've held hands with families consumed by sorrow. I've seen the faces of those who were taught cruelty and the faces of those who were taught mercy. From that place I declare this truth…the executioner's actions cannot reclaim what was lost, cannot heal the terror of a violated life and cannot restore the dignity of a stolen childhood. It can only add another grave to the ledger of human harm. Our calling is justice beyond killing.

The Crossroads of Law and Ethos

We stand at a crossroads where law and ethos meet. When the state chooses to execute it teaches with unmistakable clarity that violence is an acceptable means to end violence. What are we teaching our children, our neighbors, our neighbors' children

when we make killing a civic ritual? We're spelling out an ethic that answers harm with annihilation. And that ethic doesn't stop at the prison gates…it seeps into homes, schools and streets. I oppose executions not out of naïveté but out of moral urgency. I oppose them because they replicate the very evil we claim to abhor. The way forward must be justice beyond killing.

The Hard Work of Mercy – Justice Beyond Killing

The prophetic tradition calls us to higher things…to mercy, to grace, to compassion…not as sentimentality but as the hard work of forming a people. These aren't soft virtues. They're disciplines of the soul. Mercy requires courage…the courage to resist the easy headline, the instant retribution, the loud demand for spectacle. Mercy requires institutions that can hold pain without answering it with death. Compassion demands a public structure that invests in survivors, funds truth and stages accountability in ways that don't end in irreversible erasure. This is what it means to build justice beyond killing.

Justice Beyond Killing

Make no mistake…acknowledging the call to mercy doesn't diminish the reality of monstrous crimes. It doesn't turn away from justice. Justice is demanded…by victims, by communities and by our own moral consciences. But justice isn't identical to killing. Retribution might satisfy a hunger for payback but it doesn't teach repentance. It doesn't create repair. It doesn't offer moral education. A society that answers murder with more killing flattens the moral imagination until only one recourse is visible…the termination of persons rather than the transformation of lives. We must restore our moral vision around justice beyond killing.

A Call to Moral Leadership

I call on anyone who still has a conscience to recognize the spiritual violence inherent in state executions. I call on religious leaders to join me and preach a counter-narrative…one that refuses to sacralize vengeance. I call on parents to ask themselves what kind of moral legacy they want to leave. Do we want to hand our children a creed that tells them some lives may be ended as an antidote to harm? Or will we teach them that human worth is guarded even when human failure is punished? Our civic choices are also moral lessons. Those choices must lead us toward justice beyond killing.

Alternatives that Honor Life – Justice Beyond Killing

There are concrete alternatives that honor both the pain of victims and the sanctity of life. Life without parole prevents further violence while preserving the chance for truth to be told, for remorse to be voiced, for restitution to be made in humanly meaningful ways. Restorative pathways place victims and communities at the center demanding that offenders face the consequences of their actions…not as spectacle but as encounter, naming harm and seeking reparation. These aren't platitudes. They're real designs meant to break cycles of pain instead of widening them. They're the groundwork for justice beyond killing.

Breaking the Habits that Destroy Us

If you tell me that some crimes are so horrific that the desire for death is inevitable I won't deny the feeling. But we have to decide whether inevitability is a law of nature or a habit of the heart. The prophetic task is to break the habits that destroy us… to call forth a people who live by principles stronger than expedience and louder than the drumbeat of vengeance. That's the prophetic demand—to become a people of justice beyond killing.

Stop Killing People

So I declare plainly and urgently…stop killing people. Not because I'm ignorant of pain but because I've seen what killing does to the souls of the living. Not because I long for impunity but because I long for justice that doesn't betray the very humanity it claims to defend. Don't mistake this for indifference. I grieve with families whose lives have been torn apart. I join their demand for truth, accountability and protection. But I won't join in perpetuating the same violence that birthed their grief. If we're to be a people who rise above the logic of retaliation then we must refuse to make killing the currency of justice. This is my prophetic plea…let us choose another way…one that honors victims, restrains offenders and builds a future where mercy isn't an afterthought but the law of our common life.

10.14.25

Exorcism in a Universalist Theology or Universalist Exorcism

Universalist Exorcism

Exorcisms have often been portrayed as a desperate struggle between God and the devil, a battle where the stakes are eternal. In many Christian traditions, it carries the weight of ultimate fear…the idea that if demons are not cast out, souls may be lost forever in the fires of hell. In a universalistic mindset, the meaning of exorcism shifts dramatically. Hell and the devil are real, but they are not eternal. Evil exists and it is fierce, but it is temporary. Thus, universalist exorcism is not about rescuing someone from endless damnation but about confronting the diabolical present forces of darkness, challenging their grip and pointing toward the eternal hope of ultimate restoration…that Jesus will leave no one and nothing behind.

The Temporary Nature of Hell

In this view, hell is not an imaginary construct or a scare tactic. It is a real experience of torment and separation from God. People taste it in addiction, despair, hatred, violence and spiritual oppression. But hell is not the final destiny of the soul. It is temporary, a painful but passing reality. Exorcism can be understood as a direct confrontation with these forces…a battle in which divine love opens a window into the darkness. It is a proclamation that the torment which overwhelms a person does not have to define them and does not get the last word.

The ritual does not erase suffering, but it declares that suffering is not forever. Hell is not eternal fire…it is a passing tempest, met head-on by the unwavering light of God's love.

The Devil's Power Is Finite

The devil is real but not eternal. His work is visible in destruction, cruelty and oppression…seeking to convince creation that it is separated from God beyond repair. Yet his power has limits. He may rage…but he cannot reign forever.

Exorcism embodies this truth as a spiritual clash. To cast out demons is to confront the deceiver directly. Each invocation of divine authority strikes at the lies and deception, each chant and scripture reading pushes back the shadows. The ritual becomes a dramatic battle scene…the devil may roar…but he is surrounded by love and ultimately overwhelmed by the force of mercy and love. Exorcism demonstrates that even when the enemy appears powerful…his time is short, his reign is temporary and his final end is certain…a collapse into love.

Universalist Exorcism as Liberation

Exorcism is about liberation…healing for those crushed by forces of darkness in the here and now. It is a work of mercy… yet exists in terror. Each ritual is a battlefield where the afflicted is not abandoned but encircled by the divine.

This liberation extends beyond the individual. Exorcism speaks to communities weighed down by collective demons…hatred, violence, racism and greed. The same God who frees individuals from torment also frees societies from destructive spirits. Exorcisms are a battlefield where love and hope prove victorious over oppression and despair.

A Foretaste of Restoration

Every act of deliverance points forward. If hell and the devil are real but not eternal, then exorcism foreshadows the ultimate reconciliation of all things. It is not the annihilation of an enemy but the unveiling of the truth that no enemy can last forever. Exorcism whispers of the day when no demon will remain…

when no hell will torment…when God's light will saturate everything.

The battle imagery emphasizes this prophetic dimension…each exorcism is a microcosm of the universal struggle, a tangible preview of the triumph to come. It is a ritual not simply for survival but for the revelation of the ultimate victory of mercy and restoration.

A Ministry of Hope, Not Fear

At its heart, exorcism is not about terror. It does not begin with the threat of eternal damnation but with the assurance of eternal love. The ritual confronts real forces of evil, but it does so in confidence rather than panic. It declares that hell is temporary, the devil is defeated and liberation is possible both now and in the future.

This does not trivialize suffering or minimize the reality of torment. It takes suffering seriously…so seriously that it insists it must end. Exorcism dramatizes this truth. It is God's "no" to hell and the devil and God's "yes" to freedom and reconciliation.

The Logical Outcome of Universalist Exorcism

Exorcism acknowledges the reality of hell and the devil but denies their permanence. It is an act of liberation for those tormented, a proclamation that evil cannot last and a foretaste of the day when God's love will restore all things. Exorcism is not about fear of eternal damnation but about hope for ultimate freedom. Each act of casting out becomes a living prophecy… that no darkness is forever, no demon is eternal, even the devil will one day submit to love and nothing can separate all creation from the God who is love.

10.16.25

Judicial Hide and Seek: The Legal Odyssey of Anthony Boyd

Judicial Hide and Seek: When the Courts Stay Silent

Anthony Boyd's case before the Eleventh Circuit is not about the method of execution or the timing of appeals…it is about the collapse of law itself in Alabama's capital system. Under Alabama law (§15-18-82(a)), only the judiciary may set an execution date. Yet in 2023, at the request of the Attorney General, the Alabama Supreme Court rewrote the rule and handed that sacred judicial function to the Governor.

The Vanishing Act of Justice in Alabama

In Boyd's case, the Governor…not the courts…set his execution date. The same officials who prosecute and defend death sentences now decide when to carry them out. The same branch that seeks death now controls the timing of mercy. This is a violation of both the state and federal Constitutions, a fusion of powers that offends the Fourteenth Amendment's guarantee of due process and the very notion of separated powers.

Silence Becomes Judicial Hide and Seek

Boyd, representing himself pro se from a death row cell, has argued that this unconstitutional procedure invalidates the State's ability to execute anyone under it. His case is built on Ex parte Young (1908), which holds that federal courts can intervene when state officials act unlawfully under color of law. Yet the district court dismissed his case, calling it "last-minute litigation." Boyd appealed. Now, even as his execution date looms, the Eleventh Circuit has not given him a briefing schedule…the basic instruction that tells him when and how to file the papers that could save his life.

Without it, he cannot submit his arguments. He cannot defend his own existence. The machinery of death hums on while the machinery of justice stalls.

This is more than a procedural error. It is the quiet violence of institutional indifference. Courts do not need to deny justice outright; they can simply starve it by neglect. They can withhold the schedule, the response, the acknowledgment…and by the time they stir, the condemned is gone. The law becomes not a shield but a mask for power.

Anthony Boyd's Legal Filings

Anthony Boyd is not a lawyer. He does the absolute best he can and sends his pleadings through a system that treats his life as an inconvenience. The Eleventh Circuit's silence is not neutral…it is a decision to prioritize convenience over conscience, bureaucracy over breath.

What does it say about a nation when a man must beg for the right to know his own deadlines while the State has already marked his date of death?

Separation of Powers?

The Constitution demands more. The Fourteenth Amendment protects not just procedures but the structure that gives them meaning. When Alabama let the executive usurp a judicial act, it destroyed that structure. The same Governor who can grant clemency now sets the execution date; the same Attorney General who demands death petitions the Governor to impose it. The fox writes the rules for the henhouse. The separation of powers…the cornerstone of every safeguard we claim to honor… has been sacrificed on the altar of expediency.

And still the court will not even send a schedule.

Federal Courts and the Endless Judicial Hide and Seek

This is not mere oversight. It is the arrogance of a system so insulated from suffering that it no longer recognizes the humanity of those before it. It is a spiritual problem disguised as a procedural one. The courts are comfortable speaking to lawyers in suits, not to men in chains. They are used to nice shiny PDFs, not motions mailed from death row. They are not used to hearing the Gospel of Justice preached from a cell.

But that is exactly what Anthony Boyd's filings are…a prophetic cry. Beneath the citations and case law lies a theological truth… that when a government assumes the power to kill through a process that violates its own laws, it forfeits its moral legitimacy. When courts ignore the cries of the condemned, they deny the image of God in the one who cries.

Witnessing the Consequences

This is not just about one man's fate. It is about the spiritual death of a legal system that has forgotten mercy. It is about a court so obsessed with efficiency that it forgets the human being waiting for a piece of paper that never comes.

The Eleventh Circuit's silence is not administrative…it is moral. It speaks the same language as the execution chamber…control without compassion, order without justice. It is how democracies drift toward cruelty…not through fire and fury, but through indifference and delay.

When the law refuses to hear the condemned, the law itself becomes condemned. When the machinery of death moves faster than the machinery of due process, the Constitution is not simply violated…it is crucified.

And yet, in that crucifixion, there remains a witness. Boyd's filings…constructed in a cell of concrete and steel…testify that

truth still matters, even in the shadow of the gurney. They remind us that structure is substance, that the separation of powers is not an abstract doctrine but a living safeguard for human dignity.

Every time the Governor sets an execution date, every time the Attorney General requests one, every day the court remains silent, a new violation occurs. It is not past…it is present, ongoing and alive in its injustice.

Federal judges have the authority and the duty to stop it. But if they choose silence, they too become part of the ritual of killing…a clerical step in the long, slow crucifixion of justice itself.

So long as Anthony Boyd waits in his cell for a briefing schedule that never comes, justice waits with him…in that thin space between law and mercy, between life and death. And from that silence rises a single, haunting question…

If the court will not speak, who will?

10.18.25

Gov. Ivey, Meet with Anthony Boyd.

October 18, 2025

Dear Governor Ivey.

You have a big decision coming up. Life or death. I have a simple request…come sit for a second with Anthony Boyd before you allow his execution to proceed. Meet with Anthony Boyd. Look into his eyes. Hear his breath. Feel the weight of a life poised on the edge of execution. Just take a second to see his humanity. No paperwork, no press releases, no legal arguments can convey the human reality of standing before death. If you cannot meet him, if you cannot witness him, how can you claim to act with requisite knowledge of the situation? How can you claim to act justly when you don't even have all the information?

Meet with Anthony Boyd: A Call to Witness Before Judgment

Anthony Boyd is not a file…he is not a statistic…he is a human being made in the image of God, standing before the machinery of death. I have walked with him through silence and fear, through prayer and despair. I have heard him say with unwavering truth, "I am innocent." I have seen the quiet dignity in his eyes, the courage of a man whose life is on the line for a crime he did not commit. I bear witness to him now, and I ask you to bear witness as well. I ask you again to meet with Anthony Boyd, to see the truth not as it appears on paper, but as it lives and breathes before you.

The Fragile Case Against Anthony Boyd

The case against him is full of uncertainty and gaps. There is no DNA evidence linking him to the crime. There are no fingerprints, no forensic traces and no physical proof that he was

present at the scene. The prosecution's case rests largely on statements from co-defendants whose own freedom depended on implicating him. Critical witnesses who could have verified his alibi were never called. Even those who testified admit his involvement were peripheral actors. The timeline of events remains unclear, and key questions about who committed specific acts were never answered. When innocence is supported by alibi evidence, the absence of forensic proof and witness contradictions…condemning anyone would be a grave miscarriage of justice…but Anthony Boyd is the one waiting on your decision.

Where Doubt Persists, Mercy Must Lead

Mercy must guide us where doubt persists. Jesus said, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy" (Matthew 5:7). Justice demands investigation. Justice demands mercy before the state takes a life. To ignore it is to turn away from God's command to love the neighbor, to protect the innocent, to act in righteousness. I have stood inside execution chambers. I have felt the oppressive silence. I have watched life extinguished. I have seen what is sacred…the image of God…destroyed. Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me" (Matthew 25:40). To take Anthony Boyd's life is to act against Christ Himself…to trample mercy, justice and conscience.

An Invitation to Conscience

Sitting with Anthony Boyd is not an act of advocacy or politics…it is an act of humanity. To meet someone facing death is to see beyond the charges, beyond the headlines, beyond the legal briefs is to recognize the life they have lived, the fears they hold and the dignity they still possess. Even if you ultimately carry out the law, you would at least do so with the full knowledge that your decision was informed not just by procedure…but by presence, by witness and by conscience. That

is why I again plead with you to meet with Anthony Boyd—to step beyond the distance of office and law and look directly into the eyes of the man whose life you hold in your hands.

Alabama's death penalty system is not merely flawed…it is fraught with the danger of irreversible error. Legal appeals stretch for decades, procedural adjustments are made midstream and lives hang in the balance while human beings become pieces of paper in an endless stream of motions and appeals. Anthony Boyd's case exemplifies this peril. His innocence shines like a lamp in darkness, demanding acknowledgment before the machinery of death moves forward. Clemency here is not leniency…it is the affirmation that you…on behalf of the State of Alabama…value life, fairness and conscience over expedience and fear.

I want to invite you again. Come to Atmore. Sit with him. Meet him. Look into his eyes. Let the humanity of Anthony Boyd pierce your heart. Let the reality of his life confront the machinery of death. Let your conscience carry the weight. Let history remember who chose to act in the light of God's mercy… and those who chose to look away.

Anthony Boyd's life calls for your action. His innocence calls for your courage. His humanity calls for your conscience. But this is not only about Anthony Boyd. It is about every human being who comes to the state's chamber facing death. Let your office establish a standard…meet every individual before execution. That seems only fair if you are the one who decides whether they live or die.

The Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood
Spiritual Advisor to Anthony Boyd

10.19.25

The Collective Evil of the State and Anthony Boyd

The Collective Evil of the State and Alabama's Execution System

Alabama's adoption of nitrogen hypoxia as a method of execution marks a disturbing evolution in the machinery of state killing. First used in January 2024, this method has been presented as "efficient" and "humane," yet beneath the technical veneer lies a profoundly intimate cruelty. The execution chamber is not a neutral space. It is a crucible of violence where life is extinguished through deliberate human intervention, and moral responsibility is distributed across a vast network…from the Governor who authorizes the act to the officers, clerks and medical personnel who sustain it.

Keep Watching

5

Nitrogen Hypoxia: A "Humane" Yet Intimate Cruelty

The procedure itself is harrowing and intimate. The condemned is guided onto a gurney and strapped down…wrists, ankles and chest secured to hold the body still. A clear mask is pressed over the face and connected to nitrogen lines. As the gas flows, panic sets in, muscles convulse, the chest heaves and eventually life departs. Machines facilitate the process, but human hands restrain, human eyes witness and human voices pronounce the ritual. The horror is not abstract…it is tangible, immediate and morally unavoidable.

Shared Responsibility: From Governor to Gate Guards

No single person completes every step. One officer secures the straps, another fastens the ankles, a third presses the mask, while someone else opens the valve. Beyond the gurney, a wider network participates…gate guards monitor transport, clerks process orders, control-room staff track the procedure, medical personnel verify identity, the warden oversees and the Governor authorizes. Each task, no matter how minor, is necessary for the act to succeed. Evil does not hide in a single gesture…it spreads, like a stain, through every hand and every signature. The moral weight is shared, yet fully present in all.

Understanding the Collective Evil of the State

Hannah Arendt's notion of the "banality of evil" illuminates how ordinary bureaucratic acts produce extraordinary harm. A buckle fastened, a strap tightened, a signature placed…all appear routine, yet each is a thread in a fabric of violence. Compartmentalization may dull awareness, but it does not dilute responsibility. Every participant, from the highest office to the most junior role, contributes to an evil that is both systemic and intimate.

Hannah Arendt and the Banality of Bureaucratic Violence

Theological reflection deepens this understanding. Human life is sacred, yet nitrogen execution deliberately extinguishes it. Every act…the restraint, the mask, the flow of gas…is a moral trespass. Those who sustain the system, knowingly or unwittingly, enter into communion with evil. The state does not commit this alone…it acts through human hands and choices. Moral and spiritual harm is inseparable from the act of killing.

Anthony Boyd: The Human Face of the Consequences of the Collective Evil of the State

Anthony Boyd is not an abstraction. He is a human being whose life is imperiled by a system that prioritizes procedure over

conscience. His case illuminates the architecture of evil in Alabama's death machinery. It is not the action of one officer or one official…it is the collective act of a state choosing to extinguish life. Each role, however seemingly minor, contributes to the same moral apocalypse.

Individual and Collective Repentance

Repentance must be both individual and collective. Individuals must acknowledge their participation in, or tacit support of, the machinery of death. Institutions and society must confront structures that normalize killing and distribute responsibility. Ethical integrity requires recognition of the evil, acknowledgment of harm and deliberate turning away from complicity. Justice cannot coexist with unquestioned obedience to a system that extinguishes life.

Awakening Conscience and Restoring Justice

Alabama's nitrogen execution chamber stands as a mirror of the state itself. It reflects the cost of obedience without conscience, the consequences of bureaucracy divorced from moral judgment and the danger of law exercised without mercy. Evil may appear orderly, procedural and polite…but it is no less destructive. Every hand, every signature and every eye that sustains the system is implicated. To witness this truth is to confront the unconscionable, to name it and to demand repentance.

The prophetic call is clear…society must see the machinery of death in its entirety and recognize the collective moral failure it embodies. The chains of responsibility cannot be erased by bureaucratic distance. From the Governor to the gate guard, from the secretary's desk to the officer's hand, all are implicated in the moral injury of the act. Conscience must awaken, mercy must reclaim its place and life must be restored as the measure of justice. Only then can Alabama begin to reckon with the evil it has wrought.

10.21.25

If You Condemn Him…You Should Kill Him: On Anthony Boyd

Every execution begins long before the gas flows. It begins the moment someone decides they will not have to see it.

If You Condemn Him…You Should Kill Him

The only reason the death penalty survives is because the people who impose it never have to carry it out. The system depends on distance. The violence of killing is separated from the moral weight of deciding who dies. In a courtroom death is abstract. The words are careful. The gavel falls. The jury votes. The judge announces. Papers are signed. Decisions are filed. And then everyone goes home. No one has to see the life they chose to end. No one has to hear the last breath. No one has to feel the final silence.

The Distance Between Sentence and Execution

Anthony Boyd's jury voted ten to two for death. The judge overrode their non-unanimous verdict and handed down a death sentence. They decided that this man should die. But none of them will be in the room when it happens. None of them will see him strapped to a gurney, gas flowing into a mask…the thrashing struggle for breath…the struggle that ends too soon. None will feel the suffocating weight of a life leaving the world because of their decision. That is the point. The death penalty is designed to protect the conscience of those who impose it. Distance is the machinery that makes killing possible…the buffer that allows ordinary people to perform extraordinary violence without facing the truth of what they have done.

If You Condemn Him…You Should Kill Him: Fragmented Responsibility Hides the Act

The modern death penalty divides responsibility into small seemingly harmless tasks. The judge sentences. The governor signs. The warden issues orders. The technicians carry out procedures. Witnesses observe behind glass. Each participant can truthfully say, “I did not kill him. I just did my job.” By breaking the act of killing into fragments the system hides the human cost of its decisions. It creates moral insulation. Without this buffer, without the separation between sentence and punishment, executions would be impossible. If the people who condemned Anthony Boyd had to carry out the act themselves the killing would stop.

Nowhere to Hide

Imagine the judge walking into the chamber and seeing the man he sentenced. Imagine the jurors fastening the straps, placing the mask over his face, hearing the rise and fall of his chest until it stops. Imagine the governor turning the valve and watching the final moments of a human life. Could they still claim justice? Could they still convince themselves that their actions were humane? I do not believe they could. Once you confront death in the act of causing it the illusion of procedure falls away. You cannot hide behind robes or rules. You cannot say it is just. You cannot pretend it is not violence.

The Banality of Evil

Hannah Arendt described this as the banality of evil…ordinary people committing extraordinary harm because the system made it ordinary. Albert Camus called the death penalty a public murder carried out under the pretense of morality. Both recognized that evil often hides in plain sight wrapped in procedure and authority. The death penalty, like all bureaucracies of death, depends on distance. It thrives because those who sentence others do not have to touch the life they decide to end. It survives because we have insulated ourselves from the consequences of our own laws.

If You Condemn Him…You Should Kill Him: The Consequence

Alabama's use of nitrogen hypoxia makes this point painfully clear. Officials describe it as clean, efficient, humane. The language of science and technology is meant to hide the truth. The mask, the valve, the medicalized words make the killing seem less like killing. But there is no clean way to suffocate a human being. There is only the reality of a life ending by human choice. If the people who judged Anthony Boyd had to witness that reality themselves the death penalty would end. The moral distance that protects their conscience would be gone…and with it the ability to carry out this violence without facing its truth.

If You Condemn Him…You Should Kill Him: Where Are the Judge and Jury Now?

So… Where are the judge and jury now? Do they remember the man they condemned? Do they think of him when they pass the courthouse, when they sit down for dinner, when they pray before sleep? Or have they buried it with the rest of life's paperwork, another case closed, another day's work done? The system depends on that forgetting. The distance is not just physical. It is moral. It allows those who once held a man's life in their hands to move on as if they never touched death at all.

The Unbearable Truth of the Death Penalty

But the truth remains. The sentence they spoke is still alive. It waits in the cell where Anthony Boyd breathes borrowed air. When the gas begins to flow their decision will come to life again. Whether they are watching or not they will be there. Their voices will echo in the hiss of nitrogen. Their verdict will tighten the straps. Their signatures will close his eyes. The law can divide the labor of killing but it cannot divide the guilt.

That is the unbearable truth of the death penalty. No one escapes it. Every act of execution is a mirror held to the face of a society

that kills in its own name. We look away so we do not see ourselves. But the blood does not fade with distance. It only hides beneath the surface of our laws, our institutions, our comfort. If the judge and jury who condemned Anthony Boyd had to kill him themselves they would see what we all refuse to see. They would know what we all need to know. There is no justice in killing. There is only the slow corrosion of the soul.

10.21.25

A Prayer for Anthony Boyd

A Prayer for Anthony Boyd

Gracious and Eternal God,

We come before You today, hearts open and minds attentive, to lift up Anthony Boyd into Your care. You know the truth of his life, every joy and sorrow, every hope and fear…you see what is hidden from our eyes…and you know the innocence that dwells within him. Surround him with Your mercy, Your love and Your peace. Let him feel Your presence now, steady and unwavering, a light that cannot be dimmed, a shield that cannot be broken.

Lord, be with Anthony in every hour. Hold him when fear presses in, calm the shadows of doubt and despair and let him feel the warmth of Your Spirit as a companion and friend… Let him know that he is seen, that he is valued, that he is innocent before You and that he is loved beyond measure. Let him find strength in knowing that You do not forget and that no human action can remove the dignity You have given him.

We pray for those who have suffered and for those who have judged wrongly. Grant them clarity, Lord, grant hearts that can recognize truth even when it is hard to see…transform confusion, anger and grief not by ignoring them but by opening minds and softening hearts. Teach us that justice is not found in fear or in swift judgment but in truth, in compassion and in the courage to stand for what is right.

O God of Justice and Mercy, we pray for those who hold authority over life and death. Give them wisdom and humility… remind them that every human being is more than a case, more than a number, and that their decisions carry eternal weight. May their hearts not harden in procedure. May their hands not act

without conscience. May their choices reflect the sanctity of life, the importance of mercy and the responsibility of justice. Let Anthony Boyd's innocence be seen, respected and protected. Let those who decide his fate act with the clarity and courage that truth demands.

Lord Jesus, You who forgave and defended the vulnerable, teach us to embody the same mercy. Help us to see Anthony not as a headline, not as a file but as a human being, innocent and deserving of life, dignity and hope. Remind us that true justice does not punish the innocent and that mercy is the work of the courageous…teach us that defending the innocent is one of the highest acts of love and devotion.

You said, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." We pray that Anthony Boyd may feel that abundance even now. Let him know that life is more than the hours that pass, more than the days that weigh upon him, more than the uncertainty that surrounds him. Life is hope, feeling, connection and love. Let this truth be his anchor when fear rises, his shield against despair and his comfort amid the weight of injustice. Let him feel the care and prayers of countless hearts who stand with him, who see him and who affirm his life.

We pray for ourselves, Lord. Teach us to see the human face in every story. Help us to confront our own anger and grief and to act with conscience and compassion. Open our eyes to the dignity of every life and let our hearts guide our actions. Let our words, presence and prayers be living testimony to the value of life and the necessity of standing for those who are wrongly accused. Let us never grow indifferent, never accept injustice in silence and never forget the moral weight of our actions.

Holy Spirit, breathe peace into our hearts and minds. Calm the rising fear and sorrow that surround Anthony and all who care for him. Strengthen our resolve to speak for truth, to act with justice and to advocate for mercy. Let our prayers rise as

testimony that Anthony Boyd's life matters. Let them remind the world that innocence must be defended, that justice without mercy is no justice at all and that every human life carries sacred worth.

We pray for Anthony's spirit. Keep him strong and unbroken. Surround him with Your protection. Uphold him in Your care. Let him feel the love from all those who cannot be with him physically but who carry him in their hearts. May he experience the dignity that no law, no sentence and no human action can take away. Let him know he is not alone, that countless voices call for his protection and that countless hearts affirm his innocence and humanity.

We pray for society, Lord, that we may awaken to the moral and spiritual weight of taking life when innocence is at stake. Teach us that the machinery of the state cannot replace conscience. Show us that legal sanction does not erase ethical responsibility. Let us remember that the loss of one innocent life leaves a wound in every heart, in every community and in the conscience of the world. Teach us that mercy and justice must coexist and that defending the innocent is a sacred responsibility entrusted to every one of us.

As we pray, we remember Your words in Matthew: "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these, you did for me." May our presence, our words and our actions serve as living witness to that truth. May our consciences be sharpened, our courage strengthened and our commitment to mercy renewed. Let us hold vigil wherever we are, witnessing to the dignity of life, defending the innocent and affirming that truth and compassion must prevail.

Gracious God, we commit Anthony Boyd into Your care. We commit ourselves to Your teaching, Your mercy and Your light. May this prayer remind us that life is sacred, that conscience is necessary and that love, compassion and justice endure even in

the face of false accusation and the threat of death. May all who hear these words feel the weight of responsibility to defend the innocent, to stand for truth and to uphold the value of every human life.

We ask all of this in the holy name of Jesus Christ, the source of life, the bringer of peace and the embodiment of mercy.

Amen.

10.22.25

Prayer for Anthony Boyd in the Shadow of the Killing Machine

Prayer for Anthony Boyd in the Shadow of the Killing Machine

Gracious and Merciful God,

Tonight, we come before You trembling but unbroken. The air is heavy, the hours are few and the machinery of death hums in the distance. Yet even now, in this midnight of human cruelty, we know that You are not absent. You have not turned Your face away. You are here…closer than breath, nearer than fear, burning like fire in the darkness.

You are the God who saves. Always. You are the God whose will is mercy, whose nature is compassion, whose power is love. You have never desired the death of any of Your children. You have never rejoiced in the spilling of blood. From the cross to the tomb to the empty morning, You have declared once and for all…Life, not death, is Your final word.

And so tonight, in the shadow of the killing machine, we cry out to You for Your son…Anthony Boyd. You know his name, O Lord. You have written it on the palms of Your hands. You have counted his tears, You have kept his prayers. You have walked with him through the corridors of this injustice. You have sat beside him in the loneliness of his cell. You know his heart. You know his innocence. You know he belongs to You.

God of Abraham, God of Moses, God of the Crucified and Risen Christ…come down tonight. Come like thunder. Come like a whirlwind. Come like freedom breaking chains. For this world has mistaken cruelty for justice, vengeance for order and death for peace. But You, O God, will not be mocked. You are not the author of execution. You are the God who breaks every

instrument of death. You are the God who turns gallows into altars and graveyards into gardens.

We refuse to whisper when the hour demands a shout. We proclaim what is true…Anthony Boyd shall never die. For You have willed that none shall perish. You have willed mercy, not murder. You have willed redemption, not revenge. And we believe, Oh God, that Your will shall overcome the will of the state.

Move now, O Spirit of the Living God. Enter the heart of the governor. Enter the minds of the courts. Let their rest be troubled, their pens grow heavy, their hands tremble at the thought of blood. Let mercy rise in them like an unexpected dawn. Let conscience burn hotter than ambition. Let them see, for one sacred moment, the face of Christ in Anthony Boyd…and recoil from the horror of what they plan to do.

And if they refuse, O Lord…if they harden their hearts and blind their eyes…then shake this nation. Let the ground beneath the death house quake with Your indignation. Let the heavens thunder with Your "No." Let every witness feel the fire of divine disapproval. Let the very air declare the blasphemy of this act.

You are the God who once said, "Let my people go." Say it again tonight, Lord. Let this man go. Let him live. Let him bear witness to Your mercy. Let him breathe the air of morning once more and tell the world that You are still a God of miracles.

We do not beg You, God, because we already know Your heart. We do not bargain. We proclaim. Your will is salvation. Your will is life. Your will is that death be undone. So we call forth that will tonight with every fiber of our being. Let the killing stop. Let this machine of death rust into silence.

But if this world will not listen…if they insist on crucifixion once more…then let Your Son stand beside Anthony Boyd as He

once stood beside the condemned thief. Let Christ whisper in his ear, “This night you are with Me in Paradise.” Let that promise break the bars, unbind the fear, and flood that cell with holy fire.

God, give Anthony peace that no executioner can touch. Let Your Spirit fill him like breath. Let him feel the prayers surrounding him…the countless hearts breaking and believing, the multitude crying out his name. Let him know he is not forgotten, not abandoned, not alone. Let him rest in the truth that no one dies in vain who dies wrapped in Your mercy.

But still, O Lord, we dare to ask for the greater miracle…Stop this death. Intervene. Interrupt. Confound the plans of the powerful. Let the phone ring at the last hour. Let the signature be withheld. Let the door of death remain closed. Let this nation wake up to what it is doing before it is too late.

For we know, God, that the death penalty is not law…it is idolatry. It is the worship of power disguised as justice. It is the empire pretending to be righteous while crucifying the innocent once again. It is the state trying to play You, and it must be stopped.

So tonight, we speak directly to that empire… You cannot kill what God has claimed. You cannot silence the voice of mercy. You cannot end what Christ has already redeemed. The blood you seek to spill will cry out from the ground, and God Himself will answer.

O God of justice and fire, do not let us turn away. Do not let this execution pass quietly. Burn within us the courage to resist, to cry out, to act. If Anthony’s body is taken, let his spirit rise in thousands more who will not bow to the machine. Let his life ignite a movement that exposes the lie of redemptive violence once and for all.

For we remember, Lord, that You too were condemned. You too were strapped to the instruments of state violence. You too were executed as a criminal. And You rose…not in vengeance, but in victory. You rose to prove forever that love is stronger than death.

So we pray tonight with resurrection faith… Let that same power move now. Let it surge through the darkness of Alabama, through the hearts of the faithful, through every locked door and barred window. Let it unmake this killing hour. Let it turn despair into defiance, fear into fire, death into life.

Anthony Boyd is Your son. His breath is sacred. His story is holy. His life is not the property of the state…it belongs to You alone. Guard him. Hold him. Deliver him.

And let the world see in this moment that mercy is mightier than the sword, that love will outlast the grave, and that no government can cancel the grace of God.

Tonight, we come before You trembling but unbroken. The machine hums, the night deepens, and yet…we believe. We believe in the God who saves. We believe in the Christ who refuses to stay dead. We believe in the Spirit who will not let this world go untransformed.

Save Anthony Boyd, O Lord. Save him now. Save him utterly. Save us all from the sin of killing in Your name.

In the name of Jesus…the executed, the risen, the merciful, the fire that cannot be extinguished…we pray, we believe, we will not stop believing.

10.23.25

Horror: Thoughts on Another Nitrogen Execution

After witnessing the horror of the first nitrogen execution, I'm terrified to witness another. But it's looking increasingly likely that I will.

It was horror. Pure, unrelenting horror. I can still hear Kenny Smith's choking in my dreams. The sound burrows into my skull and won't let go.

Serving as Smith's spiritual advisor during the first nitrogen execution, I stood just feet away. They said the new method would be "humane," that it would be quick, that it would be clean. They lied. What I saw was a nightmare. It was a man suffocating while the state called it justice. It was ritualized killing…clinical, cold and soaked in sin.

When the nitrogen began to flow, Kenny's body betrayed every lie they told. He convulsed. He gagged. His chest rose and fell in wild panic. His legs shook so violently that the straps clanged against the gurney. The sound…those gasps, those deep animalistic cries…lasted forever. I prayed, but my prayers shattered into a million pieces against the stark walls. I wanted to scream, to stop it, to make the entire world cease turning. But I knew I couldn't. They wouldn't have stopped anyways. The machinery of death had already begun its hymn of cruelty.

People ask what it was like. It was like watching someone drown on dry land. It was like hearing a soul try to claw its way out of a body. It was torture…nothing more, nothing less.

I've been in execution chambers all over the country, but never like this. Nitrogen hypoxia was supposed to be sterile, scientific. Instead, it was chaos. It was horror in slow motion. It was a new method of killing wrapped in the language of progress. I watched

the state turn breath…the most basic gift of God…into a weapon. And, every subsequent nitrogen execution has been described similarly.

Since that night, I haven't known peace. I wake up gasping for air. I see Kenny's body jerking in my sleep. I smell the rubber of the mask. I feel the terror thick in the room, the way even the guards trembled, the way the witnesses went pale. The memory lives in my lungs. Every breath since that night feels heavier.

And now, the nightmare is coming for me again. This time, it will be another one of my guys, Anthony Boyd.

Anthony is not an idea. He is a man…a living, breathing, praying child of God. He prays with me. He loves his family. He seeks grace. He knows that God loves him. He's not what he once was. None of us are.

And yet, I am being asked to prepare him for another nitrogen execution…for the same horror that destroyed Kenny.

I do my best to sit with Anthony and talk about peace. But how do you prepare someone to die by suffocation when you are still choking on the memory of the last one? How do you help another man breathe when you have forgotten how to breathe yourself? I am supposed to be the calm, the faith, the anchor. But the truth is, I am terrified. I am trying to prepare Anthony for something that I am not prepared for. I am guiding him into a darkness that still devours me.

I keep telling him that God will be there in that room. But when I stood in that room with Kenny, God felt impossibly far away. The silence was deafening. The air was heavy with absence.

That night broke something in me. I don't know how to walk back into that place…the stark walls, the gloved hands, the straps, the hiss of nitrogen like a serpent in the air. I don't know

how to stand there again and watch another person gasp for life while the state congratulates itself for how civilized it is.

I became a spiritual advisor to guys on death row because I believe in redemption. I've seen men find grace in the deepest darkness. I've seen forgiveness grow where no one thought it could. But the state doesn't believe in redemption. The state believes in vengeance dressed up as justice. And every time it kills, something holy in all of us dies too.

People call me brave. I am not brave. I am haunted. I am broken. I stand in that horror because somebody has to. If no one witnesses…if no one loves…then the nightmare wins. If no one prays, the silence becomes permanent.

I believe in a God who breathes life into dust…not one who suffocates it. I believe in a Christ executed by the state…not one who blesses the state's executions. When I watched Kenny die, it felt like standing at the foot of the cross. But this time, the crowd didn't weep. They nodded. They took notes. They called it a fascinating new procedure.

I tell myself I can't go back in there. Every part of my body screams not to. But I will. Because that's what God has called me to do. To stand beside the condemned when the world turns away. To carry mercy into the machinery of death. To remind the state that every breath is sacred…even the last one.

I will go because love demands it. But I will go trembling. I shouldn't have to go at all.

10.27.25

Stand Up to Power! : The Courage of Jerzy Popieluszko

The Courage

There are people who don't just live the Gospel…they bleed it. Jerzy Popieluszko was one of those. He didn't talk about courage…he inhabited it, quietly and stubbornly, in the face of a machine that wanted to grind down the human soul until it no longer remembered God. He wasn't a revolutionary in the way governments understand revolutions. He was a priest…small, tired, soft-spoken…who somehow became a mirror for everything his country had forgotten…dignity, truth, compassion and the wild freedom of faith.

Jerzy Popieluszko and the Meaning of Courage

When I think about courage, I think about a body trembling before power and still standing up straight. I think about Jerzy Popieluszko at the altar, hands shaking, voice breaking, daring to say the name of Jesus out loud in a land where truth had been outlawed. He didn't carry a gun or a manifesto. He carried a chalice. He raised it high, and in that moment, the whole system trembled. Because when someone refuses to lie, the architecture of oppression begins to crack.

Preaching Truth in the Face of Fear

Popieluszko's homilies were simple. They weren't about politics so much as the sickness of the human soul when it becomes afraid of the truth. He told people to overcome evil with good, and he meant it…not as a slogan, not as an easy forgiveness, but as the only way to stay human. He preached to workers, to dreamers, to the wounded and the weary…and somehow, he made faith feel like resistance again. In a world addicted to fear, he reminded them that courage was a form of worship. The

communist state tried to silence him. They harassed him, followed him and threatened him. They tapped his phone and filled his parish with informants. Still, he kept preaching. He didn't speak with anger or vengeance. He spoke with the authority of someone who had already surrendered everything but truth. The courage to tell the truth is always cruciform. It leads you where you'd rather not go. It strips you bare of safety. It teaches you that resurrection isn't a metaphor…it's what happens when you love something enough to die for it.

The Martyrdom of Jerzy Popieluszko

When they finally kidnapped him…when they beat him, bound him and threw his body into the Vistula River…they thought they'd won. That's what empires always think. But the Gospel has this way of undoing the math of violence. The blood of the murdered priest became a sermon that no regime could erase. His funeral became a Eucharist for a nation waking up. His death became a doorway for others to walk through without fear. The Polish people didn't just bury him…they carried him into their own conscience. Later, the Church recognized what was already true…Jerzy Popieluszko became a saint, not because of ritual or canon but because holiness had already burned through him long before his death. His sainthood is the kind that smells like blood and bread and gasoline. It is the sainthood of a man who believed that love is stronger than the state.

Jerzy Popieluszko's Message for Our Time

And now, decades later, I wonder what Jerzy would say to us. We live in a different kind of dictatorship now…the dictatorship of distraction, of self-interest, of cowardice dressed up as civility. Fear is still here…fear of being honest, fear of losing comfort, fear of telling the truth about what we see. Popieluszko's courage doesn't belong to history. It belongs to anyone who feels the tremor in their chest when conscience calls and the world says stay quiet. And yes…Jerzy Popieluszko teaches us how to stand

up to Trump. Not because he was partisan, but because he understood what happens when faith starts worshiping power instead of God. He teaches us how to speak when leaders lie, how to hold a moral line when the crowd demands vengeance, how to pray when the church becomes complicit with cruelty. His courage was never about politics…it was about the human soul. He reminds us that silence in the face of corruption is not neutrality…it's surrender. Faith without truth is just another disguise for fear.

A Prophet Against Religious Nationalism

In our time, the cross has been dressed in flags and slogans. The Gospel has been used to bless the machinery of greed and exclusion. Jerzy Popieluszko's witness cuts through all of that. His life says no to every attempt to make Christ the servant of empire. His death says that God stands with the beaten, not the powerful. His sainthood is a living indictment of the church's temptation to comfort. "Overcome evil with good." Those words still sting because they still ask everything of us. Courage isn't loud. It's steady. It's the refusal to give your soul away to the powers that promise safety. Popieluszko reminds us that holiness isn't about purity…it's about presence.

The Enduring Courage of Jerzy Popieluszko

There's a kind of silence that kills, and a kind that heals. The silence of fear kills. The silence of prayer heals. Jerzy Popieluszko lived in that space between…a silence that trembled toward speech, a courage that looked like grace, a faith that refused to die. He teaches us that the opposite of fear is not fearlessness but love…love that refuses to surrender the truth of our shared humanity. The courage of Jerzy Popieluszko wasn't about winning. It was about witnessing. It was about standing at the edge of darkness and refusing to back away. He lived and died believing that truth cannot be destroyed…that evil only wins when good people are too afraid to speak. And so, his life

remains a question for us all…what would happen if we stopped being afraid? Because maybe courage still looks like that…a trembling voice speaking truth into a room that would rather not hear it. A priest lifting a chalice in the shadow of death. A saint, quietly teaching the living how to be free.

10.28.25

Norman Grim : What Would God Say?

What Would God Say to Norman Grim?

The Final Hour

It's almost time. The lights inside the prison burn bright against the dark October sky. Somewhere in the back, Norman Grim is waiting. In a few minutes, they'll walk him down that short hall to the room where the state will help him die. The official word is execution. The truer word is killing. He says he's ready. He's given up his appeals, told his lawyers to stop fighting for him. He says he wants to die. But no one ever really wants this. What he wants is peace. What he wants is rest. What he wants is what this world never gave him. And I keep wondering…as the hour draws closer…what would God say to Norman Grim tonight?

God in the Cell

Maybe God has been sitting in the silence of that cell for weeks, waiting for him to notice. Maybe God's been whispering the same thing again and again, in the places words can't quite reach, "You are still mine." I can almost hear it. "Norman, I was there when you were small and afraid, when the people who should have loved you taught you to live with pain instead. I was there when you put on a uniform and tried to find meaning in service. I was there when you came home and couldn't find your footing. I was there when the darkness grew louder than your hope. I was there when you broke, when you did the unthinkable. I never turned away." That's what I think God would say. Not in anger. Not in approval. Just in that steady, unfathomable way love speaks when nothing else can.

Love Large Enough for Both Norman Grim & Cynthia Campbell

Cynthia Campbell was a child of God too. Her death was terrible and wrong. Her name deserves to be said aloud. God's heart breaks for her, and for the people who will never stop missing her. But here's the thing we never seem to understand or believe…God's mercy is not a scale. It doesn't have to choose sides. God can hold Cynthia and Norman in the same sorrow, the same love, without diminishing either one. Norman has carried his shame like a weight he can't set down. When he waived his appeals, he said he was taking responsibility. Maybe that's true. But maybe it's also the voice of trauma speaking again…the old voice that told him his life didn't matter, that the world would be better without him. The same lie that has followed him since childhood. And tonight, the state will make that lie official.

The Execution of Norman Grim: Florida Calls It Justice. God Does Not.

Florida calls it justice. But it's really despair with paperwork. We keep pretending that if we kill the broken ones, we'll be safer, cleaner and more righteous. We won't be. We'll just be more practiced at ignoring what mercy sounds like. I believe God is saying something else tonight. Not to the politicians, not to the witnesses, not to the ones adjusting the straps or checking the IV lines. God is speaking to Norman, "Norman, I know you think this is the end. I know you are tired. I know you have run out of ways to make peace with what you've done. But death is not my justice. Death is not my language. I have loved you through every darkness. I will love you through this too. What the world cannot forgive, I can. What the world calls finished, I call beginning."

When the Room Grows Still

And maybe, when the time comes and the room goes still, Norman will hear that voice. Maybe he will close his eyes and finally believe it…that he was never worthless…that he was never forgotten…that even now, God is waiting to catch him.

The witnesses will see a man die. The news will print a few paragraphs and call it closure. But in the unseen world…in the quiet beyond what we understand…mercy will still be speaking. "Come home, Norman. I forgive you. I grieve what you did, and I grieve what was done to you. But I will not let death have the final word."

God's Last Word is Love

The state believes it has the last word tonight. It doesn't. God does. And that word is…love.

10.28.25

Eyewitness to Horror : On The Execution of Anthony Boyd

36 Minutes of Horror : The Execution of Anthony Boyd : An Eyewitness Account

The Execution of Anthony Boyd. Details matter. The 19 minutes. The 36 minutes total. The over 230 gasps. The way his body responded. These aren't gratuitous documentations. They are reality.

The State of Alabama has built a narrative around nitrogen execution…claims of painlessness, of humanity, of a peaceful death. None of that is based on witnessing. It's based on theory, assumption and the need to believe we can kill people humanely. I was the closest witness. I saw. It was horrific.

Anthony chose me to be in that chamber for a reason. Not just to pray with him and offer the sacraments, though I did that of course. He wanted me to witness what happened to him. He knew his body would tell a story that needed to be heard. And he wanted me to record not just what I saw, but what it did to me… my thoughts, my reactions, my rage, my grief and my wrestling with God in the face of what I was witnessing. Because that's part of the truth too. What it costs to watch a human being die like that. How it changes you.

If you strip this down, if you make it neat and digestible, you erase what Anthony died trying to show us. You erase the weight of it all. And that erasure is itself a violence. A way of making his death acceptable…manageable…routine.

This document exists so that cannot happen.

The Initial Approach

The chamber door loomed as we approached, a thick slab of steel that promised finality, that bore the weight of human power concentrated in cruelty. Every time I do this, there's a point where I realize there's no going back. And as I was walking toward that big steel door to go back inside, I knew there was no turning back. I couldn't breathe. Each breath felt like it was filtered through iron and concrete, each inhalation weighed down by a cosmic gravity I could not name. My lungs struggled as if the very air itself had turned to lead, pressing down, filling my chest with an ache that radiated through my ribs and into my spine. My knees wavered beneath me, trembling with the weight of inevitability, with the moral and spiritual weight of what I was about to witness. The pit of my stomach clenched so tightly I could feel it in my throat, a hollow, roiling pressure that threatened to erupt in a way that would have obliterated everything around me if not for the careful. I did not explode. I merely walked forward, inch by inch, negotiating my own existence, carrying with me the awareness that once I crossed that threshold, the world as I knew it would never be the same.

The steel door rose ahead, cold and unyielding, reflecting the harsh fluorescent light, its surface sending shivers through the air like an electric current. I asked the guard to pray for us, a quiet plea, my voice trembling, almost swallowed by the cavernous space around us. His nod, solemn and almost imperceptible, seemed to anchor me briefly in a fragile human connection amid the machinery of death. The door opened, and I moved past the holding cell, the echoes of my own shoes a hollow, haunting metronome. The television, once filled with melodrama, now flickered with a cartoon's surreal colors, an absurd contrast to the gravity of what was to come. The room seemed to mock the human experience, shifting from the tragic to the absurd in moments, a cosmic reminder that life and death are intertwined in ways incomprehensible.

I approached the gurney. I told him I loved him again and then I began to read Scripture aloud, letting the sound carry through the

cold air. The words reverberated off the steel walls, against the cold floors, filling the room with sacred vibration. I went from John 8, dwelling on mercy, judgment and the weight of sin, to John 14, the promise of peace and eternal presence, to First Corinthians 13, meditating on the endurance, power and transcendence of love, to Revelation 21, imagining the descent of the heavenly city, all while the cold gnawed at my bones. Then I moved to the Passion narrative, Jesus in the garden, sweat like drops of blood, His agony mirrored in the universal suffering of humanity, the trial before Pilate…the nails, the slow ascent toward the cross.

They told me to stop reading. The crucifixion had already arrived in that room anyways, a convergence of the sacred and the horrific. An executioner coughed, a harsh, jarring sound that seemed to bounce off the walls, yet Anthony simply smiled faintly, maintaining his calm, maintaining his self. The room was bone-chilling cold…the temperature seeped into the marrow, rattling every bone, every nerve. I looked at the oxygen monitor…low. I did not know precisely what that meant, yet I thought…if I must die…there is no better place to give my life in love.

The Final Moments

The officials in the witness area behind me tensed behind the glass, their faces set with the gravity of the moment. The head guard loomed, a monstrous figure with the most geometrical cranium I had ever seen, dark, imposing, a symbol of mortal rot. A wiry guard nearby, small and slight, reminded me of a harmless roach, but lethal in intent. My memories of the first nitrogen execution surged, the terror of suffocation, the helplessness, the pain. The fear threatened to undo me, yet I concentrated on Anthony, on his whispered instructions from the holding cell, “Watch my legs rise and fall. You will know when I cannot go any further.”

To my right, the lawyers, his brother and the media observed. I prepared. I steadied myself.

At 5:50, the curtains in the viewing chamber were drawn back. Anthony was strapped cruciform by his arms and chest to the gurney, his body covered tightly in a white sheet.

As the warden stepped forward toward the gurney, the death warrant folded neatly in his hand, Anthony turned his head as far as the straps would allow. His eyes found the warden's face, and with a rasp of breath that almost passed for a laugh, he said, "Go ahead…pumpkin head." The corners of Anthony's mouth lifted against the weight of the mask. "Just saying what I see," he said, and then went still as the warden began.

At 5:51, the warden read the death warrant.

At 5:52, Anthony spoke his last words:…

"I just wanna say again, I didn't kill anybody, I didn't participate in killing anybody. Just want everyone to know, there is no justice in this state. It's all political, it's all revenge motivated. There is no justice in the state, there can be no justice in the state." His voice was clear, steady, the voice of a man at peace with his innocence even as the state moved to extinguish him. He spoke of closure coming from within, not from execution. He ended with: "I want all my people to keep fighting, you all matter. Let's get it."

At 5:54, a correctional officer checked the seal on the mask. I knew it wasn't sealed. I could see it.

At 5:55 to 5:56, The head guard unexpectedly called me forward. I obeyed instinctively, knowing it was dangerous not to. I held Anthony's hand briefly and looked into the mask. The intimate, almost sacred nature of his signal occupied my every thought. Anthony wanted me to see, to witness, to bear testament. His

whispered messages wove through the room, “I love you. I’ve got this. I love you. I’ve got this.” I echoed back, “We’ve got this. We’ve got this. I love you too.” He shook his head, a subtle affirmation of understanding, surrender and courage. I told him to go to the light, to be the light, to cling to the light. He shook his head slightly, whispering, “I know. I will.”

The Gas Begins : The Body’s Desperate Fight

At 5:57 to 5:59, the gas apparently began flowing. Anthony’s lower half of his body began to jolt. He shifted, rolling to his side for a few seconds, his body angled toward the viewing chamber. He appeared to tremble and shudder. I stood by his side during this, my presence the only anchor I could offer.

Anthony’s entire being shot up. Then, I backed up slightly. I wasn’t supposed to be this close. I could hear the nitrogen. The guard barked, “No, come back. Come back, come back.” I stepped forward into the perilous space, less than three feet from the mask, under his armpit. I murmured to Anthony ceaselessly, “I love you. You’ve got this. Go to the light. Go to Christ.”

His body convulsed forward against the restraints, lunging toward me with a violence that made the gurney shake. His face bulged outward, eyes wide and straining, the whites visible all around, pupils dilating in shock and terror. The veins in his forehead and neck swelled instantly, thick ropes of blue and purple pressing against his skin as if trying to burst through. His mouth opened behind the mask, lips pulling back and I could see his teeth, his tongue, the desperate gulping for air that wasn’t air.

The restraints bit into his wrists as he pulled against them. His whole upper body strained forward, chest heaving in massive, convulsive breaths that looked nothing like breathing—more like drowning on dry land, like his lungs were trying to turn themselves inside out. The veins at his temples throbbed visibly,

pulsing with each desperate attempt to find oxygen that would never come.

His eyes found mine. Wild. Terrified. Human. So utterly and devastatingly human.

The mask fogged with his breath…in, out, in, out…rapid, panicked, the condensation appearing and disappearing in frantic rhythm. But I knew what was going into his lungs. Pure nitrogen. Invisible death. His body didn't know it was dying yet, kept trying to breathe, kept pulling in great gulps of what looked like air but was suffocation in gaseous form.

Another convulsion. His back arched off the gurney as much as the restraints would allow, spine curving, every muscle in his body going rigid with the primal, animal instinct to survive. The tendons in his neck stood out like cables under unbearable tension. His fingers splayed wide, then clenched into fists so tight I could see his knuckles go white, then splayed again—grasping at nothing, at air, at life itself slipping away.

I watched his chest heave…massive, desperate expansions that looked like his ribcage might crack from the force. Each inhalation was violent, his whole torso lifting off the gurney, shoulders straining forward, the gurney creaking beneath him. His diaphragm spasmed, visible through the thin sheet, contracting and releasing in rapid, irregular pulses. But there was no relief. Only more nitrogen flooding his lungs, displacing every molecule of oxygen, turning breath into poison.

The sound…ragged, wet gasping behind the mask. The horrible sucking noise of air being pulled through a throat that was closing, through lungs that were burning. Each breath sounded like tearing fabric, like something vital being ripped apart. I could hear the whistle of air through his nose, the desperate snorting.

The bulging of his face intensified. His forehead seemed to swell, skin stretching tight and shiny under the fluorescent lights. His cheeks puffed out, then hollowed, then puffed again with each violent attempt to breathe. His eyes watered, tears streaming down the sides of his face into his hair, pooling in his ears. Whether from the physical trauma or from the knowledge of what was happening, I couldn't tell. Maybe both. His jaw clenched and unclenched behind the mask, grinding, the muscles along his jawline spasming in rapid succession.

His throat worked constantly, Adam's apple bobbing up and down, up and down, like he was trying to swallow but couldn't. I could see his pulse hammering in his carotid artery, racing, pounding, visible proof that his heart was fighting even as his lungs betrayed him.

The gurney rattled with each convulsion. Metal against metal, a rhythmic clanging that marked each surge of his body's desperate rebellion. His legs jerked beneath the sheet, knees trying to bend, feet pressing down then lifting, trying to find purchase, trying to run from what couldn't be escaped.

I leaned in. I was aware of the moral necessity to record, to see. Gaps in the mask were clearly allowing extra oxygen to seep in. The struggle continued, intensified. His body fought with everything it had, every cell screaming for oxygen while nitrogen filled the space where life should be.

At 6:00, I extended a blessing in the shape of a cross three times. Anthony's chest began to rise, a slow, deliberate lift that barely disturbed the cold sheet beneath him. His shoulders tensed slightly, then relaxed. I noticed his eyes move. I mirrored his cadence in my breath, inhaling and exhaling slowly to match his rhythm, trying to hold the room, hold him, hold the sacredness of the moment.

Then, I watched the rhythm set in. Each breath he took was an act of courage, an act of resistance, a final sermon preached in the language of human endurance. I heard his voice somewhere in my mind…"Remember my legs." I felt the weight of those words descend upon me like a cosmic signpost…when his legs could rise no more, when his body could no longer sustain the rhythm, I would know. So, I stood watch.

The guard ordered me back.

I felt the universe contracting into that room, compressing time and space into each desperate inhale. Breath, that simple gift, had become a weapon, a betrayal, a horror enacted by law and machinery. Watching him fight for air, I sensed the fragility of existence…how quickly flesh turns to suffering when stripped of its first miracle. God, if present, seemed silent, and yet I could feel the weight of eternity pressing down, fused with mortal terror.

Long Minutes of Gasping : The Extended Count

At 6:01, I stepped back, and Anthony appeared to take deep, gasping breaths that appeared to stutter in his chest. His right arm shook. His chest rose again, higher than before, a visible increase in effort, ribcage expanding against the limits of oxygen deprivation. The quiver at the corner of his mouth betrayed concentration, awareness, the primal struggle between will and suffocation. Time between breaths appeared consistent. I began to count the gasps for air that would follow…each one a separate agony, each one a desperate attempt by his body to find oxygen that would never come, each one a violent refusal by his body to surrender, even as nitrogen flooded his lungs.

"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death… I WILL FEAR NO EVIL."

Time became viscous and heavy. Each gasp echoed with the finality of inevitability and the cruelty of human hands. I could see fear etched into every fiber of his being. Existence had become unbearable and yet impossibly sacred. I could not look away from the fragility of living.

At 6:02, the gasping began to intensify. His fingers flexed and moved in a rhythm that synchronized with his breath… adjustments born of desperation, the first of many signals I would hold sacred. The toes of his right foot curled, then relaxed, a motion speaking the language of survival that only the dying know. His eyes flickered again, eyes tracking mine in brief bursts of connection, pupils dilating and contracting. His shuddering gasps appeared to speed up. Gasp after gasp. The rhythm was relentless, inevitable. His body fighting with everything it had, every cell screaming for oxygen while nitrogen filled the space where life should be. By 6:03, perhaps a dozen gasps had accumulated.

“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death… I WILL FEAR NO EVIL.”

The rhythm of his gasps carved dread in the room. I could almost see the body as both altar and victim, a grotesque liturgy of pain and endurance. Every pulse of veins, every quiver of muscle, screamed not just for life but for meaning in the void. Humanity, stripped to its rawest state, faced the machinery of death and the horror was almost holy…too sacred to look away from, too human to survive unshaken.

At 6:03, the rhythm continued to intensify. His chest lifted faster, exhalations became longer, more deliberate, air forced through a throat closing against nitrogen. I saw tremors in the fingers of his left hand, tendons shifting beneath skin like cables under tension. His legs shifted on the gurney…his right leg flexing, left leg following signals I would later recognize as sacred final communications. Every breath he took was monumental, every

quiver an act of resistance against the machinery of death. I noticed the pulsing of veins in his forehead, rising and falling with each heartbeat, blue channels of life fighting against asphyxiation. The faint twitch of his eyebrows as he maintained effort. The muscles along his neck flexed, each swallow of air precise, each breath a small victory over nitrogen. His right hand twitched, pressing briefly against the gurney with enough force to leave marks on his palm, then relaxing. The gasps continued. By 6:04, we were approaching 20 gasps. The counting had begun in earnest.

"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death… I WILL FEAR NO EVIL."

The rhythm of suffering became a language I could almost understand. Each convulsion spoke of defiance and despair. The machinery of death was precise and merciless. I felt the weight of human cruelty and human endurance intertwined. Life had never seemed so small and so immense at the same time.

At 6:04, the toes of his left foot flexed in pulses, almost like Morse code written in flesh and bone. His chest heaved rhythmically, shoulders trembling with the effort of each breath, collarbone rising and falling like tides. Eyelids flickered…left then right…signals I recorded in my mind as sacred timestamps. What looked to be shuddering, open-mouthed, chest-heaving gasps continued. By 6:05, we were around 30 gasps. Each one marking another moment of conscious suffocation, another instant of his body's desperate rebellion against the machinery of death.

"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death… I WILL FEAR NO EVIL."

Every twitch of finger and toe became monumental. The body was still and alive and dying all at once. I felt the fragility of being and the inevitability of death collide. The room contained

nothing but terror and devotion. I could not measure the scope of horror before me.

At 6:05, minute by minute, the patterns became almost imperceptible yet undeniable. The pulse in his temples synchronized in my perception with the rhythm of his breaths… life and death dancing in his body. His chest rose in precise, measured increments, shoulders trembling. Fingers curled, toes flexed, eyes blinked at intervals I could count. The room itself seemed to shrink around his struggle. Every detail heightened into unbearable clarity. The pulse in his temple synchronized with the quiver of his jaw, muscle and blood moving in desperate harmony. The twitch of his fingers, the lift of his legs, the shift of shoulders…all measured, intentional, the body refusing to surrender even as it died. By 6:06, we had reached approximately 45 gasps. His body knew it was suffocating, and it screamed the only way it could…through these gasps, these desperate, convulsive inhalations of poison.

“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death… I WILL FEAR NO EVIL.”

The gasps multiplied into a chorus of desperation. Each rise of the chest was a sermon in suffering. The room seemed to tilt toward oblivion and yet hold the sacred in balance. Life was being rewritten in convulsions and trembling limbs. I was standing at the edge of human possibility and horror.

At 6:06, the seemingly shuddering, chest-heaving gasps continued, though Anthony’s mouth sometimes closed. Veins along his neck pulsed, his adam’s apple rising in stages, swallowing nitrogen like bitter communion. His right leg twitched…his left followed, a call and response written in dying muscle. I murmured scripture fragments softly, “The Lord is my shepherd…I shall not want…” Shoulders rose in tiny, painstaking lifts with each breath, the effort visible in every muscle fiber. Veins throbbed along temples and neck, tributaries

of life still flowing. By 6:07, we were approaching 60 gasps. The relentlessness of it. The mechanical precision of his body's torture.

"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death… I WILL FEAR NO EVIL."

The body became a vessel for something infinite and horrifying. I could see the battle between survival and the inevitability of death. Each gasp was a testament and a requiem. God's presence felt like both absence and unbearable intimacy. The horror of witnessing burned into my chest.

At 6:07, Anthony's breathing appeared to slow slightly, but the effort remained monumental. The rise and fall of his chest consolidated into a rhythm of endurance, each breath now purchased at enormous cost. His eyes tracked mine, the smallest flick of a pupil, an acknowledgment passing between us beyond words. I marked each fraction of a second as sacred. His legs moved again, millimeter by millimeter, preparing for the final signal written in his body's last language. Shoulders lifted and fell in undulations barely visible. Eyelids flickered. Fingers curled then relaxed, tendons standing out like wires. Each breath was monumental, each gesture a sermon in human courage written on flesh. By 6:08, we had accumulated roughly 75 gasps. The counting became almost unbearable.

"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death… I WILL FEAR NO EVIL."

It was as if the laws of the cosmos themselves had turned cruelly against him. Each movement, each tremor, each shudder was a declaration that life still existed even as death imposed itself in brutal silence. The cross I had prayed over in spirit now seemed microscopic compared to the expanse of suffering before me. This was not a story…it was the existential collapse of morality, the theater of cruelty in which God's silence is deafening.

At 6:08, the gasps shifted into a more sustained rhythm. Every gesture now became a crescendo of effort. Veins visible in faint pulses along his neck and temples, roads of blood trying to carry oxygen that wasn't there. Fingers, toes, legs, eyelids, lips, chest…all performed deliberate motions, each a note in a symphony of survival. His eyelids flickered at intervals so small they were almost imperceptible, yet each blink felt like a sacred punctuation, a refusal to close permanently. Breaths moved through cracked, dry surfaces. His chest heaved with adjustments that looked like convulsions, each one a declaration of persistent life. The toes flexed, the fingers quivered, veins pulsed with weakening pressure. By 6:09, we had passed 90 gasps. Still fighting. Still desperate.

"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death… I WILL FEAR NO EVIL."

Every gesture was monumental. His chest rose with a force that seemed to defy the inevitability of suffocation. Each twitch was a declaration of resistance against everything trying to end him. The horror was complete and intimate. I felt every movement as a communion and a nightmare.

At 6:09, the faintest lift of his legs, almost imperceptible, communicated the sacred code…when the final lift comes, you will know. He continued, rising into the desperate rhythm of inhales and exhales, the primal dance between oxygen hunger and nitrogen flooding. His chest rose and fell with each effort, shoulders trembling. The pulse in his temple synchronized with the quiver of his jaw, muscle and blood moving in desperate harmony. By 6:10, we were approaching 110 gasps. The rhythm remained relentless.

"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death… I WILL FEAR NO EVIL."

The last signals of his body became messages written in flesh. His limbs trembled and rose in silent communication. I could see the struggle of life clinging to form. Each breath was monumental and each exhale sacred. The room had become a theater of suffering and witness.

At 6:10, Anthony's breathing appeared to become slightly shallower, though still coming in distinct gasps. The rhythm was almost metronomic now, his body in the throes of nitrogen suffocation, still fighting, still trying, still refusing to surrender to the inevitable. His eyes continued to track mine when they could. By 6:11, we had accumulated roughly 130 gasps. The mechanical precision of his body's continued struggle against the state's machinery of death.

"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death… I WILL FEAR NO EVIL."

I realized I was witnessing the obliteration of ordinary time. Every gasp was a miniature apocalypse, each second a universe ending and beginning again in terror. There was no veil between life and death here…only a body stretched to its limits, a soul clawing at the walls of existence. The horror was absolute: intimate, impossible to contextualize, yet undeniable and in that, something unbearably real glimmered.

At 6:11, the gasps began to slow imperceptibly, but they did not diminish in their desperation. Time intervals between breaths started to become more apparently inconsistent. The gasps were getting quieter, but they were still happening with force. Still fighting. Still desperate. More gasps accumulated steadily. By 6:12, we were approaching 155 gasps. Each breath was still monumental, each gesture still spoke of resistance. The body refused to surrender even as it weakened, even as the nitrogen did its slow, mechanical work.

“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death… I WILL FEAR NO EVIL.”

The gasps were fewer and still each one carried the weight of eternity. I could feel the inevitability approaching with deliberate cruelty. Every small movement was a final defiance. The horror had a texture I could feel on my skin and in my chest. Life and death were inseparable in this room.

At 6:12, his legs moved with almost imperceptible shifts of weight on the gurney. Chest heaved in deep breaths, each one a small battle, each exhale a surrender to effort yet insistence on life. Eyelids flickered, his pupils adjusting to the harsh fluorescent light, still seeing, still present. Fingers twitched, toes flexed, movements that seemed to speak a language only the dying know. By 6:13, we had passed 175 gasps. The accumulation felt unbearable. The counting burned into my memory.

“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death… I WILL FEAR NO EVIL.”

The body began to falter and yet fought with monumental determination. I could see each twitch as a final act of human will. Death was patient and precise and unrelenting. Every moment felt infinite and unbearable. I was bearing witness to the absolute extremity of existence.

At 6:13, Anthony’s breathing appeared to become even more shallow, with less apparent heaving of his chest with every new breath. The rhythm slowed into a long, desperate cadence, the body negotiating with death. Gestures still carried meaning written in sinew and bone. Fingers flexed and curled, toes twitched in delicate succession. Each inhale seemed monumental, each exhale sacred. By 6:14, we were approaching 195 gasps. The body was still trying. Still gasping. Still refusing to let go, even as it weakened.

“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death… I WILL FEAR NO EVIL.”

Each inhale and exhale became more precious and more terrifying. The body was writing a liturgy of suffering in muscles and veins. I could feel eternity contained in each fleeting movement. The horror and the sacred were intertwined and inseparable. Life had never felt so fragile and so defiant.

At 6:14, Anthony appeared to take shallow choking breaths that appeared to slightly jolt his head. His head appeared to loll back and then to the side. His legs appeared to tense for a few seconds and then slack. His breath appeared to stall, then he seemed to take another shallow gasp for air. The body fought, hovered in liminal space, a fragile balance between presence and absence. Legs flexed, lifted slightly at the ends of the gurney. Fingers twitched, toes flexed, eyelids moved in synchronous rhythm, a body still coordinating itself against death. Lips parted slightly. Chest rose and fell, each inhale monumental, each exhale sacred, the rhythm of survival now slowing to its final measures. By 6:15, we had accumulated roughly 210 gasps. The rhythm was slowing, but the gasps continued.

“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death… I WILL FEAR NO EVIL.”

The room had become a crucible of suffering. His body, still trembling, still trying, had become the raw measure of human endurance against annihilation. Death here was not abstract…it was suffocating, intimate, a violation of flesh and air, a systematic unraveling of everything we call life. I felt my own body ready to follow in terror, yet I stayed, tethered by something between faith and sheer witness, forced to reckon with the grotesque reality of mortality.

At 6:15, the gasps became increasingly sparse and labored. His body appeared to be reaching the limits of its resistance. Eyelids

flickered more slowly. The signals continued, fainter now, but still present. Fingers trembled with less intensity. Each gasp seemed purchased at an even greater cost. By 6:16, we were approaching 230 gasps. Over 230 separate, distinct gasps for air seemed imminent. Over 230 moments where his body tried to survive the unsurvivable.

“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death… I WILL FEAR NO EVIL.”

The Final Signal

Every gasp seemed both fleeting and eternal. The body’s resistance was monumental and exhausting to witness. Time had become unbearable and elastic. I could see the sacred in each desperate movement. The horror of the human condition pressed against my chest.

At 6:16, We had passed the 230 mark. Over 230 separate, distinct moments where Anthony’s lungs demanded air, where his body screamed for oxygen, where nitrogen poured into the mask and his body responded with desperate, convulsive inhalations. Each gasp a second. Each gasp a small eternity. Each gasp a violent negotiation between life and death.

The final acts of resistance were small and monumental at the same time. I could feel the rhythm of life and the inevitability of death converge. Every twitch and flex became sacred and horrifying. The room was full of terror and testimony. Existence itself had been condensed into the struggle of this body.

Then, the final signal.

His legs began to rise. Not the subtle micromovements I’d been tracking for over nineteen minutes, but something else entirely. Something monumental. Both legs lifting together, slowly at first, then with gathering purpose, rising up from the gurney like

a resurrection, like a body trying to ascend and being pulled back down by the weight of nitrogen and death and the machinery of the state.

They rose higher. Higher. The sheet fell away from his feet. I could see them now—vulnerable, human. His toes pointed upward toward the fluorescent lights, toward heaven, toward something beyond this horror. The muscles in his calves stood out in sharp relief, quivering with the effort. His thighs tensed, every fiber engaged in this final act of witness.

The gurney groaned beneath the shift in weight. The restraints around his ankles went tight. But still his legs rose, defying gravity, defying the nitrogen flooding his lungs, defying everything that was killing him. They rose until they looked like two ghosts, suspended in the air like offerings, like protests, like prayers made flesh.

He held them there.

I remembered his words.

“Watch my legs. When I raise them and hold them there, I can’t go any further.”

It was as if the entire cosmos was moving through him. Like every ancestor who’d been lynched, every person executed by the state, every soul suffocated and murdered was speaking through the trembling of his legs suspended in air.

And then…

They fell.

Not slowly. Not gently. They dropped like dead weight, like cut strings. Both legs falling together, crashing down onto the gurney

with a sound that echoed through the chamber—the heavy thud of flesh and bone hitting metal, final and absolute.

And in that moment, I knew. He had given everything. Every ounce of strength. Every last reserve. He had held his legs up as long as humanly possible, held them trembling in the air as witness, as testimony, as the sign he'd promised me.

His face changed. The bulging, the straining, the desperate fight…it softened. Not into peace, but into something else. Surrender. Release. The look of someone who had done what they set out to do, who had completed their witness, who had nothing left to give.

The groan that came from his mouth…deep, watery, resonant… seemed to rise from somewhere beyond his body. It reverberated through the chamber, through my chest, through the walls themselves. A sound of ending and beginning, of death and testimony, of a life poured out and a witness sealed.

But his body wasn't done. His heart kept beating. His lungs kept trying to breathe. I watched him in that liminal space between life and death, his body clinging to existence even as the nitrogen did its slow mechanical work of suffocation.

The Final Vigil

For the final seventeen plus minutes of the execution, I bore witness to the slow cessation of life. Each second was heavy with the awareness of human fragility. The stillness was sacred. My lips barely moved as I whispered pieces of scripture, each syllable a prayer, a tether to eternity, a bridge between the sacred and the profane machinery around me.

At 6:17, Anthony took two final barely perceptible gasps.

There were slight movements at 6:20.

I watched the slow cessation of life as if suspended in eternity. Each second became a universe ending and beginning in terror. I felt the weight of human cruelty and divine absence. The horror was unbearable and intimate. Witnessing became the final act of communion.

I became aware of my own heartbeat, thundering in my ears, each pulse echoing like a benediction. I reflected on the mystery of presence. God present in suffering, God present in silence, God present in the infinitesimal movements of life's last breath.

I began to cry.

The details flooded my mind. The slight rise of the sheet over his chest, the faint tension in his jawline even in stillness, the minute echo of a sigh that seemed to linger like incense in the air. Every detail became a theological reflection—presence and absence, body and spirit, the liminality of human mortality.

Time became almost liquid, stretching, folding over itself.

A faint shiver ran through my spine, and I interpreted it as both my grief and the residual energy of life's final exertion. I contemplated the paradox of liminality…Anthony's body still here, yet his essence elsewhere, hovering in a space I could not name.

Every second became saturated with reflection. I traced the theological arc of suffering…human cruelty, divine justice, redemption, mercy, resurrection. I could almost feel Anthony's spirit moving, reaching, a fragile connection between my presence and the eternal. I noticed that my own breath was still synchronized with the rhythm of his chest moments before, a residual echo of communion, a spiritual resonance.

I began to perceive the presence of God in the space itself…a warmth in the corner, a subtle shift of air, a barely audible

vibration that felt like divine sighing. My hands pressed together in silent prayer, then released onto my lap. My mind moved through theological landscapes.

Time collapsed further. I noticed the tiny tremors of the gurney settling, the soft settling of the sheet over Anthony's still chest. Every imperfection, every sound, every flicker of light became a theological reflection on impermanence, grace and eternal presence. I continued whispering scripture.

"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death… I WILL FEAR NO EVIL."

I stood trembling and aware of my own fragility. The world had become a void filled only with the memory of suffering and the deliberate violence of the state. Every heartbeat echoed the terror I had just witnessed. Faith and morality seemed fragile and fragile illusions. The presence of God felt like a shadow hovering between horror and witness.

I felt my body begin to physically sag. I folded my hands, leaned slightly forward, closed my eyes, and felt the culmination of presence. I knew that all my guys that I'd accompanied previously were there too.

The Execution of Anthony Boyd: An Extended Tally

Over 230 gasps. That's what his body endured. Over 230 separate, distinct moments where Anthony's lungs demanded air, where his body screamed for oxygen, where nitrogen poured into the mask and his body responded with desperate, convulsive inhalations. I had counted many of them. Gasp. Gasp. Gasp. The rhythm burned into my memory. The sound of a man drowning in slow motion. The sound of a body trying to survive what should not be survived. The sound of over 230 separate acts of conscious suffocation, each one a torture, each one a violation, each one a moment where Anthony remained aware…aware of

the nitrogen flooding his lungs, aware of the impossibility of escape, aware that his body was being murdered by the state while the world watched or looked away.

When you consider that I only started counting at 6:00, there could of at least been 40 more gasps that I left out. It was all so difficult to quantify.

When the curtains closed at 6:27, his official time of death was recorded as 6:33 p.m. But I knew what those six minutes meant. Six more minutes of hovering between life and death. Six more minutes of his body clinging to existence even as the nitrogen did its slow, mechanical work. Six more minutes where Anthony Boyd, who had maintained his innocence, who had taught death row inmates about hope, who had transformed his execution into activism and witness, lay still on a gurney while the state finished what it had begun.

By the end, the chamber had become a space of intense theological meditation: every inch of air, every shadow, every microsecond preserved the sacred record of love, courage, endurance, grief and divine presence.

Anthony Boyd had given everything he had to let the world know three numbers.

19 minutes of conscious horrific struggle.

36 total minutes of a torturous execution.

Well over 230 gasps from start to finish.

The Aftermath : Final Rite Denied

I stood trembling, my own body threatening to collapse, aware of the imminent removal. The curtains slammed closed. As I tried to make the sign of the cross one last time over Anthony, the guard

pushed me from behind, a hard, cold shove that knocked the wind out of me. I protested, “Don’t push me,” but he pushed me again, relentless, unmoved by my words or my purpose. In that moment, I realized I was completely powerless to perform what I was there to do…to commend Anthony’s body to eternity, to give him the final act of spiritual care he deserved. My hands shook, my heart pounded and rage mixed with sorrow boiled up inside me. The injustice of it was staggering. I had been denied my sacred duty, denied a moment of grace in the midst of unimaginable horror.

I left, shaking, furious, the rite unfinished, the body not fully commended to eternity. I had to remind myself that God loved Anthony more than I ever could. The hallway beyond the chamber felt like a tunnel into nothingness, fluorescent lights glaring like distant stars in a dying galaxy. Every step I took echoed, a hollow percussion against the metal and concrete, each step a reminder that I had left something sacred behind.

I wanted to scream, to throw myself against the walls, to rend the sky with protest, but there was only breath…ragged, trembling, inadequate. And in that silence, I felt the sheer enormity of what had occurred, the unbridgeable gulf between human law and divine justice. I imagined Anthony’s spirit hovering somewhere beyond the machinery of this world, beyond the nitrogen, beyond the cruelty, held only in God’s hands. I imagined God leaning close, whispering love and affirmation, attending to the sacrament I had failed to complete.

The guard’s shove lingered like a wound across my skin, a reminder that even in death, human authority can impose indignity. My hands, still trembling, could not make the sign of the cross over Anthony. My lips, still tasting the metallic tang of grief, could not utter the final blessing. And yet, I understood that the ritual had not ended simply because my body was denied its completion. Anthony’s witness had already ascended into eternity. The truth of him…the courage, the love, the defiance,

the teaching, the unyielding voice against injustice…had gone where no guard or machine could follow…into the hearts of the guys that he left behind.

Presence at The Execution of Anthony Boyd

Every breath I drew was a reminder of the fragility of life, of the horror humans can inflict, and of the quiet, indestructible spark of divine presence in moments we cannot fully comprehend. I realized that my grief, my rage, my failure to complete the final rite, were themselves acts of bearing witness, albeit imperfect, fractured, human. And in that, I understood a sliver of mercy… that the sacred does not require perfection, only presence.

1.29.25

Immediate Eschatology: Universal Salvation Eternally Within

Everyone is Already Saved: The Immediate Eschatology of the Atonement

Everyone is Already Saved: The Cross as the Axis of Creation

He hung there…bloodied, broken, and nailed between heaven and earth…and the universe itself trembled. The wind whispered through galaxies, the stars pulsed in awe and the planets turned in sorrowful rhythm. The Cross was not mere wood…it was the axis of creation, the hinge of eternity, the point at which time itself bowed. Every heartbeat, every quark, every atom, every galaxy reverberated with the agony and glory of Christ. “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38-39). The dying of Christ was not merely historical…it was existence itself crying out in divine love, a truth that had always been, now revealed. Christ died for all. Every soul, every creature, every atom, every life yet to be born, every memory of what has passed participates. Salvation is already present in all…it waits only to be recognized. “He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5).

The Cross does not intrude upon creation…it is the language of creation itself. The Word made flesh does not enter history as one among many but as the interior of all that exists. In Christ, God’s eternal YES to creation becomes audible. The Incarnation is the infinite God consenting to finitude without remainder. Every act of creation already anticipates this descent. Being itself is cruciform, relational, self-giving from the beginning. The Cross

is not a reaction to sin but the eternal self-expression of divine love. The Lamb was "slain from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8). To speak of atonement is to speak of ontology, the way all things hold together in the One who was, is, and is to come.

Every being carries the seed of salvation. This is not a promise contingent on works or understanding, but the fruit of God's eternal election. God has chosen everyone…no soul is excluded. To behold the Crucified is to see the universe in its most authentic form. The blood that drips into the soil consecrates the whole earth. The body broken between heaven and earth unites them forever. The nails that pierce his flesh drive through the illusion of separation. Heaven and earth, divine and human, eternal and temporal, all find reconciliation in the One who breathes forgiveness into the world. "Father, forgive them…" (Luke 23:34).
Everyone is already saved because the cross is the axis of all creation.

Everyone is Already Saved: The Eternal Presence of Salvation

The Cross reveals not a distant hope but a present unveiling. The atonement pulses immediately through creation. Time folds into the body of Christ. Past and future meet in the eternal now of love. Salvation is not a transaction…it is the recognition of what has always been. Every being carries it already, enfolded within God's eternal will. "For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross" (Colossians 1:19-20).

Resurrection is not an afterword but the interior meaning of the Cross made manifest. The empty tomb is not a place but a revelation…nothing which has entered into love can ever be lost. Salvation is within every being and will be revealed in all. "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he

were dead, yet shall he live" (John 11:25). Immediate eschatology collapses temporal distance. The eternal does not wait for our readiness…it is already within our becoming. Grace awakens, not arrives. Time groans in labor toward recognition of what has always been given. "Behold, the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21).

Even in suffering, even in rebellion, salvation quietly persists. God's love does not fail. Nothing can separate the created from the Creator. Every act of recognition, however small, is a revelation of what has already been planted by God. "The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth" (Psalm 145:18). To awaken to the salvation already present is the true eschatological act. The Cross is the eternal pattern of divine solidarity. "Where can I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I make my bed in hell, behold, you are there" (Psalm 139:7-8).
Everyone is already saved because there has never been a time where they were not.

Everyone is Already Saved: Grace as the Fabric of Creation

Grace burns in the stars, flows in rivers, moves in the wind and trembles in every living heart. "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care" (Matthew 10:29). To exist is already to be immersed in grace and salvation. Recognition is not achievement but awakening…like remembering a song you have always known. "Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth" (1 John 3:18). Every act of tenderness, every protest against cruelty, every tear of compassion, these are movements of the Cross living in the world, revealing the salvation latent in all beings.

Grace is not added to creation…it constitutes its depth. The supernatural is not a second story atop the natural but the infinite within the finite. Every finite thing bears the weight of the

infinite within it. The bread of the world is already Eucharistic… the water of life already baptismal. Salvation is already present and waits to be revealed. “In him we live, and move, and have our being” (Acts 17:28). Even the smallest creature participates in this grace. A bird’s song, the wind across the plains, the growth of trees, the rising of the sun, all declare the truth of God’s love. Salvation is not abstract…it is woven into the fabric of life itself. “For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible…all things have been created through him and for him” (Colossians 1:16).

Creation itself sings. The stars preach the gospel to the void… mountains bow in silence…oceans chant in their depths. There is no later. Redemption does not wait. “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (John 1:5). Every act of courage, every touch of mercy, every refusal to hate declares what has always been true…the world is already reconciled. Salvation exists in all and will inevitably be revealed in all. “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:21).
Everyone is already saved because grace is the epicenter of creation.

Everyone is Already Saved: Christ Beyond Boundaries

Christ moves beyond every border, every creed, every name. He dwells in every act of justice, every cry for mercy. “All things were created through him and for him” (Colossians 1:16). No soul escapes divine compassion. “God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them” (2 Corinthians 5:19). All divisions are illusions. Discipleship is recognition. “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).

The world wakes. Stars, quarks, galaxies sing the glory of Christ. Rivers shimmer with divine radiance…mountains blaze…oceans

pulse. Children laugh…the old weep in wonder…forests and skies whisper hallelujah. “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands” (Psalm 19:1). Christ’s beauty is everywhere: in a stranger’s compassion, in courage, in hidden holiness. The cosmos rejoices. “Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn” (Isaiah 60:3). Every heartbeat, every breath reveals the infinite beauty of Christ.

The Eucharist is not confined to altar and chalice but extends through every act of love that gives life. Every gesture of care, every spark of justice, every embrace of peace, these are sacraments of reconciliation. “Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31). To see Christ in others, to love, to forgive, to protect, to care…these acts reveal the salvation that is already present. Every act of mercy, every refusal to harm, every step toward reconciliation manifests the reality of God’s choice and love. Everyone is already saved because Christ knows no boundaries.

Everyone is Already Saved: The Latent Salvation Within All Beings

Salvation is not something external, imposed upon creation from above…it is the eternal presence of God enfolded within every being, every atom, every life. Every human soul, every bird, every river, every mountain, every particle of stardust carries this seed. It is latent yet inevitable, awaiting recognition, awaiting awakening, awaiting the moment when the eternal YES of God is fully revealed in all creation. “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound” (Isaiah 61:1). The Cross does not merely announce redemption…it resides in all things as the blueprint of existence, the eternal architecture of love, the law of being itself.

Even the smallest and seemingly insignificant life participates in this revelation. The hummingbird hovering over a flower, the worm turning the soil, the sap rising in trees, the current flowing in rivers, the rhythm of the tides…these all are expressions of the latent grace embedded in creation. Every act of life carries the reflection of the eternal Word. To deny the universality of this salvation is to deny the very ontological reality of creation itself. "For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible…all things were created by him, and for him" (Colossians 1:16). Each particle of matter, each vibration of energy, participates in a divine symphony whose harmony is Christ.

Humanity is uniquely gifted to awaken and reveal this latent salvation. Our capacity to recognize, to love, to create, to forgive, to act justly, is the means by which creation itself glimpses the fullness of God's will. Every act of kindness, every selfless gesture, every pursuit of justice, is not only human morality…it is cosmic participation in the eternal atonement. "Let all that you do be done with love" (1 Corinthians 16:14). The Cross is not a distant event in the past…it is the pulse of creation itself, and in human awareness, its beauty and truth are awakened, mirrored and reflected throughout the universe.
Everyone is already saved because salvation is within us.

Cosmic and Temporal Integration of Salvation

Time itself is caught up in the atonement. Past, present and future fold into the eternal now of God's love. Christ is not merely a historical figure but the eternal Logos, present in every moment and every particle of being. To acknowledge the latent salvation within all is to see time as a pliable, cruciform continuum, where the eternal and temporal meet in the presence of God. "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). The Cross is the axis upon which creation pivots, the hinge upon which history turns, the eternal signature embedded in every act, every breath, every moment of existence.

Even in human suffering, resistance and sin, salvation remains present and unyielding. Every act of cruelty, every act of despair, every moment of doubt is enfolded into the eternal orbit of divine love. “For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed” (Isaiah 54:10). No being is truly lost. No creation is ever abandoned. Salvation exists in all and will inevitably be revealed in all. Every wound and every failure becomes a vector toward the recognition of God’s eternal embrace.

Death itself participates in this process. It is not the termination of existence but a threshold into deeper recognition. The soul does not step outside of God’s love but moves more fully into its presence. “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints” (Psalm 116:15). Each passing is a note in the eternal symphony of redemption. The Cross is present even in decay. The resurrection permeates every ending. To be is already to be saved, even in the face of death, even in the shadows of fear and doubt. Salvation is already enfolded within all that exists, waiting only for revelation.
Everyone is already saved because salvation is both cosmic and temporal.

Humanity as Co-Participants in Revelation

The human vocation is not to earn salvation but to awaken and manifest what is already present. To love, to forgive, to protect, to care, to seek justice, to cultivate mercy…these are not acts of earning grace but acts of revealing grace. “Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth” (1 John 3:18). Each act of kindness echoes through the cosmos, awakening recognition of the salvation latent within all beings. Every gesture, every word, every compassionate act resonates with eternal consequence, revealing the pre-existent reconciliation embedded in creation.

Every culture, every language, every tradition, every human heart, carries seeds of this revelation. Salvation is not confined to any creed, any tribe, any nation. The love of God penetrates all hearts, whether conscious of it or not. “God hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth” (Acts 17:26). The Cross reaches across every boundary, every division, every illusion of separation. Humanity is the instrument through which creation itself awakens to its own divine identity.

Every moment of awakening, every act of recognition, every realization of truth, is a participation in the unfolding revelation of salvation. Nothing is outside this process. Even the most hidden, the most overlooked, the most marginalized, the most despised carries the image of God and participates in this cosmic unveiling. Every soul, every being, every life, is already enfolded in divine love and will inevitably experience the fullness of salvation.
Everyone is already saved because God has extended such revelation to us.

The Inevitability of Universal Revelation

Salvation is not delayed…it is inevitable. All that exists carries within itself the latent gift of reconciliation, and all that exists will one day awaken to it. Nothing can obstruct the eternal purpose of God. “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end” (Jeremiah 29:11). All acts, all events, all histories, all sufferings, all joys, all energies, all particles, are enfolded into the orbit of divine reconciliation. The universe itself moves toward its own recognition, and nothing will escape this movement.

Even the most rebellious hearts, the most estranged, the most seemingly lost, are already enfolded within the salvation of God. No being is beyond the reach of the Cross. “Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37). The revelation of

salvation is not contingent on human comprehension or cooperation; it is the natural unfolding of creation toward its own awakening. Every atom, every consciousness, every wave and particle participates in this inexorable movement toward recognition.

Creation itself testifies to this inevitability. Stars rise and fall, rivers flow, mountains stand, winds blow and the cycles of life continue…all singing in the language of salvation already present. Every sound, every color, every motion of life reflects the eternal pulse of God's love. "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork" (Psalm 19:1). To witness creation is to witness the eternal unveiling of salvation in all things.
Everyone is already saved because love has already been revealed as universal.

The Eucharist as Immediate Revelation

The mystery of the Eucharist is the heart of divine immediacy. Upon the altar, time folds into eternity and heaven bends low to touch the earth. The bread and the wine do not merely signify… they are changed. Through the divine Word and Spirit, they are transformed into the very Body and Blood of Christ. "This is my body…this is my blood" (Matthew 26:26, 28). What appears as bread and wine to the senses is, in truth, the living Christ made present…whole, real and entire. The elements are not symbols of His absence, but vessels of His indwelling. In this holy transformation, creation itself reveals its deepest secret…God is not far off but immediately present in matter, sanctifying the world from within.

The Eucharist is not remembrance alone…it is participation in the eternal sacrifice of Calvary, made present here and now. The same Christ who hung upon the Cross, who rose from the tomb, who reigns at the right hand of the Father, becomes truly and substantially present upon the altar. "The cup of blessing which

we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" (1 Corinthians 10:16). In receiving, the faithful touch and taste the very life of God. The sacrifice is not repeated…it is eternally alive, eternally given, eternally new.

This transformation does not negate creation…it fulfills it. The bread of earth becomes the Bread of Heaven…the fruit of the vine becomes the Blood of Life. In this act, the whole cosmos is drawn into divine transfiguration. The altar becomes the axis of the universe, the Cross renewed in mystery. "For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed" (John 6:55). To partake is to enter the pulse of divine being, to commune not with an idea but with the living God who fills all things.

The Real Presence is the revelation of God's universal presence made tangible. What is true in all creation is made manifest here…Christ in all, and all in Christ. The consecrated elements unveil what has always been…the divine life at the core of all being. "He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him" (John 6:56). In the Eucharist, heaven and earth, Creator and creation, are gathered into one Body and one Blood.

To kneel before this mystery is to stand at the center of the universe's reconciliation. The Eucharist is the summit of salvation's immediacy…the eternal made edible, the infinite made intimate. In this sacred feast, the world's redemption is not promised but present. The bread and wine, now the very Body and Blood of Christ, are the unveiling of divine love made flesh for all. Through them, the cosmos itself knows the epicenter of the cosmos…the very salvation that rests at the center of us all. Everyone is already saved because there of the truth of the Eucharist.

The Cosmic Hymn of Salvation

As creation awakens, a cosmic hymn resounds. Galaxies swirl in praise, stars pulsate with radiant love, planets dance in rhythmic adoration and the smallest quark vibrates with eternal resonance. Rivers shimmer with divine light, mountains blaze with silent song, oceans pulse in resurrection rhythm and forests whisper hallelujah. Children laugh, the old weep in wonder, animals stir and the winds of heaven move as messengers of love. “Nations shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising” (Isaiah 60:3). Every heartbeat, every breath, every thought, every gesture becomes a note in this eternal symphony.

The Cross radiates through all things. The wounds of Christ are the blueprint for reconciliation, the map of the universe’s own awakening, the pattern of love eternally impressed upon every being. Every act of mercy, every gesture of justice, every step toward peace, every refusal to harm, manifests the salvation already present. The latent gift enfolded in all beings comes to life in the unfolding recognition of God’s eternal purpose. “For the Son of man has come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10).

Finally, the revelation of salvation will encompass all. Every soul, every particle, every wave, every star, every galaxy, every river, every creature, every life yet to be born will participate in the full awakening of divine love. Nothing will be lost. All wounds, all failures, all despair, all fear, all sin are drawn into the eternal orbit of God’s grace. “Behold, I make all things new” (Revelation 21:5). Nothing can separate creation from divine love. Everyone is already saved, always, already, all. Salvation is present, awakening, inevitable, cosmic, eternal and infinite.

10.29.25

You Can't Follow Jesus and Support the Death Penalty

It's not that complicated…You Can't Follow Jesus and Support the Death Penalty

The question of whether Christians can support the death penalty is not merely political or legal…it is profoundly moral and spiritual. At its heart, it asks what it truly means to follow Jesus. His life and teachings, recorded in the four Gospels, offer a clear and radical vision of justice, mercy and the value of life. When we pay close attention to His words and actions, it becomes impossible to reconcile the deliberate ending of human life with His message.

Keep Watching

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Life is Sacred

From the very beginning of His ministry, Jesus made it clear that every human life is precious. In John 10:10-11, He says, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." Life, in Jesus' vision, is more than mere survival…it is full, abundant and sacred. And yet, the death penalty deliberately ends that life. Can a follower of Christ honestly support a system that permanently takes away what God Himself cherishes?

The parable of the Lost Sheep (Luke 15:3-7) makes this even clearer. A shepherd leaves ninety-nine sheep to search for one that is lost, rejoicing when it is found. The point is not simply about persistence…it is about the infinite value of a single life. If

God celebrates the return of even one lost sheep, who are we to decide that a human being has exhausted their worth?

Jesus consistently lifts up those whom society deems unworthy. In Matthew 9:10-13, He dines with tax collectors and sinners, saying, “They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick… I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” In doing so, He models a justice that restores rather than punishes. Those whom we might consider lost, dangerous or beyond redemption are exactly the ones Jesus calls us to care for.

Mercy Above Judgment

Mercy runs like a thread through every teaching of Jesus. In Matthew 5:7, He declares, “Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.” This is not a suggestion…it is a principle for living. Mercy is not just an abstract virtue…it is an active way of engaging with the world, one that seeks restoration rather than retribution. Capital punishment, by its very nature, eliminates the possibility of mercy and forever closes the door to change.

One of the most striking examples is Jesus’ encounter with the woman caught in adultery (John 8:3-11). The law demanded her death, yet Jesus interrupts the execution…“He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.” One by one, her accusers leave, and Jesus tells her, “Go, and sin no more.” He does not dismiss the wrong done, but He refuses to end her life, showing that mercy does not negate accountability…it elevates it.

Jesus also insists that forgiveness must know no limits. When Peter asks, “Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?” He answers, “I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven” (Matthew 18:21-22). Forgiveness is endless. Execution, in contrast, is absolute. It offers no chance for repentance, no hope for transformation, no room for God’s mercy to work through time.

Nonviolence and Loving Enemies

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus offers a vision of justice that is profoundly counterintuitive. “Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye: but I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also” (Matthew 5:38-39). Justice, in Jesus’ hands, is not about punishment but about transformation. Capital punishment, being irreversible and retributive, stands in direct opposition to this ethic.

And what of enemies? Jesus commands, “But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you” (Matthew 5:44). This is radical. It asks followers to extend love where it seems impossible, to see potential in the lives of those society deems hopeless. Can we claim to follow Christ and then sanction their death? It seems contradictory to the very model He offers.

Even in the face of His own arrest, Jesus models nonviolence. When Peter draws a sword to defend Him, Jesus responds, “Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword” (Matthew 26:52). Violence, even in the service of what seems “just,” is rejected. The death penalty, as a sanctioned act of violence, violates this principle at its core.

Restorative Justice Over Punishment

Jesus presents Himself as the fulfillment of the Law (Matthew 5:17), reframing justice not as punishment but as life giving restoration. The Mosaic Law permitted capital punishment, yet Jesus’ reinterpretation emphasizes mercy, redemption and reconciliation. The cross embodies this ethic…God allows His Son to endure suffering, absorbing violence without retaliating, offering life and redemption to all.

The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Matthew 18:23-35) reinforces this. A king forgives a servant an enormous debt, yet the servant refuses to forgive others and is punished. Jesus' point is clear…mercy is essential to justice. If humans can show mercy, how much more should we leave space for God's restorative work? Execution forecloses the possibility of mercy and denies the transformative potential that Jesus champions.

Similarly, the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) demonstrates God's desire to restore the lost. The son squanders his inheritance and returns home broken, yet his father welcomes him with open arms. This story is more than sentimentality-it is a radical statement about the value of life, the necessity of hope and the power of restoration. Followers of Christ are called to mirror this ethic. Permanent punishment denies the opportunity for reconciliation and healing.

Lifting Up the Marginalized

A Gospel-centered ethic consistently prioritizes the most vulnerable. Jesus heals lepers, forgives sinners and reaches out to tax collectors. Those whom society often ignores or condemns are exactly the ones He lifts up. The death penalty disproportionately affects the poor, marginalized and powerless…those with little means to defend themselves. To support it is to contradict the way Jesus consistently sided with the outcast, the overlooked and the despised.

The Good Shepherd, again in Luke 15:4-7, leaves the ninety-nine to seek the lost. Every single life is worth seeking, worth saving, worth celebrating. Execution, by contrast, ends the pursuit before it has a chance to succeed. This ethic calls us to seek restoration, not retribution.

Conclusion: You Can't Follow Jesus and Support the Death Penalty.

The teachings of Jesus, as recorded in the Gospels, present a radical and uncompromising vision of life, mercy and justice. From the parables of the Lost Sheep and the Prodigal Son to the Sermon on the Mount, He repeatedly emphasizes the sacredness of each human life, the necessity of mercy and the call to love even those whom society deems unworthy. His actions…whether dining with sinners, forgiving the guilty or refusing to resist violence with violence…demonstrate that true justice is not served by the extinguishing of life, but by its restoration and transformation.

Jesus' ethic challenges all who seek to follow Him to reconsider what it means to uphold justice. It is not a call to passivity, but to an active engagement with the brokenness of the world in ways that reflect God's mercy. Restoration, forgiveness and protection of life are the hallmarks of His Kingdom, and they demand constant reflection and discernment from those who claim to follow Him.

To follow Christ faithfully is to prioritize life over retribution, mercy over vengeance and restoration over punishment. It is to recognize that every person, no matter their past, bears the image of God and carries the possibility of repentance and renewal. Even when confronted with wrongdoing, His teachings call for responses that preserve life and open space for transformation rather than permanently ending it.

In meditating on the life and words of Jesus, one is confronted with a profound question…How can we embody the mercy, love and restorative justice He models in a world that often demands retribution? While the challenges are real and the weight of sin is heavy, the Gospel consistently points toward a vision of justice that is life-giving, hope-filled and centered on God's boundless compassion. The ethical and spiritual challenge of following Jesus is therefore not only to resist vengeance in its most extreme forms, but to actively seek ways to bring healing, reconciliation

and preservation of life into every encounter with human brokenness.

In the end, the teachings of Jesus do not leave room for complacency. They demand reflection, courage and a willingness to align human judgment with divine mercy. The call is clear… justice in the spirit of Christ is restorative, life-affirming and infinitely patient, holding open the possibility of redemption for every person, even in the face of wrongdoing. The path of mercy may be difficult, but it is the path that aligns with the Gospel, the path that honors life and the path that reflects the heart of God. Put simply, you can't follow Jesus and support the death penalty.

10.30.25

The Case for Clarance Goode: Innocence in Plain Sight

The Case for Clarance Goode's Innocence: A Systemic Failure in Plain Sight

A Triple Murder and a Rush to Judgment

In August 2005 three people…Mitch Thompson, Tara Burchett-Thompson, and 10-year-old Kayla (Kyla) Burchett…were found shot to death inside a small home in rural Oklahoma. The scene was brutal…the kind that leaves a community grasping for meaning and someone to blame. Within days, investigators zeroed in on Clarance Rozell Goode Jr.…a young man with few resources and a reputation that made him an easy target. By fall, he was charged with three counts of first-degree murder and facing the death penalty. His co-defendant Ronald "Bunny" Thompson, Mitch's cousin, quickly turned state's witness in exchange for leniency, and prosecutors declared the case solved. But what appeared to be a swift resolution was in truth a collapse of justice. Beneath the surface of official certainty lay a web of deceit, suppressed evidence, and manipulated testimony that would ultimately send an innocent man to death row.

The Case for Clarance Goode: A Systemic Failure of Justice

The case stands as a profound failure of the criminal justice system. A careful examination of the evidence…particularly newly discovered materials that prosecutors withheld from the defense…reveals serious questions about Goode's guilt and exposes a pattern of misconduct that denied him a fair trial. The constitutional violations are so egregious they undermine any confidence in the verdict itself. What emerges from the recently disclosed documents is not merely a story of procedural error but a deliberate orchestration by law enforcement and prosecutors to

conceal exculpatory evidence…manipulate witness testimony… and secure a conviction against a potentially innocent man.

The Foundation of Injustice: Two Compromised Witnesses

At the heart of Goode's wrongful conviction lies a disturbing reality: the State's case depended entirely on two deeply compromised witnesses whose credibility should have been destroyed at trial. Ronald "Bunny" Thompson, Mitch's cousin and a male co-defendant who turned state's witness, was the only eyewitness to testify. His cousin, Christina "Michelle" Chastain, provided crucial corroborating testimony. Both had overwhelming motives to lie and both gave multiple conflicting versions of events to law enforcement. Yet prosecutors systematically suppressed evidence that would have exposed their unreliability, while law enforcement manipulated the investigation to shield these witnesses from scrutiny. The jury was explicitly instructed that Bunny's testimony alone could not convict Goode unless corroborated and that if they found Chastain to be an accomplice, her testimony likewise required corroboration. These instructions recognized the inherent unreliability of such witnesses. Yet the State proceeded to build its entire case on precisely these two individuals while simultaneously hiding evidence that would have revealed them as calculated liars with their own murderous motives. The prosecution's willingness to stake three death sentences on such compromised testimony speaks to either reckless indifference or deliberate malice…neither of which has any place in the administration of justice.

The Case for Clarance Goode: Concealed Confession and Suppressed Evidence

The withheld evidence is staggering in its significance. Most critically, prosecutors concealed that Bunny had confessed to his wife, Brandy Thompson, that he entered the victims' home with the premeditated intention to kill J.R. Hoffman…one of the

intended targets. This confession directly contradicts Bunny's trial testimony, where he portrayed himself as an unwitting, unwilling participant coerced by his co-defendants. When defense counsel asked Bunny directly whether he went to the house intending to shoot Hoffman, he unequivocally denied it, stating "No sir" when asked if he wanted to get even with Hoffman. This was perjury, and prosecutors knew it. The context makes Bunny's motive crystal clear. On July 26, 2005…exactly one month before the murders…Bunny had been brutally beaten by Mitch Thompson with a metal baseball bat at Hoffman's instigation. The assault was so severe that Bunny suffered a broken rib, was hospitalized, and publicly humiliated. He had every reason to seek revenge. Brandy's suppressed statement reveals that Bunny openly planned retaliation against Hoffman long before the killings.

The prosecution never disclosed Brandy's statement to the defense. It would have proven that Bunny had both motive and premeditation, and that his testimony against Goode was a self-serving fabrication designed to save his own life. Under Brady v. Maryland, the State was constitutionally obligated to disclose this exculpatory evidence. Their failure to do so deprived Goode of the opportunity to impeach Bunny's credibility and present a complete defense.

A Web of Lies: Chastain's Contradictions

If Bunny's testimony was the heart of the State's case, his cousin Michelle Chastain's was its lungs…keeping it breathing through false corroboration. The State portrayed Chastain as a concerned family member who merely repeated what she heard. In reality, she was an active participant in the cover-up who changed her story multiple times depending on what prosecutors needed. Newly revealed notes show that Chastain originally told police she did not know who committed the murders. Later, she claimed Bunny confessed to her. Then she changed her story again to say that both Bunny and Goode admitted involvement. Each shift

coincided with new pressure from investigators. The prosecution concealed these prior inconsistent statements from the defense. Had the jury known that Chastain's story evolved under duress and that she too faced potential charges, her credibility would have evaporated.

Even more troubling is the fact that the prosecution knowingly misled the court about Chastain's motives. Internal memos show that Chastain received leniency in unrelated legal matters after agreeing to testify. This arrangement was never disclosed to the defense or jury. Such concealment violates both the letter and spirit of Giglio v. United States, which requires disclosure of any deal or inducement offered to a government witness.

The Case for Clarance Goode: Police and Prosecutorial Collusion

The misconduct in Goode's case extended far beyond individual acts of suppression. Law enforcement officers worked hand in glove with prosecutors to construct a narrative that fit their assumptions rather than the evidence. Reports were rewritten to omit exculpatory details. Witnesses were coached to align their statements. Critical physical evidence that could have undermined the State's timeline simply vanished. Detectives ignored leads implicating others, including one that suggested Bunny himself fired fatal shots. Instead, they doubled down on a version of events that placed Goode as the ringleader, even though no forensic evidence tied him to the crime scene.

The recently uncovered notes also indicate that prosecutors were fully aware of the inconsistencies in Bunny's statements but decided to "let the jury sort it out" rather than correct perjury. That conscious choice transformed the trial into a charade. When the State becomes complicit in false testimony, the courtroom ceases to be a forum for truth and becomes instead a stage for conviction at any cost.

The Ethical Abyss

The Goode case exposes the ethical abyss at the core of Oklahoma's capital system. Prosecutors are not supposed to win at all costs. They are supposed to seek justice. When they hide confessions, manipulate witnesses, and silence truth, they betray not only the defendant but the public trust itself. Every concealment in this case served a single purpose…to preserve a conviction that the State could no longer justify if the truth were known.

The cooperating co-defendant ultimately pleaded guilty and received a deal that spared him the death penalty; he cooperated with the State in return for that leniency. That arrangement—paired with the State's nondisclosure of critical materials—left Goode facing the death penalty while the key government witness avoided capital exposure.

A Call for Justice

The Constitution promises due process. That promise is meaningless when prosecutors can bury evidence, encourage perjury, and secure death sentences on the testimony of proven liars. Clarance Goode's conviction cannot stand in light of what has come to light. His case demands not only reversal but reflection on how many others sit on death row because the system values finality over truth.

Justice requires more than procedure. It requires courage to confront the wrongs committed in its name. The withheld evidence in Goode's case does more than suggest reasonable doubt…it screams it. The case for Clarance Goode is clear…and the time has come to listen.

10.31.25

The Eucharist Exposes Capital Punishment

Capital Punishment is Exposed by The Eucharist

The Center of Faith

The Eucharist is the center of our faith. The words from Matthew 26:26, 28 echo in us. “This is my body…This is my blood.” In this sacrament we do more than remember. We taste the suffering of Christ. We meet him…living, present and sacrificed. We take into our own bodies the literal body and blood of the God who was executed. The Eucharist exposes capital punishment for what it is…evil.

The Privileged Get It Wrong

But the privileged get it wrong. They shrink the Eucharist into a spiritual boost…as if grace exists just to make them feel better. The altar becomes a mirror for private devotion instead of a table for the salvation of the world. This view is not just incomplete. It is blasphemy. It survives only by ignoring what Jesus actually said.

Turn to Matthew 25:36, “I was in prison, and you visited me.” Jesus does not hedge. Judgment will hinge on how we treat the oppressed…the hungry, the sick, the imprisoned. He leaves no room for abstraction. The prisoner is not a symbol of Christ. The prisoner is Christ.

Here lies the paradox. We proclaim Christ’s real presence in bread and wine yet we deny his equally real presence in the cells of rapists, murderers and those we call “the worst of the worst.” If Jesus meant what he said, then when we receive the Eucharist we partake in the body and blood of those we have imprisoned.

Not because I say so. Not because tradition says so. But because Jesus said so.

We must remember…our Lord was one of them. The Eucharist is an encounter with a man legally condemned and publicly executed. The Cross matters not because the Church decreed it but because Christ bore it in flesh.

The Eucharist Exposes Capital Punishment

If you want to find Christ now, do not look only to the past. Look to the execution chambers of the present. That is where the fullness of the Eucharist is revealed…scandalous, raw, real.

Since the U.S. Supreme Court's 2022 decision in Ramirez v. Collier, condemned prisoners can have clergy present at their executions. Since then, I have stood with the condemned more than anyone else in the country…eleven times, in five states. Each time it's a sacrament. The body and blood become real. The presence calls…not to comfort but to solidarity.

This is not sacralizing violence. It is stripping it bare. Standing at the foot of the modern cross and refusing to look away. Seeing that the Eucharist exposes capital punishment…not because executions are holy but because Christ refuses to be absent from suffering.

The Executed Christ : How The Eucharist Exposes Capital Punishment

One cannot understand the Eucharist until they have met the executed Christ.

Last Thursday, I stood with Anthony Boyd as he faced his final hours. The chamber was heavy…alive with pain. Fear, grief and prayer hung in the air. Anthony's eyes met mine…calm, alert,

unbearably present. He made small gestures, subtle signals and already the sacrament was happening.

Then the procedure began. His body betrayed nothing of peace. Limbs jerked. Muscles convulsed. His chest heaved violently. Gasping. Every breath torn, frantic. Skin flushed, contorted. Veins bulged. Hands and arms shook uncontrollably. Tremors ran through his shoulders, legs, torso. Sweat and saliva slicked his face. Tiny spasms crawled across every part of him. The gurney shook beneath him. Every motion grotesque, impossible to look away from.

He fought the inevitability and yet the Eucharist was undeniable. Every twitch, every gasp, every tremor became part of the sacrament. The body broken. Blood poured out. Christ's presence…scandalous, raw, unavoidable…was in that chamber. This is what it means for the body to be broken, for blood to be poured out.
This is what it means to encounter Christ where the world has abandoned him.

And here is the truth the Church too often forgets. The Eucharist is not clean. It is prison food. It is the body of one on death row. It is Christ…the filthy prisoner…being consumed.
Every time we eat and drink while failing to resist executions we devour Christ even as we crucify him again. We join the mob. We drive the nails ourselves.

The False Sacrament of Death : The Eucharist Exposes Capital Punishment

Every execution is a crucifixion. Every injection, every suffocation, every bullet, every convulsion is Christ's body broken again.

The bread and wine are not private tokens of comfort. They are the body and blood of the condemned. They are the presence of Christ where the world has turned away.

The Eucharist leaves no room for the death penalty. At God's table all are welcome. But executions exclude. They say "You are beyond forgiveness. You do not deserve to live."
That is the opposite of communion. That is the opposite of Christ.

Executions are a false sacrament…an anti-Eucharist. They lift up a victim, shed blood in the name of "justice" and mimic liturgy. But it is a demonic adulation of death.

The Eucharist Demands Resistance

The Eucharist forces a choice.
You cannot stand at both tables.
You cannot take the bread of life while blessing the bread of death.
You cannot sip the cup of mercy while justifying the blood of vengeance.

One feast is from Christ. The other feast is from the executioner.

Last Thursday, as I watched Anthony Boyd convulse…as I felt the weight of the sacrament in that chamber…I understood this truth in my bones.
To receive the Eucharist and do nothing to stop executions is to participate in the crucifixion all over again.

The body and blood of Christ demand witness. They demand resistance.
The Eucharist exposes capital punishment…revealing its cruelty, its blasphemy and its contradiction of everything Christ lived and died for.

Christ lives in the execution chambers…the Golgothas of our age.
If we do not see him there, if we do not respond, then the Eucharist that we take is nothing but empty ritual.

10.31.25

The Death Penalty at Sea : A Moral Cataclysm

Blowing Up Suspected Drug Traffickers: The Death Penalty at Sea

In recent weeks our government has been blowing up suspected drug traffickers at sea…and not quietly. They have shared images and videos as if destruction itself were proof of justice. This is not protection or prevention…it is The Death Penalty at Sea. It is state-sanctioned killing without trial…without defense…without remorse. On land, even capital punishment faces courts, appeals and scrutiny. At sea, there is no law…only judgment delivered through fire. Suspicion alone now carries the weight of a sentence…and that sentence is death. When governments turn suspicion into justification for execution, they strip away the principles that give justice meaning. The death penalty is already the gravest power a state can claim…and using it at sea without trial or reflection is to turn governance into vengeance. Every explosion becomes a statement that might makes right…and that the value of a human life depends on convenience.

Justice Abandoned and The Death Penalty at Sea

The foundation of justice is due process. Every person has the right to be heard…to face evidence…to have a chance at defense. Blowing up a vessel based on suspicion destroys those rights before they can even be spoken. This is not an investigation…it is a verdict detonated on impact. There is no judge…no jury…no appeals. The Death Penalty at Sea replaces deliberation with destruction and proof with power. Justice is not served…it is silenced. Publicly celebrating these explosions deepens the moral collapse. Death becomes display…execution becomes theater. The moment we turn killing into performance, we teach that authority is measured by destruction. When death becomes spectacle, conscience becomes irrelevant.

Lives Exposed to The Death Penalty at Sea

Each explosion at sea is an execution carried out in isolation. Those on board may be traffickers…or they may be sailors, migrants or bystanders. The sea leaves no certainty and no survivors to tell the truth. Precision is a myth…and innocence is collateral. To destroy a vessel is to gamble with human lives that can never be restored. The Death Penalty at Sea does not target individuals…it consumes everyone within reach. Each detonation sends a message that some lives are disposable…and that mistakes are acceptable if they serve the image of control. This is moral failure disguised as strength.

Disproportionate, Irreversible Punishment and The Death Penalty at Sea

The death penalty is irreversible…and when imposed without trial it is absolute moral ruin. Destroying a boat delivers death before truth can be known. Even if guilt exists, the punishment is excessive beyond reason. On land, debates about execution involve evidence, proportionality and time for reflection. At sea there is no debate…only a split-second decision to erase a life. The Death Penalty at Sea is punishment without proof and destruction without remorse. It teaches that killing is easier than accountability. When the state claims this power, it abandons its duty to protect and becomes the very thing it condemns.

Collateral Damage as Part of the Sentence

An execution at sea does not end with the blast. Families lose sons and fathers who may have never committed a crime. Coastal communities watch as fear replaces trust and livelihoods vanish with each explosion. Fishermen are mistaken for smugglers… boats for threats. Violence spreads beyond the sea, staining the land with silence and grief. Each detonation widens the distance between government and people. What begins as a campaign against crime becomes an assault on humanity itself. When the

state embraces destruction as justice, every citizen becomes vulnerable to suspicion.

The Death Penalty at Sea as a Spectacle of State-Sanctioned Killing

Publicizing these attacks corrodes the very idea of justice. When governments broadcast explosions as triumphs, they transform horror into entertainment. Death becomes proof of control…a display of dominance dressed as virtue. Each image teaches that killing is a form of governance. The Death Penalty at Sea turns the state into both executioner and performer. This is not authority…it is moral collapse recorded and replayed for applause.

The Illusion of Authority

The Death Penalty at Sea confuses power with justice. True authority requires restraint, accountability and reverence for life. Destroying boats on suspicion alone reveals the opposite…a fear of weakness disguised as strength. When leaders celebrate these deaths, they mistake destruction for order and terror for stability. Each explosion is a confession that the state no longer trusts its own laws. Authority that kills without trial is not justice…it is tyranny with better branding.

Alternatives That Uphold Justice

There are ways to confront crime without abandoning morality. Arrests, coordinated seizures and prosecution can dismantle trafficking networks while preserving human life. Intelligence and cooperation can achieve what explosives never can…lasting justice rooted in truth. Executions at sea are a shortcut that sacrifices conscience for spectacle. It erodes trust, invites abuse and leaves nations morally adrift. Ending this practice is not weakness…it is the recovery of humanity.

The Moral Imperative

Executions at sea amplify every flaw of the death penalty…the absence of oversight, the certainty of error, the finality of death. Treating explosions as justice erases centuries of moral progress. The Death Penalty at Sea is not protection…it is desecration. Each detonation signals that the state no longer serves life but rules through fear. True justice demands restraint, humility and reverence for human dignity. Governments must reject this theater of destruction…must choose life over spectacle. Otherwise suspicion will become law…and the ocean will remain a graveyard of conscience.

11.1.25

I Will Lose Nothing: The Eternal Explosion of Restoration

"I Will Lose Nothing"

"All those the Father gives me will come to me. Anyone who comes to me, I will never reject. I did not come to do my own will, but the will of the one who sent me. And this is the will of the Father who sent me: that I should not lose a single person He has given me, but that I should raise them all to life on the last day. Everyone who sees the Son and believes in him will have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day." –John 6:37-40

The Gravity of Mercy

Some words do not speak; they move. They ripple, they bend, they insist. John 6:37-40 is such a word.

"All that the Father gives me will come to me." Not might, not perhaps, not someday…WILL. The universe itself leans toward this truth. Even the stars, the rivers, and the planets bend. Even the broken hearts, the hidden souls, the fragments scattered across the years lean toward home…that place where we are from.

Christ does not offer a possibility. He unveils certainty. The Father gives. The Son receives. The Spirit, quiet and relentless, ensures that nothing…nothing, no fragment, no shadow… remains lost. Even death itself, even the silence of finality, is folded into mercy's eternal rhythm. "I Will Lose Nothing" echoes in every corner of creation.

From a theological perspective, this passage underscores the inexhaustible reach of divine love…the gift of the Father

establishes both the initiative of grace and the inevitability of its fulfillment.

The Descent

“I have come down from heaven.” Not to inspect. Not to pass judgment. Not to observe from afar. To descend fully. To take upon Himself the entire weight of creation, the fragility of human hearts, the darkness of despair. Christ descends so that He might restore all.

God does not hover. God enters. God bears what we cannot. Every grief, every terror, every hidden fear, every despairing whisper, every shadow of our humanity…He carries it. He carries it fully. Nothing human is foreign. Nothing mortal is unvisited. The Incarnation is not a glance…it is immersion. It’s marrow, sinew, bone, breath. And if He descends to the deepest depths, then even the depths themselves belong to Him. Even the places we think irredeemable. Even the places that human law dares not touch.

“I Will Lose Nothing”: The Refusal

“Whoever comes to me I will never drive away.” The first exile ends here. The gate swings open. The wandering ends.

The Son does not rest until every soul is held. Nothing is beyond reach. Nothing is too distant. Fear of rejection is mortal. It does not exist in the heart of God. Mercy bends. Mercy reaches. Mercy gathers. Nothing can escape it. Nothing.

Even in the silence of the condemned, even in the shadow of despair, nothing is left behind. The Word does not let go. The Word presses closer. The Word draws near. The Word lifts. The Word does not hold grace back. Every fragment spoken of in this promise is reclaimed in the promise of Jesus…“I Will Lose Nothing.”

The Refusal of Loss

“This is the will of Him who sent me: that I should lose nothing.” The syllables hum with inevitability. The Shepherd does not rest while one voice remains unheard. Love is relentless. It is absolute. It is omnipotent.

The world itself is a story of reclamation. What is broken will be restored. What is lost will rise. Even what we fear beyond hope, beyond reckoning, beyond the knowledge of men, is already being drawn toward light. Nothing is beyond the reach of mercy.

The Fire That Heals

Judgment exists, but it is fire that purifies, not punishment that destroys. What burns is not the soul…but hardness, illusion, pride, fear, separation. What emerges is clarity. What emerges is recognition. What emerges is restored life.

Even resistance, even despair, even terror itself bends under the heat. Even the shadows, even the silence, even the chains of human law, are instruments in the symphony of ascent. The fire lifts. The fire heals. The fire gathers.

“I Will Lose Nothing”: The Rising

I have seen it many times. I stand in the cold steel of the execution chamber. The fluorescent lights hum faintly overhead, and the air presses down with the weight of human finality. I have just witnessed another life end, another verdict passed, another soul dismissed…by law, by fear, by judgment.

And then it happens. One by one, my guys…some I had long feared lost…begin to rise. They rise radiant, luminous. Their chains melt into light. Their faces glow with an impossible serenity, eyes bright with peace, with joy, with the certainty of being held.

I cannot move. I cannot speak. The steel of the chamber, the antiseptic chill, the shadows of death…all dissolve in the brilliance of life restored.

Then, the person who has just been executed…just banished from the world…pauses at the threshold. Hesitant. Trembling. And then he steps forward. In an explosion of radiant light…his body transforms into eternal grace…and he joins them.

The chain of light stretches from earth to heaven. Each soul added, each hand lifted, each voice rising. The impossible becomes real. No one left behind. No one lost. The words of John 6 whisper through the chamber, alive and undeniable…All that the Father gives me will come to me. “I Will Lose Nothing.” “I will raise them up.”

This vision exemplifies the salvific breadth of divine providence…the notion that God’s will, while mysterious, is invariably restorative, embracing all who are drawn by grace.

The Rising of the World

“I will raise them up on the last day.” Not some. Not the chosen few. All. Every fragment of life, every hidden spark, every shadowed soul, every forgotten story, every prisoner condemned and ignored…all will rise.

The last day is not a threat. It is a horizon. Every fragment of creation moves toward it. Every atom bends toward the light. Even silence becomes a note in the symphony of resurrection. Even the last shadow becomes light.

“I Will Lose Nothing”: The Seeing

“This is the will of my Father: that everyone who sees the Son and believes may have eternal life.” To see is to awaken. To believe is to remember. The soul learns through time, through

suffering, through patience, until sight becomes recognition, until the heart bends to love itself.

The vision I have witnessed in the chamber is this teaching in motion. Seeing mercy in motion, seeing the condemned rise radiant, is seeing the logic of God…implacable, radiant, unstoppable…working where human judgment declares grace to be impossible. This is the moment when one understands Jesus' cry… "I Will Lose Nothing."

The Will

The will of the Father is single, burning, absolute. Mercy and justice are not opposed…they are one movement…the reclamation of everything made.

What began in love will return in love. Nothing lost. Nothing abandoned. Every fragment gathered. Every story restored. What creation began in joy, it will finish in joy.

The Gospel Without Remainder

All that the Father gives me will come to me. "I Will Lose Nothing". I will raise them up on the last day.

These are not metaphors. They are the blueprint of reality. The gospel is not selective. It is the reclaiming of every soul, every fragment, every story. Even what seems utterly consumed…the chamber, the chains, the sentence…cannot interrupt the movement of God's will. Everything God loves returns. Nothing is left behind.

"I Will Lose Nothing": The Last Word

When sermons fade, when theology exhausts its voice, when the world lies silent, one promise endures…"I Will Lose Nothing."

It bends time. It bends heaven and earth. It gathers the living and the dead. It will not rest until all are restored.

And when the final hour comes, when every life is reunited with light, when every name is spoken back into being, Christ will stand at the center of creation and whisper the last, eternal word of the gospel…

“Behold, I have lost nothing.”

11.2.25

Why Abolitionists Must Stand for Everyone on Death Row

No Exceptions: Abolitionists Must Stand for Everyone

Abolitionists (the abolitionist movement) hemorrhages its power every time it reaches for respectability. We parade the innocent man freed by DNA evidence. We spotlight the battered woman who finally fought back. We tell the redemption stories, the ones with tears and transformation and a narrative arc that makes mercy look like common sense. We've become experts at packaging our cause in whatever form makes comfortable people comfortable.

This is not abolition. This is public relations.

If we believe the death penalty itself is the problem…if we mean that…then there can be no exceptions. No crime too heinous, no person too monstrous, no public outcry loud enough to justify what the state does in our name. Abolition means standing for everyone the state wants to kill, especially the ones we'd rather not defend. Especially the ones whose humanity we have to fight hard to even see.

Mercy Without Measure: Abolitionists Must Embody Mercy

Fighting for sympathetic defendants is easy. It costs us nothing foxr abolitionists to say, "This one shouldn't die because they're innocent" or "They've changed." Those arguments don't challenge the death penalty…they reinforce it. They concede that execution is acceptable if only we could aim it properly, kill the right people or get the moral calculus correct.

But the system cannot be aimed correctly because the system itself is the violence. It is designed to kill the powerless while comforting the powerful. It executes the poor to reassure the

comfortable. It kills the broken to let the rest of us pretend we have control over chaos. Every time we concede that some people "deserve" to die, we hand the state a blank check and the state will always cash it on the bodies of those with the least power to resist.

The minute you accept that anyone deserves execution, you've lost. Because "deserving" is a story we tell ourselves about who has value and who doesn't…and that story is always written by the people who will never find themselves on death row.

The Moral Test of Consistency

The abolitionist claim is not that some executions are mistakes. It's that all executions are atrocities. The death penalty is not broken…it is functioning exactly as designed…as a tool of control, vengeance dressed in the language of justice and state power at its most naked and brutal.

Consistency is everything. The moment we carve out exceptions…this crime too vicious, that person too dangerous… we begin thinking like executioners. We adopt their taxonomy of human worth. We sort lives into columns…savable or unsavable, innocent or guilty, redeemable or disposable.

You cannot build a moral framework on the foundation of murder. You cannot make state killing humane. The gas chamber, the electric chair, the lethal injection gurney…these are not different acts, just different aesthetics for the same violence. And every time the state kills, it teaches the same lesson…that some human beings are killable, that vengeance is virtuous and that fear is an acceptable basis for policy.

What Being an Abolitionist Really Means

Abolition is not mercy. It is not softness. It is the hardest political commitment there is…the refusal to abandon anyone to the

machinery of death, even when every instinct screams to let them go.

We live in a society addicted to the fantasy that killing solves killing. We are told that execution brings closure, that death balances the scales and that blood washes away blood. This is a lie we tell ourselves because the truth is unbearable…violence does not resolve violence. It metastasizes. Each execution radiates outward, touching families, communities, everyone forced to carry the knowledge of what was done in their name. It doesn't heal trauma…it creates more of it.

To be an abolitionist is to reject that lie completely. It is to face the machinery…the restraints, the chemicals, the observers behind glass…and name it for what it is…ritual murder masquerading as justice. It is to say that nothing…no crime and no vengeance…can make this right.

The Trap of the "Good Victim": Abolitionists' Favorite Poison

The state wants us cautious. It wants sbolitionists to hedge, to say "We just need to make sure we don't execute the innocent." Because that argument doesn't threaten the death penalty…it perfects it. It says the problem is accuracy, not the killing itself. It turns abolition into a quality control issue.

This is how the death penalty survives…by convincing even its opponents that it could work if we just reformed it enough. But you cannot reform an execution. A "humane" killing is still a killing. An error-free death penalty is still a death penalty. The only way to end this is to refuse the premise entirely…to stop pretending that any life is expendable for the sake of order.

When we insist on standing for everyone…when we defend the guilty as fiercely as the innocent…we expose what the death penalty really is…not justice but a ritual of power, a performance

in which the state demonstrates who matters and who doesn't, whose suffering counts and whose life can be erased.

The Solidarity of the Condemned

To oppose the death penalty…to be abolitionists…is to stand with the condemned not because they are innocent or reformed or sympathetic, but because they are human. Full stop. Every person on death row is the sum of a thousand systemic failures… poverty, racism, untreated trauma and violence inherited across generations. These are not excuses. They are context. And context matters when we decide whether to kill or to reckon with our collective responsibility.

Solidarity means refusing to let anyone be thrown away. It means visiting the prisons, learning the names, telling the stories that don't make us feel good. It means saying to the person the world has given up on… You still belong to us. Your life still has irreducible worth.

We cannot heal the world by eliminating the people we've broken. We cannot teach that life is sacred by destroying it. Defending the condemned is not about excusing their actions… it's about insisting that even at their worst, they remain part of the human community and we do not kill our own.

The Heartbeat of Abolitionists

The death penalty survives on fear. Fear of chaos, of violence, of wounds that can never close. Abolition demands that we face that fear and still choose life. It demands that abolitionists build something infinitely harder than punishment…accountability without brutality, safety without slaughter and justice that does not require blood.

The day we stop fighting only for the innocent is the day abolition becomes real. Because abolition is not about improving

the system…it's about destroying its logic entirely. It's about dismantling the idea that any human being is disposable, that any crime justifies state murder and that vengeance is indistinguishable from justice.

Abolition is the work of reclaiming our humanity from the grip of retribution. It is the refusal to let fear and rage dictate who lives and who dies. It is the discipline of saying that no one…no one…is beyond the reach of our solidarity.

If we only stand for the innocent, we have already lost. But if we stand for everyone…for the guilty, the broken and the ones we don't want to defend…then we might finally become the kind of people who deserve the ability to use the word "abolitionist."

11.3.25

A Prayer of Mercy for Tremane Wood

A Prayer for Tremane Wood

O God of mercy
O God who bends close to the suffering and the condemned
we lift before You this hour Tremane Wood
Your child, Your creation, Your beloved.
You have known him since before he took his first breath.
You have seen his struggles, his mistakes, his growth and his faith.
You have been near through years of waiting
through nights filled with fear and through moments of hope.
Now as he stands before a time of great uncertainty
we ask You to let Your mercy rise and speak through the hearts of those who will decide his future.

God, You know how much the world needs mercy.
We live in a land that often forgets that punishment does not heal that death does not bring peace.
We pray that Your Spirit will move like wind through every room where Tremane Wood's fate is considered.
Let compassion replace hardness.
Let understanding overcome judgment.
Let the desire for life be stronger than the desire for vengeance.
Let the light of Your love guide every thought and every choice.
Let all who show mercy now be shown mercy in return,
so that Your grace may multiply through this moment and beyond.

Hold Tremane Wood close, Lord.
In this waiting time give him strength to face each day.
Let him feel Your presence in the quiet of the cell

in the prayers whispered by those who care for him
in the letters, the visits, the small signs of love that remind him he is not alone.
Keep his heart steady, his mind clear and his spirit open to Your grace.
If he feels despair lift him.
If he feels forgotten remind him that You never forget.
If fear surrounds him let Your peace be stronger still.

We pray for every person who will speak or listen in the days ahead.
Let truth be heard.
Let compassion have the final word.
Let the dignity of Tremane Wood's life be recognized as sacred
not because of what he has done or left undone
but because he bears Your image.
Give courage to those who advocate for him
and give wisdom to those who hold authority over him.
Let them see through the lens of Your mercy.
Let their hearts be softened by the knowledge that all life belongs to You.

God of justice and tenderness
we pray not only for Tremane Wood but for all whose lives are bound up in his story.
We pray for his family
for those who love him and carry the heavy ache of uncertainty.
Strengthen them, Lord.
Let them feel Your arms around them when the world seems too harsh.
Let them find peace even in the midst of waiting.
May their love remain steadfast
and may it be a reflection of Your own unending love.

We pray too for the family of the one whose life was lost.
Their grief runs deep and their wounds are real.
Meet them in that pain, O God.

Surround them with compassion that does not fade.
Help them to find paths of healing that do not depend on another's suffering.
Let Your grace touch the places in their hearts where anger and sorrow still dwell.
May they one day find rest in Your peace
knowing that love not death is what truly heals.

We pray for all who work within the system of punishment and power
for the officers and officials, the judges, the advocates
the unseen hands that carry out the will of the state.
Protect their souls from the burden of violence.
Open their eyes to the human cost of what they are asked to do.
Let mercy enter their hearts like light through a locked window.
Even in the hardest hearts let the possibility of compassion take root and grow.

Holy Spirit, we ask that You breathe Your peace into Tremane Wood's spirit.
Let him rest in the knowledge that You hold his life in Your hands.
Let every moment be filled with Your strength and Your calm.
Even in the face of fear let him find trust.
Even in the shadow of death let him feel the warmth of Your light.
Remind him that he is surrounded by people who are praying
people who believe in mercy
people who refuse to let his name be forgotten.
Let him know that Your love endures longer than any sentence and deeper than any prison.

We remember, O Lord, that Your Son also faced the judgment of the state.
He too was sentenced, mocked and led away to die.
You were with Him through it all.
You were in His pain, His surrender and His final breath.

And when the world thought all was finished
You revealed that death does not have the last word.
Do the same now, Lord.
Let Your resurrection power move in this situation.
Let new life rise where despair has settled.
Let mercy speak louder than the machinery of death.

We pray for the people of Oklahoma
for citizens, leaders and communities who must decide what kind of justice they will uphold.
Let the spirit of compassion awaken across the land.
Let hearts remember that every person condemned to die is still someone's child
still capable of change
still held in Your love.
Turn this moment into a witness for life.
Let it show the world that mercy is stronger than fear.

God of life let Your will be mercy.
Let Your will be healing.
Let Your will be peace.
We place Tremane Wood into Your hands.
We place those who judge him into Your hands.
We place ourselves there too asking that You shape us into
people who believe in redemption
who defend the dignity of every life
who speak truth even when it is costly.

When the decision is made, Lord
let it reflect Your heart.
Let mercy prevail.
Let the world see in this moment a sign that love still has power to change things.
And if sorrow comes let it not destroy hope.
Let every tear become a seed of justice
so that future generations may live in a world that no longer kills in the name of the law.

We entrust Tremane Wood to You, O God of compassion.
Be near to him this hour and in the days to come.
Hold him in Your grace
and let Your mercy surround him like a river that cannot be stopped.
Let every prayer spoken for him become part of the work You are doing to heal this broken world.

In the name of the One who was condemned and yet rose again
Jesus Christ, our Redeemer and our peace
Amen.

11.4.25

Luigi Mangione Case Demands Justice, Not Execution

Two Forms of Violence, One Path to Justice

On December 4, 2024, Luigi Mangione allegedly shot Brian Thompson outside a Manhattan hotel in Manhattan. Surveillance cameras captured the event and cartridge cases at the scene were inscribed with the words “delay,” “deny” and “depose.” Shortly thereafter, Attorney General Pam Bondi announced that federal prosecutors had been directed to seek the death penalty in the case.

But here is what the cameras did not show…the decades of deaths that happened quietly in hospital rooms and living rooms across our country as insurance companies, including the one Thompson led, denied care that could have saved lives. These deaths have no footage. No manifests. No criminal charges. Yet they are just as real.

Much of the national conversation has focused on whether Mangione should face the death penalty. That is the wrong question. The right question is what kind of justice responds to both forms of violence…the bullet and the denial letter…without creating more suffering. The answer is not execution. The answer is systemic reform paired with accountability. Anything less is a distraction from the justice we all need.

The Violence We Choose Not to See

Brian Thompson served as CEO of UnitedHealthcare, the insurance arm of UnitedHealth Group, from April 2021 until his death in December 2024. During his tenure, UnitedHealthcare covered more than 49 million Americans and generated roughly $281 billion in revenue in 2023. Thompson’s total compensation that year was approximately $10.2 million,

including salary, stock and option awards and non-equity incentive pay.

In 2024, the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations issued a report criticizing major Medicare Advantage insurers, including UnitedHealthcare, Humana and CVS, for allegedly using algorithmic tools to deny or limit post-acute care claims, prioritizing profits over patient needs. But numbers alone cannot convey what denial means. Let me be specific with real cases.

Jeff Hall of Estero, Florida, became paralyzed from the neck down after developing Guillain-Barré Syndrome in February 2024. His Florida Blue insurance plan capped the number of days he could remain in acute rehabilitation. After being forced to step down to a lower-level nursing facility, his health deteriorated so rapidly within six days that he was sent to the emergency room, placed on a ventilator and required a second tracheostomy. Hall believes the coverage limits set his recovery back by months.

Eric Tennant, a 58-year-old safety instructor from West Virginia, was diagnosed with stage 4 bile duct cancer that spread to his bones. His oncologist recommended histotripsy, a noninvasive procedure using targeted ultrasound waves to destroy liver tumors that could extend his life and reduce his need for grueling chemotherapy. His insurance denied the treatment.

Social media accounts documented further examples. One person wrote that Thompson’s company put multiple family members in debt they would be paying for the rest of their lives and denied care for an uncle which led to his death. Another remembered the day United Healthcare denied a one-night hospital stay for a twelve-year-old child as medically unnecessary following heart repair surgery.

Of course, these are people who survived to tell the tale. Imagine all who did not. These are not abstractions. These are slow deaths

by spreadsheet. They are legal. They are profitable. And they are continuous.

Luigi Mangione : Reported Motive

As of December 2024, investigators report that Luigi Mangione's alleged motive was ill will toward the health insurance industry. According to a diary released by the prosecution, he left behind a handwritten document criticizing the healthcare system and health insurance companies. While any use of violence is wrong, his reported concerns reflect a broader problem…the healthcare system extracts wealth from human suffering. It creates algorithmic harm that is systematic, predictable and designed to maximize profit at the expense of patient well being. This type of harm contributes to more deaths each year than any mass shooter but happens quietly, behind terms like "prior authorization" and "out of network coverage."

Why the Death Penalty Is a Distraction

Bondi's announcement framed the shooting as premeditated and called for the death penalty. The call for execution satisfies something primal in us…the desire to see evil punished, to watch justice served visibly and finally. But execution accomplishes nothing except spectacle. It does not bring Brian Thompson back. It does not prevent the next act of rage fueled violence. It does not address the despair that breeds in a system where people feel powerless. Most importantly, it lets us avoid the harder conversation about accountability for the systemic violence that created the conditions for this incident.

Consider what executing Mangione would communicate…that America takes murder seriously when it's committed by an individual with a gun, but not when it is committed by a corporation with a claims processing algorithm. That a CEO's life matters, but Jeff Hall's, Eric Tennant's and countless others whose stories were never told do not. That we will mobilize the

full force of federal law to punish one alleged killer, but will not lift a finger to hold accountable systems that harm tens of thousands of patients annually. This is not justice. This is theater.

The Case Against Luigi Mangione

Luigi Mangione faces serious criminal charges and, if convicted, will face severe punishment. According to prosecutors, he reportedly arrived in New York City on November 24, 2024, more than a week before the shooting, and allegedly conducted reconnaissance near Thompson's hotel. On December 4, 2024, he is reported to have positioned himself between two cars on West 54th Street and, as Thompson passed by, fired several gunshots from a 9mm pistol, resulting in Thompson's death.

Killing an individual does not fix a system. It creates suffering for Thompson's family, his children, his loved ones…people who had nothing to do with corporate policy. If Mangione intended to reform healthcare, the reported actions have failed. They did not change a single policy…at least in the short term. They only elevated the industry's profile and created trauma for reformers trying to advocate for systemic change…who are now concerned that their work is going to be destroyed by the reckless actions of one.

Mangione was indicted by a Manhattan grand jury on eleven counts, including one count of murder in the first degree, which alleges he killed the executive in furtherance of an act of terrorism, defined as an intent to intimidate or coerce the civilian population or a government unit. *The terrorism charge was ultimately dropped. Mangione was also indicted on a plethora of federal charges as well (which is where the death sentence could possibly come from…since the State of New York does not have the death penalty). Life imprisonment, if convicted, is the appropriate response. It removes a dangerous individual from society. It punishes severely. It satisfies accountability while avoiding the moral complications of state sanctioned killing.

The prosecution's case also highlights that Mangione reportedly believed the only way to achieve accountability was through violence. He appears to have thought the system was so indifferent to suffering that murder was rational. He was wrong about the method. But his reported beliefs point to systemic failings that demand attention.

The Accountability We Owe

If Luigi Mangione is executed, violence is answered with violence. Retribution may be satisfied, but the conditions that made Thompson's death feel like justice to a desperate individual remain unaddressed. True justice requires responding to both forms of violence…individual murder and systemic harm through denial of care. It requires holding Mangione accountable, if convicted, and the healthcare industry accountable for ongoing systemic harm.

Healthcare reform worthy of this moment must include mandating public disclosure of denial rates. Every insurance company should publish, by diagnosis and treatment type, their approval and denial rates. Sunlight is the best disinfectant. We need independent medical review boards that take denial appeals out of the hands of insurance companies and establish state or federal boards of practicing physicians, not insurance employees, to review disputed denials.

We should criminalize fraudulent denials. If an insurance company denies a claim that an independent review later determines was medically necessary and the denial leads to death or serious harm, executives should face criminal liability. Administrative costs should be capped so that insurance companies spend at least 85% of premium revenue on actual healthcare, with administrative costs capped at 15%.

A victims' compensation fund should be established so that families who can demonstrate that insurance denials led to

preventable death or serious harm have access to compensation from a mandatory fund funded by insurers based on denial rates. Finally, we must ban AI-driven denials without human review. Any AI-assisted denial must be reviewed by a licensed physician who examines patient records and explains, in writing, why care is refused.

These reforms are not symbolic. They save lives. They restore accountability. They address the despair that reportedly motivated Mangione's actions. They demonstrate that society takes all forms of violence seriously, not just the ones captured on camera.

The Precedent We Set

Every decision in a case like this sends a message.

If Luigi Mangione is executed and healthcare remains unchanged, the message is clear…individual violence against executives is punished with death, but corporate harm is tolerated as business. Rage at the system may be understandable…but suffering is the only option.

If Luigi Mangione is imprisoned and healthcare reform pursued, the message is different…violence is unacceptable regardless of the perpetrator. Individuals who kill are punished. Systems that harm patients are reformed. Accountability is universal…and justice addresses all forms of harm.

The first scenario breeds more violence. The second prevents it. Mangione is accused of murder and, if convicted, will spend the rest of his life in prison. But the conversation should not end at sentencing. Treating the reported crime as isolated rather than a symptom of systemic failure guarantees others may reach the same despair driven choices.

Mercy, Justice and the Path Forward

Mercy is not weakness. It is the strength to resist the easy answer. The death penalty offers finality but no path forward. Life imprisonment preserves the possibility of integrity. It says we will not respond to killing by killing.

Justice requires addressing both sides of the violence equation. We must hold Luigi Mangione accountable if convicted and the healthcare industry accountable for taking thousands of lives. This is not a choice between punishing Mangione or reforming healthcare. It is a demand to do both. Anything less is cowardice disguised as justice.

What We Choose: Death Penalty for Luigi Mangione?

Brian Thompson is dead. If convicted, Luigi Mangione will face the consequences of the legal system. These facts cannot change. Luigi Mangione does not deserve the death penalty. Neither did Brian Thompson. Thompson did not deserve to be ambushed outside a hotel. He was a human being, a father, a husband, a person whose life mattered. His death was tragic and unjustifiable.

The base line is simple…no one deserves to die for corporate decisions, personal rage or state retribution. Not the patients denied care like Jeff Hall and Eric Tennant. Not the thousands who will die from denied claims this year. Not Thompson. Not Mangione.

The question is whether society has the courage to pursue real justice…responding to all violence, not just the violence that makes headlines.

So, let us reject the false comfort of revenge and recognize that violence only begets more violence. True justice does not replicate the harm it condemns. It safeguards communities, protects the vulnerable and addresses the root causes of suffering. In ethically reflecting on the lives of both Brian

Thompson and Luigi Mangione, we affirm that no one is beyond accountability and no one is beyond humanity. Let us choose policies that prevent death, heal wounds and create a society where compassion and fairness guide our laws. Justice is not measured in executions or the deaths we cause…but rather in the lives we save and the dignity we uphold.

11.5.25

Anthony Boyd Remembered : Immortal Final Breaths

Anthony Boyd remembered. Just a few weeks ago, I stood with Boyd in the final hours of his life. As his spiritual advisor, I held space for him in that horrific execution chamber in Alabama. I watched a man who had spent decades seeking redemption and fighting for others meet death with a determined faith. Indeed, he knew his execution was not an ending. In the days ahead Boyd will be memorialized, I wanted to make sure these words were part of the record. -JH.

Breaths That Became a Movement

On October 23, 2025, the state of Alabama executed Anthony Boyd by nitrogen hypoxia. For the Department of Corrections, it was another scheduled event…a procedure to be completed, documented and forgotten. For those who knew Boyd, it was a public revelation of what state violence truly looks like. A man's final breath was replaced with nitrogen, and his final words became a sermon.

Anthony Boyd was not just another name on a list of the condemned. As chairman of Project Hope to Abolish the Death Penalty, he was a leader among men whom society had written off. From inside the walls of Holman Correctional Facility, he helped build one of the longest standing prisoner-led movements against the death penalty. He wrote, organized and mentored. He spoke of compassion, even for those who believed in his death. And in the months before his execution, Boyd's calm defiance turned into something greater…a moral reckoning for those that believed he should be killed.

His Final Words : Anthony Boyd Remembered

In his recorded message to Alabama's governor, Boyd extended an invitation that was as bold as it was simple, "Before an innocent man is executed, come sit down with me and have a conversation with the guy you deemed one of the worst of the worst." He continued, "If not, then I ask you to stay this execution, to stop this execution to have my case fully and fairly investigated." It was an appeal to humanity, to justice and to the possibility that listening might still matter.

When that request was denied, Boyd's words grew sharper. In his final statement he declared, "Just want everyone to know, there is no justice in this state. It's all political, it's all revenge-motivated. There is no justice in the state, there can be no justice in the state." Then, turning from condemnation to hope, he ended with the rallying cry that will outlive his name, "I want all my people to keep fighting, you all matter. Let's get it."

Let's Get It

"Let's get it." Those three words encapsulate his life's work. Boyd believed in a future without executions, a future built not by politicians but by ordinary people who refuse to look away. For years, he helped Project Hope publish newsletters, organize outreach and give voice to those on death row. He was a bridge between the condemned and the free, reminding both that the line between them is thinner than most imagine.

When Alabama chose nitrogen as its new killing method, the state called it humane. Boyd's execution proved otherwise. Witnesses reported visible distress. What the officials called "peaceful" looked anything but. In that moment, the mask meant to silence him became a symbol of everything he had been warning about…the inhumanity disguised as justice, the cruelty hidden behind procedure.

A Legacy of Mercy : Anthony Boyd Remembered

For many who oppose the death penalty, Boyd's final moments turned abstraction into urgency. His death forced a great many to confront the grotesque reality of execution by suffocation…a method that strips a person of the very breath that defines life. The sight of a man dying that way, after years of advocating for mercy, has already sparked outrage across faith communities and human-rights organizations. In pulpits and protests, his name is now invoked as proof that "humane execution" is a lie.

But beyond the politics and headlines, there was Anthony Boyd the man…thoughtful, disciplined and deeply faithful. Those who corresponded with him through Project Hope describe him as humble and steadfast, someone who believed that transformation was possible even inside the walls of death row. His writings spoke often of grace, forgiveness and the power of solidarity. He reminded people on both sides of the bars that "we either rise together or we fall together."

His Breath Lives On : Anthony Boyd Remembered

Boyd's life and death raise an uncomfortable question for the rest of us… What does justice mean when it demands the deliberate killing of a human being? If the goal of punishment is accountability, can that ever be achieved through asphyxiation? His final breath challenges us to ask whether retribution can coexist with dignity…or whether it always ends, as it did for him, in cruelty masked as law?

Vigils were held throughout the world at the time of his death. At one in Birmingham, a minister read Boyd's words aloud, "There can be no justice until we change this system … Let's get it." The crowd responded, "Let's get it." For a brief moment, the voice of a man who died in isolation filled the open air. That echo is his legacy.

Anthony Boyd's death is not the end of his work…it is the acceleration of it. The nitrogen that took his breath cannot take

his truth. Each time his words are read, each time someone joins the movement to end the death penalty, he breathes again. His passing stands as both an indictment and an invitation…to end this practice, to build systems rooted in mercy and to ensure that no one else is killed in the name of justice.

Anthony Boyd once said, “I didn’t kill anybody. I didn’t participate in killing anybody.” Such final insistence becomes prophetic when uttered by a man the state chose to kill. His death calls us to remember that humanity’s worth cannot be decided by a court…and that the measure of a society lies not in how it punishes…but in how it shows mercy…no matter the circumstance.

Boyd’s last words were not surrender. They were instruction. “Let’s get it,” he said…and with those words, he passed the torch to the living. His life was spent trying to end executions. His death will help finish the work.

11.7.25

Father Mun Jeong Hyeon: The Gospel in the Midst of Suffering

The Gospel

Father Mun Jeong Hyeon has lived what many priests only preached…a faith that left the sacristy and entered the streets.

“The only ones I give attention to are those who are suffering.”

That single sentence defines not just his ministry, but his theology. To attend to suffering was to attend to Christ himself.

Mun’s life revealed a conviction that God is not found in cathedrals of marble and incense, but among the wounded of history. His priesthood moved the altar to the streets…into places filled with tear gas, hunger strikes and the cries of the dispossessed. His courage was not an act of defiance alone…but a theological declaration…that resurrection must be lived out among the crucified.

In this, Mun stands in a lineage of the
Korean minjung theologians who saw Christ as the suffering servant present in the people’s struggle. His faith was incarnational in the truest sense…God made flesh in the bodies of the beaten, the poor and the silenced.

The Gathering of the Wounded: Father Mun Jeong Hyeon and the Church of the Streets

During the dictatorship of the 1970s, when South Korea’s rulers demanded obedience and silence, Father Mun gathered courage into community. He helped to found the Catholic Priests’ Association for Justice, which transformed the priesthood from a hierarchical office into a revolutionary body.

“Let those who are hurting come together. Let us raise a voice, just once. That’s it.”

This was not merely a call to protest…it was ecclesiology incarnate. For Mun, the church begins wherever the wounded gather. Speaking out even once was a liturgy…truth telling was and is the Eucharist of the oppressed. His arrest in 1976 alongside future South Korean President Kim Dae-jung made visible his theology of solidarity…the priest does not stand above the people…but among them…sharing both their suffering and their struggle for liberation.

In this act of gathering, Mun enacted a radical Christology…a belief that the body of Christ expands through resistance. The Church was no longer defined by walls or institutions…but by communion in pain…by the shared breath of those who dared to cry out.

Defying Empire: Incarnation as Political Presence

As Korea’s internal dictatorships waned, Mun Jeong Hyeon turned his attention to the power that remained…empire itself. His defiance of U.S. military domination was not born of nationalism, but theology.

“Wherever there is pain, there God dwells.”

Here, Mun’s theology deepens into a kind of anti-imperial incarnation. To him, the presence of American bases, tanks and wire fences was a visible crucifixion…the suffering body of Korea under the weight of global power. His protests against Camp Humphreys and later the Jeju Naval Base were not mere politics…they were sacraments of resistance.

In standing before soldiers and bulldozers, Father Mun made visible what the Church often hides…that faith requires confrontation with empire. Just as Christ confronted the rulers of

his time, Mun confronted the modern Caesars. Theologians of liberation speak of "the crucified peoples of history"…Mun stood among them…insisting that God's incarnation continues wherever oppression takes flesh.

Father Mun Jeong Hyeon's Theology of Suffering and Hope

For Father Mun, suffering was not to be spiritualized away. It was the raw material of grace.

"The Cross is not a symbol of pain but the place of love."

His theology reflects the rhythms of han…the deep Korean word for collective sorrow and unresolved injustice. Mun did not seek to escape han…he entered it, prayed within it and transformed it. Like various mystics before him…he believed that the experience of abandonment could become the wellspring of compassion.

By embracing the Cross as love, he reinterpreted redemption not as escape from history, but as engagement with it. Salvation was not about saving souls from the world…it was about turning the world to God's love and justice.

Jeju and the Sea of Witnesses: Father Mun Jeong Hyeon on Solidarity

In the 2010s, Father Mun moved to Gangjeong Village on Jeju Island, living among activists who opposed the naval base construction. Police beat him during a protest. When asked why he continued despite his age and injuries, he said…

"Peace comes only through suffering."

This was not a masochistic belief, but an incarnational one. Peace is not achieved through agreement but through endurance…through the bearing of injustice until it breaks under

the weight of compassion. His body, aged and wounded, became a living sermon.

Mun's witness at Jeju parallels the prophets who bore the weight of their message physically. In him, theology and body became indistinguishable. His spine was the scroll upon which the Gospel was written anew.

The Gospel of Courage

In 2012, Father Mun received the Gwangju Prize for Human Rights, recognizing a lifetime of solidarity with the oppressed. But to reduce his legacy to awards is to miss his deeper challenge.

"I want to be with the defeated of history."

This statement distills the heart of his theology. To be with the defeated is to reject the triumphalism of both Church and nation. It is to choose the path of Christ, who sided not with victors but with victims. Mun's courage calls us not to admire him, but to follow him…to stand where he stood…with those the world crucifies again and again.

"All my life I have stood on the road, fighting for human rights and peace."

In the end, his life is a revolutionary homily…that faith without resistance is empty, and that love without risk is no love at all.

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11.8.25

A Love That Rages: Jesus Destroys the Temple

Jesus Destroys the Temple

A Love That Rages: John 2:13–22

As Passover approached, Jesus went up to Jerusalem and found the temple courts filled with merchants selling oxen, sheep, and doves, and money-changers sitting at tables. Out of righteous anger, he made a whip of cords, drove them all out, overturned their tables, and scattered their coins. He declared, “Stop making my Father’s house a marketplace!” When challenged for a sign of his authority, he said, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up,” referring to the temple of his body. After his resurrection, his disciples remembered his words and believed the Scriptures.

When Jesus entered the temple, he didn’t find holiness. He found a hustle. The courtyard of prayer…the place where the poor came to meet God…had been turned into a market. The sounds of worship were drowned out by the clatter of coins and the noises of animals. Men sat at tables, weighing silver, trading currency and setting entrance prices for the sacred.

The temple economy was thriving. The poor were not.

Every worshipper was required to pay a temple tax and offer a sacrifice. But Roman coins, engraved with Caesar’s image, were deemed impure. So, the money changers opportunistically exchanged them for temple currency…at an inflated rate. Merchants then sold oxen, sheep and doves for sacrifice… again…at exorbitant prices. Even the cheapest offering…a pair of doves…cost far more than a poor family could afford.

And all of this took place under the authority of the priests…who allowed exploitation to operate in the name of religion. The very system meant to bring people closer to God had learned how to make a profit from the devotion of the people.

Jesus saw it and something in him ignited.

He made a whip out of cords and drove the merchants out. He overturned the tables, scattered the coins, and cried out, “Stop making my Father’s house a marketplace!”

I can almost hear the tables crash…and I wonder which of our tables he’d flip today. It is a love that rages against injustice.

This was not a loss of control. This was the clarity of divine love. Jesus’ anger was not the anger of ego or vengeance…it was the moral outrage of compassion. He was not attacking the worshippers or even the merchants themselves, but the system… the machine of greed that preyed on the desperate and disguised itself as holiness.

His was a love that rages…a love too pure to tolerate corruption…too faithful to look away from suffering. It is a love that rages against injustice.

Love That Refuses Silence

Many imagine love as gentle, calm and endlessly patient. But real love…the love that comes from God…is not passive. It burns against injustices that destroy life. It refuses to be quiet in the face of exploitation.

In the temple, Jesus embodied that truth. His actions were a prophetic interruption of a rigged economy. He exposed the hypocrisy of those who profited from the faith of others. He fought back against a theology that sold God’s grace to the highest bidder.

The whip in his hands was not a symbol of cruelty…it was a declaration of freedom. Every strike shattered the illusion that holiness could coexist with greed. Every overturned table broke open the lie that religion could remain pure while the poor were being robbed.

Jesus' love was not sentimental…it was disruptive, dangerous and demanding. It stood between the powerful and the powerless and said, "No more." This is a love that rages, a love that will not remain silent while injustice thrives. It is a love that rages against injustice.

A Love That Rages: The Gospel Against Empire

The tragedy of the temple was not just economic…it was spiritual. The marketplace had moved into the sanctuary. The same corruption that ruled the empire had infected the house of God. The holy had become transactional.

Jesus' cleansing of the temple is not a symbolic gesture. It is a revolution in miniature…the collision between the Kingdom of God and the kingdoms of this world. It is a refusal to let faith become another arm of empire. His fury is the fury of truth against the comfortable lie. He fights back because the people have been robbed not only of their money but of their dignity. They have been made to believe that God's favor has a price tag.

And here is the truth we avoid…capitalism has built a thousand temples that look exactly like this one. It preaches the same gospel of profit, turns every sacred thing into a commodity, and demands the poor pay for what should be free…mercy, housing, health and hope. It teaches us to measure human worth in productivity and profit margins, not love or justice. It baptizes greed and calls it freedom.

Jesus would overturn those tables, too. He would walk into the stock exchange, the predatory loan office, the megachurch that

charges for salvation…and he would do the same thing he did then…drive them out with a whip made of truth. This is a love that rages across centuries, challenging every system that worships profit over people. It is a love that rages against injustice.

Capitalism is not the Kingdom of God. It is the old temple reborn, dressed in modern clothes, still demanding sacrifice from the poor so that the powerful can keep their seats. And the gospel of Jesus Christ is its eternal contradiction. It is a love that rages against every form of exploitation, daring us to rise and act. It is a love that rages against injustice.

“Destroy This Temple…”

When challenged…“What sign can you show us for doing this?”…Jesus answers, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”

They misunderstand, thinking he speaks of the building. But he is speaking of himself…of his own body, the new temple of divine presence. In that answer lies the ultimate truth…love will always rise again…you can never destroy that which is truly holy…that which is truly love.

The resurrection is the final act of this love that rages. The same passion that drove him to cleanse the temple will carry him to the cross and through the tomb. Love will confront every power that seeks to turn life into a marketplace…and it will not die. This is a love that rages, unstoppable and consuming, for the sake of the oppressed. It is a love that rages against injustice.

A Love That Rages: The Holy Rage of Compassion

When Jesus drove out the merchants, he was not destroying religion…he was saving it with true spirituality. He was clearing space for prayer, for justice, for the kind of love that heals rather

than profits. His rage was holy because it came from compassion…from seeing the poor, the widowed, the weary cheated in the very place meant to lift them up.

This is what divine love looks like in a corrupt world. It rages against exploitation, not to annihilate, but to renew. It burns, not to destroy, but to cleanse. It fights, not out of hatred, but because it refuses to see people crushed under the weight of greed and hypocrisy. It is a love that rages, a call to moral courage and action. It is a love that rages against injustice.

The disciples remembered the Scripture: "Zeal for your house will consume me." That zeal…that consuming love…that rage… is what the world still needs. Not a love that whispers comfort to the powerful, but a love that overturns tables for the sake of the powerless.

Jesus' love was not tame. It was not marketable. It was a love that rages…a love that damns every system that profits from pain…and still dares to build a new world on mercy instead.

And the challenge is ours…we cannot remain spectators. We must recognize the systems that exploit, oppress and profit from the suffering of the vulnerable…whether in churches, governments, corporations or markets. We need to destroy that which is oppressing people today. Only then can the sacred spaces of our world…our homes, our communities, our institutions…become places of justice, mercy and true worship.

11.11.25

A Plea to New York: No Death Penalty for Luigi Mangione

No Death Penalty for Luigi Mangione : A Spiritual Plea

I'm not a New Yorker, but I write with urgency and a heavy heart. The last person executed in New York was Eddie Lee Mays on August 15, 1963. For decades, New York has stood apart from much of the nation…rejecting the death penalty and affirming that even those who commit the gravest crimes are entitled to due process and the possibility of redemption. That principle is more than law…it's a moral compass. Today, that compass is being tested. Federal prosecutors want to make sure that New Yorkers sentence Luigi Mangione to death.

The Human Cost

For well over a decade, I've served as a spiritual adviser to men on death rows throughout the nation. Repeatedly, I 've walked the cold halls of death…where the condemned wait their turn to be taken to the chamber…listening to confessions, sharing in prayers and searching desperately for humanity in spaces where such a task seems impossible. The battle to stay human amidst the horror is real. But battle we all must. Regardless of circumstance or location, our souls depend on the fight to stay human amidst the inhumane.

On eleven different occasions, I've stood in an execution chamber and watched as the government kills someone that I care about. Each one festers. The finality is absolute. The pain is irrevocable. The moral weight of it all…it never leaves you.

I am pleading with New Yorkers…do not let federal prosecutors undermine your commitment to life. This is bigger than one man. Bigger than one case. It is about the ethical mantle you have long

held in leading the fight against misplaced ideas of justice that spread the lie that killing can stop the cycle of killing.

Mangione Has Not Had His Day in Court

The Mangione case is horrifying. The murder of Brian Thompson, CEO of UnitedHealthcare, shook the city. Throughout the nation, we all felt it too. And yet, despite New York having abolished the death penalty decades ago, federal prosecutors have stepped in and loudly decided to seek a death sentence.

But Mangione has not even had his day in court. He is accused. Judicial proceedings have barely begun. And already, the federal government is pushing us to assume he is guilty and start preparing the execution chamber. It's easy to look at the available evidence and assume guilt. But that's not how justice works. We do not execute people based on headlines. That's dangerous. The death penalty is irreversible. Once carried out, mistakes, biases and misjudgments can never be corrected. Presumption of innocence is sacred. Especially here. It's also important to remember that life without parole mitigates the irreversible consequences of the death penalty.

No Death Penalty for Luigi Mangione : Protecting Society…and Humanity

Some will say certain crimes demand execution. For years, I've lived and breathed among men who committed unspeakable acts. Life without parole protects society just as effectively. It also allows for something execution cannot…reflection and redemption. Guilt and fear consume the condemned. And in many cases, change begins to take root. That possibility ends the moment the state executes someone.

Pursuing the death penalty…in a state that has long rejected the death penalty as an option…sends the wrong message. Justice

becomes something swayed by publicity, politics and by the desire for vengeance. Not by principle. Such lunacy is not becoming of New Yorkers.

No Death Penalty for Luigi Mangione : Indeed, if New York lets the federal government kill in its name, then every moral victory it has won against injustice will bleed out on the execution table.

Federal Overreach Threatens Local Values

Here's the harsh truth…even though New York abolished the death penalty, federal prosecutors can step in. A crime in Manhattan can become a federal crime and suddenly your moral stance is challenged. When federal prosecutors step in and seek death in a state that has abolished it, they are not just testing the law…they're testing your values. They are asking whether New York still believes what it has long stood for…that a government that can take the lives of its' citizens is a government that has grown too big.

This should alarm anyone who cares about justice, fairness and integrity. If the federal government succeeds here, it signals that New York's values are conditional. That abolition is not absolute. That your moral compass can be overridden. It also reveals that the federal government can overrule local values anywhere and everywhere else it desires. Other places throughout the nation will also face the wrath of the federal government in unexpected ways.

A Moral Plea

This is not a political argument. It is a moral one. Abolition is more than a policy…it's a reflection of commitment to life, humanity and fairness. By upholding a fierce opposition to the death penalty, you protect the integrity of the justice system and the moral fabric of society.

Mangione's case is high profile. Anger and fear are powerful. But New York's tradition has always been about resisting those impulses. Justice must not be defined by outrage, media attention or emotion. It must be defined by principle…moral principle.

No Death Penalty for Luigi Mangione : Stand Firm

I have seen the consequences of execution firsthand…lives lost, remorse extinguished, systems compromised and families shattered. I implore New Yorkers to stand firm. Reject the federal pursuit of the death penalty in your home. Honor your tradition. Protect your values. Send a message to the nation…New York will not allow the ultimate punishment to be imposed against its will. Mangione's case is a test…and it is one New Yorkers must pass.

For if New York stays silent now, it will invite the machinery of death back in…and once it starts moving again, it rarely stops with just one body.

11.11.25

Dr. Jonathan Groner and the Anatomy of an Execution

The Truth About an Execution and Dr. Jonathan Groner

Every few years, conversations about capital punishment circles back to the question of method. Lethal injection goes wrong. A state revives the electric chair. Someone mentions the firing squad. A nitrogen execution takes way too long. Then the same old arguments begin again…legal, moral and procedural. In the middle of all the present noise, one voice keeps insisting on something simple and stubborn…the truth about what actually happens to a human body in those final moments. That voice belongs to Dr. Jonathan Groner.

Dr. Jonathan Groner is a Surgeon Who Understands What Violence Does

Groner isn't a politician or a crusader. He's a trauma surgeon…a man who has spent decades trying to keep people alive after bullets, crashes and stabbings. A clinical professor at Ohio State University, he studies the mechanics of injury the way a watchmaker studies gears. When he speaks about executions, he isn't trading slogans…he's describing anatomy. And he's asking the one question the rest of us tend to avoid…does the state actually know how to kill people?

Keep Watching

3

Dr. Jonathan Groner Calls Out the Myth of Lethal Painlessness

In countless botched injections, veins have blown, drugs have failed and men have gasped for air while officials called the process humane. Groner has argued that, in purely physiological

terms, a properly aimed firing squad may cause faster unconsciousness than many botched lethal injections…but he stops short of calling it humane. For him, the real issue isn't which method is better, but that the state should stop pretending any execution is clean or painless.

The Utah Autopsy That Raised New Questions

Groner studied autopsy photographs of Ronnie Lee Gardner (who was executed by a firing squad by the state of Utah in 2010) and noticed something odd…two of the bullets had landed well outside the heart area. "We don't have precise anatomic landmarks," he said, "but it's clear the two lower bullets are way outside where the heart would be." It was the kind of observation only a surgeon would make…clinical, direct and unsettling. If the firing squad is supposed to be foolproof, why did the marksmen miss?

Fact Versus Speculation

Groner does not rush to conclusions. He simply describes what the evidence shows…suspicious shots that didn't hit where they were supposed to. The distinction matters. His whole career has been about refusing to say more than the facts allow. Human bodies vary. Guns shift. People make mistakes. The point for him is not conspiracy…it's accountability. If we are going to keep executing, he wants the state to record what happens with the same precision he'd demand in an operating room.

Science Before Politics

That consistency has made him a reliable witness in court. In Arkansas, when lawyers argued over whether the firing squad could count as a "known and available" alternative to lethal injection under Glossip v. Gross, Groner's testimony appeared in the record. He didn't exaggerate…he didn't hedge…he said the method could (in theory) cause less pain…but that we don't yet

have the data to prove it. It was classic Groner…science first, speculation never.

Dr. Jonathan Groner's Conscience

What's easy to miss in these debates is that he's not advocating for execution at all. He has said repeatedly that he opposes the death penalty. His concern is that as long as the state is going to kill, it should at least tell the truth about how it does so. That mix of empathy and precision…the doctor's conscience paired with the scientist's discipline…is why journalists keep calling him back.

The Discipline of Restraint

And when he raises doubts, he does it with restraint. The internet rewards outrage, but Groner doesn't play that game. When he said the Menzies autopsy looked "unusual," he left it at that. No grand theories, no moral theater. Just the quiet, unnerving reminder that even our most "controlled" execution method still misses the mark…literally and figuratively.

Dr. Jonathan Groner is Forcing the System to Look Closer

The deeper value of his work is that it forces everyone else to slow down. Politicians want tidy answers. Courts want legal categories…cruel or not cruel. Groner keeps pointing to the messy middle…the unpredictable ways bodies respond to trauma, the limits of training and the absence of data. That insistence on complexity is its own form of courage.

The Truth Beneath the Violence

In the end, his argument is less about method of execution than it is about honesty. Governments keep trying to invent a way to kill that feels sanitary…almost invisible. Medicine doesn't allow that illusion. Whether the tool is a syringe or a rifle…the process is

physical, violent and final. Groner knows that better than anyone. He's spent a career patching up the same kinds of wounds the state now produces by design.

Why Dr. Jonathan Groner Matters

To agree with Groner is not to cheer for death…it's to defend the truth. He isn't trying to win a culture war…he's trying to make sure we don't lie to ourselves. In a debate full of rhetoric, he brings anatomy. In a system built on denial, he brings evidence. And in a field where expertise is often twisted to serve politics, he keeps standing on the simple ground that facts still matter.

The Radical Simplicity of Dr. Jonathan Groner's Truth

That's what makes Dr. Jonathan Groner worth listening to. He doesn't moralize. He measures. And in doing so, he shows that sometimes the most radical act in public life is to tell the truth.

11.12.25

100 Year Wait for Execution: Bryan Jennings & Richard Jordan

Almost a Century of Delay: What the Cases of Bryan Jennings and Richard Jordan Reveal

Later today, the state of Florida is scheduled to execute Bryan Jennings, convicted of the 1979 kidnapping, rape and murder of six-year-old Becky Kunash on Merritt Island. Jennings was 20 years old at the time of the crime. Now, he is 66. If carried out, his execution will be Florida's sixteenth of the year and among the longest-delayed executions in modern U.S. history…46 years from the crime to punishment.

Earlier this year (June 25), Mississippi executed Richard Jordan, the longest-serving death-row inmate in that state's history. He was convicted of the 1976 kidnapping and murder of Edwina Marter. Jordan's execution came nearly 49 years after the crime…a record-long interval between conviction and death. Together, the two cases represent nearly a century of waiting for the death penalty to be carried out. These staggering timelines reveal not the persistence of justice, but its decay.

The Meaning of Time in Punishment

Punishment derives its meaning from proximity to wrongdoing. Retribution depends on immediacy…the moral force of justice weakens as time passes. When the state waits nearly half a century to act, the link between crime and punishment dissolves. The world in which these crimes occurred…the late 1970s…is long gone. Society has evolved, the victims' families have aged or died and the perpetrators themselves have become elderly men.

By the time Jennings and Jordan faced execution, they were not the same people who committed the crimes. Jennings has lived his entire adult life in confinement. Jordan, after nearly five decades in prison, was executed at the age of 79. To kill men so removed from their crimes is not an act of justice…it is an act of bureaucratic persistence mistaken for moral purpose.

Systemic Failure Revealed by Delay

These cases are not anomalies…they are symptoms of a death-penalty system collapsing under its own contradictions. Jordan's death sentence was overturned and reinstated multiple times over the years. Courts found constitutional violations ranging from improper jury instructions to ineffective counsel. Jennings's case has also dragged through decades of appeals, representation issues and procedural disputes.

This pattern of endless litigation is not excess…it is necessity. Capital cases must be scrutinized because they are irreversible. The legal system cannot tolerate shortcuts when a person's life is at stake. But that very caution ensures that executions will be delayed for decades. The result is a punishment that is both too slow to serve its intended function and too cruel to be humane.

The Human Cost of Prolonged Waiting

Decades on death row constitute a punishment all its' own…a slow psychological erosion. The condemned live lives defined by uncertainty and dread. Jordan spent nearly half a century in this limbo, enduring the deterioration of age and confinement before finally being executed. In Florida, Jennings now faces execution after nearly the same span of time, with many of his original advocates and witnesses long gone. For both men, the death sentence became a second slower death…one measured by decades in prison rather than moments of freedom.

The Death Penalty's Fatal Contradiction

The modern death penalty cannot survive its own logic. To be fair, it must be slow and meticulous…to be meaningful, it must be swift. It can be neither. The nearly one hundred years of combined delay between the crimes of Jennings and Jordan and their executions demonstrates the irreconcilable tension at the heart of capital punishment.

If the state acts quickly, it risks executing the innocent. If it acts cautiously, it condemns people to decades of psychological torture. The system's attempts to balance these imperatives lead to neither justice nor mercy…only an unending process that consumes time, money and lives without restoring moral order.

A Call for Abolition: What's the point of executing Bryan Jennings?

The death of Bryan Jennings will not…and the death of Richard Jordan did not…vindicate justice…they expose its' exhaustion. When a system takes forty-six and forty-nine years, respectively, to conclude its most severe punishment, it is not functioning…it is limping toward irrelevance. These executions do not deter crime, provide closure or affirm moral order. They simply allow the state to stubbornly and irrationally finish what it started decades ago, long after any meaningful connection between act and punishment has dissolved.

Almost a century of combined delay between two executions reveals the death penalty's core absurdity. A system that must spend decades inflicting psychological suffering (on both the condemned and the victim's family) in order to reach the moment of death has already forfeited its moral legitimacy. The death penalty does not express justice…it embodies the failure of justice itself.

The truth is that a state willing to kill after half a century has lost sight not only of mercy…but of meaning. There is no justice in an execution that takes longer than a human lifetime to arrive.

What it shows is a government trapped by its own machinery… unable to admit that death is not justice, that vengeance is not healing and that violence cannot redeem violence. The nearly one hundred years between the crimes of Bryan Jennings and Richard Jordan and their scheduled/completed executions prove that the death penalty is not a solution but a symptom of a justice system unable to evolve. A humane society should not measure its strength by how long it can keep a person alive before killing him. It should measure its strength by its capacity to end killing altogether.

11.14.25

Luigi Mangione and the Presumption of Innocence

When the Courtroom Is Replaced by the Internet : On Sensationalism, Luigi Mangione and the Presumption of Innocence

In our era of instant outrage, a person's life can be decided with a click, a share or a viral post long before a single courtroom door swings open. Luigi Mangione knows this all too well. One photo, one snippet of information, one sensationalized headline and suddenly millions of people feel entitled to pass judgment. In the eyes of the public, he is already guilty or innocent, hero or villain, accused or condemned…labels applied without evidence, without testimony, without deliberation. This is not justice…it is theater. And in such a theater, the person at the center is rarely seen as human. Instead, he becomes a symbol, a story, a character to be debated, dissected and decided upon by strangers who have no access to the facts that matter most.

The Presumption of Innocence: Misunderstanding What "Not Guilty" Actually Means

What often gets lost in high-profile cases is the basic truth that "not guilty" is not a moral declaration of perfection. It doesn't mean a jury declares a defendant innocent in every sense of the word…it means the government failed to meet the extraordinary burden our system demands. That burden is intentionally high, designed by people who understood…from history and experience…how easily assumptions, emotion and politics can warp the search for truth.

Prosecutors must prove not just that a crime occurred, but that it occurred in a very particular way, under a defined legal framework, with a specific state of mind and backed by evidence that can withstand scrutiny. Belief, rumor or gut feeling is not

enough. And yet the public rarely sees the painstaking work that trials demand…the hours reviewing evidence, questioning witnesses and weighing facts against law. To the casual observer, justice can seem instantaneous, a verdict delivered with a headline or a retweet. In reality, it is slow, meticulous…and often uncertain…and that uncertainty is exactly the point.

The Danger of Turning Humans Into Symbols : On Humanity, Luigi Mangione and the Presumption of Innocence

The louder a case becomes, the less patience people have for complexity. When Luigi Mangione becomes a symbol…a shorthand for fear, anger or outrage…he stops being a human being with rights and starts being content to consume, a story to react to, a target to condemn. That shift is corrosive. It erodes due process, it erodes fairness and it erodes the basic decency a free society owes to its members.

Courtrooms have rules. The internet does not. Evidence must be authenticated. Witnesses must be questioned under oath. Every claim must meet standards of proof the public never sees. Outside of court, accuracy is optional. Rumors spread faster than corrections. The crowd decides for itself what is true. That is why the presumption of innocence exists…to restrain the mob, to remind us that no amount of certainty outside a courtroom can replace the work of evidence and deliberation and to protect the human being at the center of the case, no matter how uncomfortable or unpopular.

The Presumption of Innocence Protects Truth, Not Just Defendants

Some critics treat the presumption of innocence as a shield for the guilty. In reality, it is a safeguard for truth. Without it, wrongful convictions multiply, certainty replaces accuracy and emotion eclipses reason. History shows that when society

abandons this principle, it does not become safer…it becomes reckless.

The fate of Luigi Mangione is for a jury to decide, not a hashtag, not a comment thread or viral video. What matters is that he starts with the same rights any of us would demand in his place. The measure of justice is not how it treats people we like, but how it treats those we are tempted to condemn.

Mangione is entitled to the presumption of innocence not because his case is simple or because the verdict will be favorable, but because he is a human being standing accused in a country that claims to value fairness. If we allow that protection to slip simply because a case is sensational, emotionally charged or politically convenient, then we have failed him and the principles we claim to uphold. In a world where public opinion moves faster than courts, innocence means nothing unless we defend it. And until we do, every one of us is at risk of being judged not by evidence, but by the fleeting judgment of social media.

11.16.25

Ms. Shade Schuler: Black Transgender Lives Matter

Every year, as Transgender Day of Remembrance approaches (Thursday, November 20, 2025), my mind nor heart is ever far from Ms. Shade Schuler.

You don't plan to be pulled into a story like Ms. Shade Schuler's. It arrives the way grief often does…quiet at first, almost like a rumor, something you think you can set aside. But then a detail catches your breath. Then another. And before long, you realize the story is not waiting to be read. It is waiting to be witnessed.

Keep Watching

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Violence Against Black Transgender Women: A Global Human Rights Crisis

Shade's name first found me that way…through reports of an unidentified body discovered in a Dallas field. The language was clinical and cold. "Decomposed remains." "Unknown male." "Possible homicide." The kind of phrasing that strips a person down to a case number. It would take time before investigators learned the truth…the body was that of Ms. Shade Schuler, a 22-year-old Black transgender woman. The year was 2015 and she was one of an outbreak transgender women of color murdered across the United States that year. Of course, violence hasn't necessarily stopped since.

By the time her name reached me, Shade had already slipped into the long shadow cast over transgender lives, the shadow where society relegates its most vulnerable. Yet something about her death resisted the usual forgetting. Something in her story kept tugging at me, soft but persistent. I'd never met her. I didn't

know much about her life. Honestly, I just knew here end. But proximity isn't what summons us to injustice…truth is. And Shade's truth was calling.

The world was silent.

Remembering Shade Schuler: Faith, Justice, and Sacred Memory

It stunned me that she was found so close to homes…less than a hundred feet from the ordinary. Children played outside, neighbors cooked dinners and cars passed by. Meanwhile her body lay hidden in a patch of overgrowth as though she belonged to no one. As though her killer knew no one would ever come looking. That is the kind of violence most people don't understand…the violence of neglect, of abandonment, of treating a life as disposable. Shade did not die alone.

The world was just too busy to help.

The decision to travel to the spot where she was found was not something I reasoned out. I felt pulled from somewhere deeper. I didn't go alone. Indeed, I led a group with Rev. Carmarion Anderson-Harvey, the fiercest and most faithful advocate for trans lives out there. The day felt heavy in a way that had nothing to do with weather. The heat wrapped around us like fur coat. The sun lingered long past its welcome.

Carmarion Anderson-Harvey and the Fight for Transgender Dignity

We turned down a gravel path that didn't want to be found. Carmarion walked just ahead of me, the others a bit behind and none of us spoke. Words fall apart easily in places like that. We carried bread and a chalice, the simplest of things, yet they felt almost absurdly fragile. As if the sacred did not belong among weeds and scattered trash.

But holiness has never behaved that way.

At first, the place looked like any neglected lot. Then the smell reached us…old and earthy, undeniably dead. A scent that clung to the air long after the moment that produced it. My mind tried to reinterpret it, to soften what I knew was coming, but the body shaped stain on the ground refused to be reimagined. It was dark. Charred looking. Familiar in a way that made my stomach tighten. I'd assumed it was an old fire pit. It wasn't.

That spot held the last evidence of Shade's body. The earth had absorbed her long before the world admitted she'd gone missing.

The Spiritual Power of Witnessing Transgender Loss and Resilience

Something shifted inside me. Not a dramatic revelation…more like a slow undeniable settling. The way a truth presses into you when you've run out of ways to avoid it. Carmarion stepped closer and murmured a prayer under her breath. Everyone else bowed their heads in reverence. The air felt different, like it had thickened with memory. As if the ground remembered her more faithfully than the systems meant to protect her.

We lifted the bread and the cup to the sky. There are moments when ritual ceases to be ritual and becomes something else entirely and something raw, electric and uncontainable. This was one of them. The air hummed. Carmarion's voice grew steadier. I felt the sting behind my eyes before I realized I was crying.

"This," we said, "is the body and blood of Ms. Shade."

Not metaphor. Not poetry. Truth.

Because if the divine is truly present in the lives of the oppressed…and every prophet worth listening to has insisted it is…then Shade had not been abandoned here. Not really. Her

dignity had not been erased, even if the world tried. Her worth had not been lessened, even when the institutions meant to honor her identity failed her.

I bent down and touched the ground. It was warm. Too warm for the hour. And in that strange warmth, in that unbearable quiet, something like a whisper moved through me…
"What you have done to the least of these, you have done to me."

I'd read those words a thousand times. But never like that. Never with dirt under my fingernails, heat settling on my shoulders and the outline of a forgotten woman pressed into the earth before me. In that moment, Shade stopped being a headline, or a symbol, or a tragic statistic. She'd become revelation.

Her life…and her death…spoke a truth to a world that still refused to hear.

That Black trans women are sacred.
That their lives are not tragedies waiting to happen.
That their bodies are not warnings.
That their deaths are not footnotes.
That the violence they endure is not inevitable.
That society must choose to stop it…actively…urgently…now.

Why Ms. Shade Schuler's Story Still Calls the World to Action

It would be easy to minimize this tragedy. But… Ms. Shade Schuler 's story is a global tale. It's about how the world decides whose lives are fully human and whose are treated like afterthoughts. It is about whether we believe…truly believe… that every person carries the image of God. And it is about what happens when we don't act as such.

I cannot pretend that visiting that place repaired the injustice done to her. It didn't. But something happened there that refuses to fade…a kind of resurrection. The kind that doesn't reverse

death but refuses to let death have the final word. The kind that insists memory can be a form of uprising. The kind that resurrects a life unforgotten.

And so, I say it plainly, as I said it then:

I believe in the resurrection of Ms. Shade Schuler.

Not because her body rose,
but because her story refuses to stay buried.
Because her truth keeps rising in the hearts of all who refuse to look away.
Because she lives…not in the earth where she was found,
but in the fight she continues to inspire.

Black trans lives matter.

May the world hear her.
May the world change because of her.
And may her memory be a revolution.

Amen.

11.19.25

Anthony Boyd Leg Lift = 19 Minutes of Conscious Suffering

The Chamber and the Promise: Anthony Boyd Leg Lift

“6:16 in Alabama: On The Leg Lift That Defined a Nitrogen Execution”

Keep Watching

5

I entered the chamber at 5:50 p.m.. Every step felt impossibly heavy, as if the air itself resisted my presence. Anthony Boyd lay strapped to the gurney…calm, alert and fully aware of the inevitability gathering around him. As Anthony’s spiritual advisor, I’d walked with him through hours of reflection, prayer and preparation. I understood the weight of the moment more intimately than most. I had been in the chamber with Kenneth Smith during the first nitrogen execution, but this was different. Anthony was determined to leave behind evidence that could speak long after he was gone…evidence only his own body could give. He told me beforehand that there was one thing I needed to watch for…one act that would tell us everything…the lifting of his legs. That single gesture, he said, would mark the point where he could go no further…where conscious effort had reached its absolute limit. In that moment, he promised, would lay the truth of the nineteen minutes I was about to witness, a sacred chronometer of endurance.

The Crucible of Time

From 5:57 to 6:16, the chamber became a crucible of time and attention. Every second stretched, magnified and thickened. Each inhalation and exhalation was deliberate, monumental and full of meaning. Anthony lay tightened against the straps, his chest

rising and falling in a rhythm I counted silently. I whispered scripture and prayer…my voice trembling yet steady…words echoing faintly off the steel walls. Each gasp, each subtle tremor of his fingers or toes, became a signal, a fragment of communication, a testament to the conscious struggle he had promised to reveal. I felt the weight of every moment, each pulse of life turning into an active, sacred witness. The minutes elongated as each movement conveyed the raw limits of human endurance…a deliberate unfolding of effort that demanded presence, demanded attention.

Minute by Minute: The Descent Into Suffering : Anthony Boyd Leg Lift

Minute by minute, the narrative of suffering and witness took shape. At 5:57 came the horrific flexing of veins, the bulging of eyes. At 6:00, I began counting the gasps…each one a unit of conscious resistance. His body moved in rhythm, a disciplined arc of effort that spoke louder than any words could. I could see the tension in his calves and thighs, the small adjustments of his hands and feet, the rise and fall of his shoulders against the cold sheet. Every gesture carried a message, a note in the symphony of his final testament. And all of it pointed forward…forward to the moment he had told me to watch for…the lift of his legs. Each breath, quiver and measured flex was preparation, a conscious pacing toward revelation. The inevitability of the moment pressed the air around us. I knew what was coming, but I also knew the truth would only arrive when he chose to give it…with the precision and intentionality that defined his life as an activist and a prophet.

6:16-The Revelation: Anthony Boyd Leg Lift

Then, at 6:16, Anthony's legs lifted. Slowly. Deliberately. Trembling under exhaustion, under nitrogen, under the cold machinery of death. His calves quivered. His thighs flexed. Every fiber of muscle strained to rise. I understood instantly…

this was revelation. This was the act he had promised. In that lift, nineteen minutes of conscious struggle condensed into a single undeniable gesture. His legs told us what no words could. They marked the span of conscious endurance, the human limit…the sacred assertion of presence in the face of annihilation. In that moment, we received direct proof of an extended period of conscious suffering during a nitrogen execution.

The sheet rose with his feet, revealing quivering muscles…stark, human, unignorable. Every twitch communicated the measure of his effort. This act was the marker he had prepared for, the sign of when he could go no further. It was the apex of his witness. Only then did the full meaning of every gasp, every tremor, every tiny adjustment come into clarity…he had been pacing himself toward this moment. The leg lift held the story…the truth of conscious deliberate struggle.

The Groan and the Meaning

The groan that followed emerged from somewhere deep and resonant, filling the chamber and pressing into me. It was human and sacred at once…a disclosure of suffering and presence. In that groan, I grasped the nineteen minutes of conscious effort. The meaning was not only in the duration but in the deliberate intent, the prophetic timing. Anthony, who had spent his life revealing truths through activism, was revealing truth now through his death…through the timing, the endurance, the conscious acknowledgment of mortality and the power of witness.

The Final Minutes and the Fall of the Legs : Anthony Boyd Leg Lift

After the lift, movement slowed. Minimal chest rises. Faint twitches of fingers and toes. Yet the narrative had already been delivered. The leg lift at 6:16 had revealed everything…how long he fought consciously, the monumental effort required and

the deliberate nature of his witness. Anthony's body had become prophetic. His legs, the instruments of revelation, marked the culmination of 19 MINUTES of horrific struggle in a 36 MINUTE execution that began sometime around 5:57pm and officially ended at 6:33 p.m.

Anthony Boyd's legs at 6:16 were more than limbs. They were a chronometer of suffering, a signpost of endurance, a language of revelation. Through that one act, execution became witness… death became disclosure. Every twitch and pulse leading up to the lift found its meaning there…preparation, pacing, the conscious arc of resistance. When his legs finally fell and minimal movement continued, I knew the story had been told. The prophetic act was complete. Anthony's conscious suffering had lasted at least 19 MINUTES.

The Call to Accountability : Anthony Boyd Leg Lift

The law may mark 6:33 as the official end, but Anthony had given us the truth of exactly how long the conscious torment lasted…creating a record that challenges the state's abstraction of "efficiency" and "humaneness." In that leg lift, his body became both prophet and expert witness, leaving behind a testament no documentation could replicate and no official narrative could dismiss.

The truth of Anthony's conscious struggle cannot remain confined to a handful of witnesses. He provided a precise record of endurance…a prophetic testimony that demands accountability. To honor his life and his deliberate act of disclosure is to fight for transparency, justice and the abolition of a method of execution that dehumanizes and hides the reality of conscious torture. His legs…lifted at 6:16…still speak loudly… and they demand that we act.

11.20.25

Being Adopted Should Bar A Death Sentence

Why Adoption-Related Mitigation Should Prevent the Execution of Richard Barry Randolph (now Malik Abdul-Sajjad)

Capital punishment is supposed to be reserved for the most morally culpable offenders…people whose actions reflect a fully developed capacity for judgment and responsibility. That is precisely why the law requires that all mitigating evidence be weighed before a death sentence can be imposed. In Richard Barry Randolph (now Malik Abdul-Sajjad)'s case (Florida Execution / November 20, 2024), the context of his adoption and early development is not a side note but a crucial window into the formative experiences that shaped him long before he had any power to alter the course of his life. Understanding those experiences does not excuse wrongdoing, but it does explain why execution is not an appropriate or just outcome for someone who has been adopted.

Early Loss and Its Lasting Psychological Impact : Being Adopted Should Bar A Death Sentence

Adoption is, at its core, an act of care. It gives children families, stability and love. But many adopted individuals arrive in their new families already carrying deep wounds from their earliest days…loss, instability or trauma that occurred before adoption ever offered its chance at healing. These early ruptures in attachment can imprint themselves on the brain in ways that persist throughout life. Neuroscientists have documented how early trauma, especially trauma that occurs before a child can speak, disrupts the stress response system and reshapes emotional development. Even when an adoptive home is supportive, those early disruptions can leave behind emotional vulnerabilities that never fully disappear.

Randolph (Malik Abdul-Sajjad)'s experience fits squarely within what research has long shown…the separation from a biological mother, even in infancy, can have lasting effects on a child's sense of security and self worth. Most adoptees flourish with nurturing parents, but the initial loss remains a significant psychological event, one that can be amplified when the adoptive environment later proves unstable or harmful.

Adverse Adoptive Environment and Compounded Trauma : Being Adopted Should Bar A Death Sentence

In Randolph (Malik Abdul-Sajjad)'s case, the home into which he was adopted included physical abuse by his adoptive father and emotional instability from his adoptive mother. That combination can magnify early attachment wounds and leave a child with very limited tools for coping with fear or distress. When a child grows up in an environment where safety is inconsistent, the developing brain adapts in ways that prioritize survival over emotional balance. This can lead to hypervigilance, impulsivity, difficulty managing anger or chronic anxiety in adulthood. These are not moral failings. They are the predictable outcomes of early adversity layered onto an adoption context already shaped by loss.

The law recognizes that when a person's psychological development is compromised by circumstances outside their control, their moral culpability is diminished. The death penalty…designed only for those with the highest level of blameworthiness…becomes disproportionate.

Identity Challenges Faced by Adoptees

Identity formation is another area where adoptees can face unique challenges. For many adopted people, especially those without access to medical history or information about their biological parents, there can be a persistent sense of uncertainty about who they are or where they come from. This isn't a

reflection of their adoptive family's love…it is simply a natural byproduct of missing pieces in the narrative of one's own life. That uncertainty can lead to fragile self esteem, difficulty with emotional regulation or heightened susceptibility to depression and substance use. These struggles do not begin in adulthood… they are seeded in childhood and shaped by forces entirely outside the adoptee's control.

Mental Health Vulnerabilities Among Adoptees : Being Adopted Should Bar A Death Sentence

Layered onto this are well documented statistical patterns in adoptee mental health outcomes. Again, these patterns are not caused by adoption itself. They stem from the early life conditions, genetic factors and prenatal environments that often accompany adoption. Adoptees experience elevated rates of PTSD, ADHD, substance-use disorders and personality development challenges. These conditions are connected directly to early trauma and inherited vulnerabilities. When a defendant's life history reflects these risk factors, courts have long considered them powerful mitigation because they directly influence behavior and decision making.

Lack of Biological and Genetic Information

One of the most significant issues in older adoption cases is the lack of biological information. For decades, adoptees were placed without access to their medical or psychiatric histories. That means many grow up with biological risks…genetic predispositions toward mental illness, impulsivity, addiction or emotional dysregulation…without ever knowing they exist. This lack of information deprives adoptees of the chance to seek early intervention or understand the invisible forces shaping their behavior. Legally and ethically, these factors must be considered when determining the fairness of imposing the ultimate punishment.

Mitigation Is Not an Excuse. It Is a Legal Requirement : Being Adopted Should Bar A Death Sentence

It is important to be clear that mitigation is not an excuse. It does not minimize the harm suffered by victims or their families. What it does is help the justice system determine whether the State should take a life in return. The Supreme Court has repeatedly affirmed that any aspect of a defendant's upbringing, psychological development or personal history that lessens moral culpability must be allowed to guide sentencing. Randolph (Malik Abdul-Sajjad)'s adoption related factors…early attachment rupture, an abusive adoptive environment, identity instability and likely inherited vulnerabilities…paint a picture of a man whose psychological development was profoundly compromised long before adulthood.

Why Richard Barry Randolph (Malik Abdul-Sajjad) Should Not Be Executed : Being Adopted Should Bar A Death Sentence

Execution is meant for those whose crimes reflect the highest degree of intentional fully developed moral culpability. But when a person begins life with the emotional disadvantages that Randolph (Malik Abdul-Sajjad) did…shaped by early loss, trauma, instability and unaddressed biological factors…society cannot fairly conclude that he stands among the "worst of the worst." The justice system bears responsibility for acknowledging the developmental realities that shaped him, especially when his life now hangs in the balance.

For these reasons…grounded in science, law and basic human fairness…adoption must be considered a primary mitigating factor when deciding death sentences.

Richard Barry Randolph (Malik Abdul-Sajjad) should not be executed.

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11.22.25

“Today You Will Be With Me in Paradise”: Christ the King

Christ the King = Above Injustice and the Work of Liberation

Christ the King? The crucifixion scene in Luke 23:35-43 is one of the most profound confrontations between divine love and human injustice in all of Scripture. In these few verses, the world reveals its cruelty, its derision, its willingness to mock suffering and weaponize despair. Yet in the very same moment, Christ reveals a kingdom built not on domination but on mercy, justice and solidarity with the oppressed. The passage becomes not only a theological proclamation of salvation but a political and social indictment of the systems that crucify the innocent…then and now.

The Rulers’ Derision and the Exposure of False Power

The rulers who sneer at Jesus stand in for every authority that protects its own power by humiliating and discarding the vulnerable. Their taunt…“He saved others; let him save himself”…is not merely mockery but an attempt to justify their violence. If he truly were God’s chosen, they imply, he would conform to their expectations of power. The tragedy is that this impulse persists across history. Societies still assume that strength is measured in dominance, that the powerful are the blessed, that the vulnerable deserve what happens to them. The cross unmasks this lie. In Christ, God chooses not the throne of coercion but the gallows of the condemned. The rulers may sneer, but it is their values…not Christ…that are exposed as false.

The Soldiers and the Machinery of Injustice

Even the soldiers jeer, participating in the cruelty as though the suffering before them were entertainment. They represent the

machinery of the state…agents who carry out violence while convinced it is simply their duty. Theirs is the cold complicity that allows injustice to operate. Their offering of wine is not compassion…it is ritualized mockery. They echo the rulers…"If you are King of the Jews, save yourself." In their derision we hear every modern voice that tells the oppressed to stop demanding justice, to stop complaining, to "save themselves" from the conditions others created. The cross reveals how deeply injustice becomes woven into the habits of an entire society.

The Inscription and the Revelation of True Kingship : Christ the King

And yet, above Christ's head hangs the inscription, "This is the King of the Jews." Rome thinks it is a joke…a political insult, a warning to any who might resist imperial authority. But the gospel transforms the insult into truth. Christ's kingship is not invalidated by his suffering…it is revealed by it. His power is not the power to avoid pain but the power to absorb the world's evil and still bless all the people in it. Jesus reigns not by crushing enemies but by refusing to become one. His authority is not revoked on Golgotha…it is enthroned…forever.

Two Criminals and the Cry for a New World

Into this scene step the two criminals crucified alongside him. One joins the chorus of derision…"Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us." This man speaks the language of survival under oppression…distrust, bitterness, the instinct to claw one's way out of suffering alone. He sees power only in terms of escape. But the other criminal perceives something deeper: "We have been condemned justly… but this man has done nothing criminal." With these words he articulates a central theme of social justice…the recognition that innocence and guilt are often distributed by systems that are themselves unjust. He acknowledges his own wrongdoing, but he also exposes the

truth…Jesus is being executed by a system that has no interest in truth.

His next words…"Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom"…are a cry for more than personal salvation. They are a plea for a new world. He recognizes that Christ's kingdom stands in judgment over all kingdoms built on violence, exclusion and fear. He senses that Jesus' reign begins not after escaping injustice but in the midst of it. His request is a prayer spoken throughout generations of oppressed people…Remember us when the world is transformed…Remember us when you come into your kingdom…Remember us.

Christ the King : Paradise is Restoration and Resistance

Jesus' response…"Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise"…is the moment the entire passage turns. The promise of Paradise is not escapism…it is the unveiling of a vision in which human dignity is restored…and the beloved community is found. Paradise is the world as God intends it, where no one is mocked, crucified or left alone in suffering. It is the fullest repudiation of the violence unfolding around them. Christ promises the fullness of restoration…the fullness of hope…mercy…justice.

A Kingdom That Breaks Into the Present : Christ the King

This promise is not merely for a man on a cross. It is Jesus' final declaration that the last word over humanity is not condemnation but restoration. It is a pledge that the kingdom of God is breaking in even where society sees only despair. And it is a challenge to every generation of Christians…if Christ is above all injustice, then Christ's people must refuse to make peace with injustice. The followers of a crucified King cannot align themselves with systems that crucify the innocent, mock the vulnerable or use power to preserve privilege.

Instead, we are called to stand where Christ stands…beside those the world dismisses, among those society cages, at the edges where pain is ignored. We are called to echo his promise of Paradise by building communities marked by justice, mercy and liberation. The cross reveals not only what the world is but what the world must become. Paradise is not only a future hope…it is a present calling.

Christ the King Sunday: The Reign of the Crucified One

In the end, the passage is not simply a story of two criminals and one dying Messiah. It is a portrait of a kingdom whose power is love, whose justice is mercy and whose King…crucified yet triumphant…leads us toward a world redeemed. Christ is above every injustice, not by avoiding it, but by entering it fully and transforming it forever. And he invites us, even now, to follow him into a Paradise that begins in solidarity with the crucified and ends in the liberation of all creation.

On this Christ the King Sunday, this passage proclaims that Jesus' kingship is unlike any earthly power. The rulers and soldiers mocked him, yet the cross itself becomes his throne…a place where he reveals a kingdom built on mercy, justice and sacrificial love. The inscription meant as ridicule becomes truth…this crucified one truly is King. To honor Christ the King is to reject every system that mirrors the cruelty of Golgotha and to follow the one who reigns by lifting the lowly, remembering the forgotten and transforming every injustice into the first glimpse of Paradise.

11.23.25

The Yearning of a Revolutionary: On Luigi Mangione's Why

Luigi Mangione, Krishnamurti and Christ: A Theological Meditation on the Yearning of a Revolutionary

UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson was shot and killed in Midtown Manhattan on December 4, 2024; Luigi Mangione was arrested in Altoona, Pennsylvania on December 9, 2024, and has been charged in state and federal court. As of September 2025, terrorism enhancement charges in the state case were dismissed, though Mangione still faces a state murder charge and separate federal charges, and federal prosecutors have signaled they will seek the death penalty."

Keep Watching

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The Yearning of a Revolutionary and Luigi Mangione. There is something unbearably human about Luigi Mangione's story. Not in the alleged act that brought him into public view…the killing of UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson…but in the spiritual turbulence that preceded it. The fragments we possess reveal a young man consumed by questions that have haunted humanity's most serious souls… How does one live authentically in a profoundly sick society? What does moral courage demand when confronted with systemic cruelty? And perhaps most painfully… what happens to the human heart when it sees too much, feels too much and carries alone the weight of a world it believes to be irredeemably broken?

The profile that emerges from reporting defies easy categorization. Here was a valedictorian, an elite engineering graduate from an affluent Maryland family, a young man who read widely in philosophy, Christian scripture, mystical theology,

political economy and Asian spirituality. Publicly shared notes and quotations reveal a mind drawn repeatedly to voices that challenge societal complacency…particularly Jiddu Krishnamurti and Jesus Christ. These fragments reveal a figure wrestling with what Paul Tillich called "ultimate concern," doing so in a way that fused existential distress with spiritual aspiration.

At the center of this turbulence lies what we might call Mangione's yearning to be revolutionary…a yearning that appears less political than it is psychological, moral and devastatingly spiritual. It arises from his sense that the world he inhabits…particularly the structures of American healthcare and capitalism…is morally disordered…even apocalyptic…in its contradictions. Within this worldview, both Krishnamurti and Jesus function not simply as teachers but as catalysts…figures of disruption whose voices illuminate society's sickness while summoning the individual into a kind of radical authenticity.

Nothing in this meditation should ever be taken as diminishing the fundamental moral gravity of what Mangione is alleged to have done. The killing of Brian Thompson was not a revolutionary act, nor an expression of genuine prophetic conscience, but a tragic and unequivocally evil outcome…an act that violates the sanctity of life at the center of both Christian theology and the ethical truthfulness Krishnamurti demands. Whatever anguish, alienation or spiritual yearning shaped Mangione's interior world cannot transfigure a moral wrong into anything less than wrong. The psychological and theological forces examined here help us understand the pathos of his inner storm, but they do not mitigate the reality that taking a human life is never sanctioned by either Christ's compassion or Krishnamurti's clarity. In this sense, the tragedy of Mangione's spiritual confusion is matched…and exceeded…by the tragedy inflicted upon Thompson, his family and the community harmed by the violent rupture of his death.

Krishnamurti and the Psychology of Revolutionary Seeing : The Yearning of a Revolutionary and Luigi Mangione

Krishnamurti's Refusal of Authority

The quote that Mangione chose to share publicly from Krishnamurti cuts like a blade: "It is no measure of health to be well adjusted to a profoundly sick society." These words, drawn from Krishnamurti's vast body of work…including Freedom from the Known and The First and Last Freedom[3]…reveal more than philosophical agreement. They suggest a young man who had crossed a threshold of perception from which there was no return.

Krishnamurti's philosophy is merciless in its clarity. Truth, he insists, cannot be mediated through institutions, traditions or authorities. It must be encountered directly, stripped of the thousand defenses we erect against reality. His concept of "choiceless awareness" demands we see things exactly as they are…not as we wish them to be, not as society tells us they are, but as they actually exist in their naked truth. And what Krishnamurti saw when he looked at modern society was not merely imperfection but structural sickness. Our institutions, he argued, mirror the inner disintegration of the human beings who built them. Fear breeds systems of control. Greed creates economies of exploitation. The well adjusted person, comfortable within such systems, is not healthy but symptomatic of deeper pathology.

For someone of Mangione's evident intellectual seriousness, encountering Krishnamurti must have been simultaneously liberating and devastating. Liberating because here was a voice that validated his growing sense that something was fundamentally wrong with the world he inhabited. Devastating because once you see through Krishnamurti's eyes, you can never quite see the same way again.

Seeing as Alienation

The comfortable illusions that allow most of us to navigate daily life begin to dissolve under Krishnamurti's gaze. The gap between what society professes…care, justice and human dignity…and what it practices becomes an open wound. Krishnamurti warns that genuine insight produces sorrow, because it dismantles illusions that once provided meaning and stability. Not the dramatic sorrow of tragedy, but the quiet, persistent ache of seeing clearly in a world that depends on blindness.

The accounts of Mangione's writings suggest someone who experienced this alienation with particular intensity. His reported condemnations of the American healthcare system as parasitic and exploitative reflect not mere political disagreement but something deeper…a Krishnamurtian moral diagnosis that the system itself is spiritually sick, that it feeds on human suffering while speaking the language of care. To perceive social reality through this lens is inherently alienating. The clearer one's perception becomes, the more intolerable the structures of everyday life appear. You begin to see the violence hidden in bureaucracy, the cruelty disguised as policy and the human cost of what others call business as usual.

Krishnamurti and the Birth of Revolutionary Longing

Yet here emerges a profound tension in Krishnamurti's teaching, one that seems to have seized Mangione's imagination. Krishnamurti repeatedly insists that revolution must be psychological, not political…that external systems cannot change fundamentally unless human consciousness itself changes. But his writing carries an ethical urgency that can stir something else entirely. When he describes society's sickness with the precision of a surgeon identifying cancer, when he strips away every comforting lie about why things are as they are, he sounds less

like a meditation teacher and more like a prophet diagnosing collective sin.

For an intellectually earnest reader…particularly one already troubled by injustice…this creates a compelling internal struggle. If the world is sick, what is the morally responsible response? If insight reveals systematic exploitation, can one remain passive? Does clarity itself demand confrontation? This is the birthplace of what I'm calling the yearning to be revolutionary…a longing to somehow embody or enact the truth that one has painfully discerned. It's not primarily a political impulse but something more primal…a need to align one's actions with one's devastating clarity.

Jesus Christ and the Theology of Prophetic Disruption : The Yearning of a Revolutionary and Luigi Mangione

Jesus as Apocalyptic Critic of Power

If Krishnamurti provided Mangione with a lens for seeing society's sickness, Jesus Christ appears to have provided him with a model for confronting it. But the Jesus that emerges from Mangione's reported writings is not the gentle teacher of Sunday school imagination. This is the Jesus of the Gospels read through the lens of liberation theology…a prophetic disrupter who confronts the powers of his time with uncompromising moral clarity.

This is the Jesus who enters the temple and doesn't politely request reform but overturns tables in holy rage. The Jesus who looks at religious authorities and calls them whitewashed tombs…beautiful outside, full of death within. The Jesus who pronounces woes upon those who lay heavy burdens on others while refusing to lift a finger to help. This is the Jesus that Gustavo Gutiérrez describes when he writes that the gospel is a "liberating praxis" that exposes structures of oppression, the

Jesus that Walter Brueggemann invokes when he speaks of prophetic imagination breaking open imperial consciousness.

This Jesus is not safe. He doesn't offer comfort to the comfortable or validation to systems of exploitation. Instead, he stands with the crushed and condemned, announcing judgment on the powers that crush them. For someone already disturbed by institutional violence, already seeing through Krishnamurti's lens the sickness of society, encountering this Jesus must have been like touching live wire.

Christological Demands and Ethical Extremity

The ethical demands of Jesus are maximalist, absolute, seemingly impossible. "Sell what you have and give to the poor." "Love your enemies." "Take up your cross." These aren't suggestions for gradual improvement but calls for total transformation. Dietrich Bonhoeffer captured this in his discussion of "the cost of discipleship," arguing that Christ calls believers into a form of life that exists in permanent contradiction with worldly power. There is no comfortable middle ground, no way to serve both God and mammon, no path that avoids the confrontation between the kingdom of God and the kingdoms of this world.

For Mangione, wrestling with the violence of American healthcare…a system that bankrupts the sick, that rations care by wealth, that transforms human suffering into profit margins… Jesus' words must have burned. Here was divine validation for his moral outrage, but also an intensification of his burden. Where Krishnamurti provided psychological clarity about society's sickness, Jesus provided ethical fire, a sense that this sickness is not merely unfortunate but sinful, not merely problematic but demanding of judgment.

Jesus and the Revolutionary Imagination

Throughout Christian history, Jesus has inspired revolutionary movements. Francis of Assisi stripped naked in the public square to renounce his father's wealth. Liberation theologians in Latin America declared God's preferential option for the poor. James Cone argued that Christ stands with the crucified peoples of every age, that the cross reveals God's solidarity with the lynched, the oppressed, the destroyed.

Mangione appears to have inhabited this revolutionary Christian imagination, though perhaps without the theological guardrails that traditionally accompany it. Jesus becomes for him a figure who not only validates moral outrage but embodies the confrontation he longs to enact…truth against corruption, compassion against cruelty and moral courage against institutional complicity. The revolutionary yearning that Krishnamurti awakened, Christ inflames and sanctifies, grounding it not merely in psychological insight but in divine confrontation with evil.

Convergence: Krishnamurti, Christ and Mangione's Moral Imagination : The Yearning of a Revolutionary and Luigi Mangione

Seeing (Krishnamurti) and Acting (Christ)

Mangione stands at the intersection of two powerful currents that don't naturally harmonize. Krishnamurti calls him to see through illusion, to understand the sickness of society with devastating clarity. Jesus calls him to challenge injustice, to overturn tables, to stand with the oppressed against their oppressors. Krishnamurti speaks of inner revolution. Jesus embodies prophetic action. Krishnamurti warns against being caught in reaction. Jesus seems to demand response.

This tension generates a psychological and theological field of extraordinary intensity. The convergence creates what we might call an existential posture of agonized clarity…the world is sick,

the suffering is intolerable and one must do something. But what? And how? The questions become not philosophical but visceral, not abstract but immediate. Every day that passes, people die from lack of healthcare. Every quarter, insurance companies report record profits. Every moment, the machine grinds on, and you see it, you see it all with Krishnamurti's clarity and feel it with Christ's compassion, and the seeing and feeling become almost unbearable.

The Lonely Burden of Knowing

This fusion of Krishnamurti and Christ creates a potent interior drama, but it also produces profound isolation. The one who sees society's sickness feels called to witness against it, but such witnessing is inherently lonely. Friends and family, well adjusted to the sick society, cannot understand the urgency you feel. They see your intensity as extremism, your clarity as obsession, your moral anguish as imbalance.

Kierkegaard wrote about this in The Sickness Unto Death…the despair of the self unable to reconcile its vision with the world's refusal to change. Mangione's writings, marked by moral disgust, urgency and loneliness, suggest someone overwhelmed by the contrast between what he believed society ought to be and what he saw it actually was. The more clearly he saw, the more alien he became. The more he understood, the less he could participate in the casual cruelties and comfortable lies that make normal life possible.

The Revolutionary Yearning as Vocation and Temptation

The Yearning of a Revolutionary and Luigi Mangione. To yearn to be revolutionary in this sense is to feel both summoned and endangered. Summoned because moral clarity seems to demand response…how can one see suffering and remain passive? Endangered because revolutionary imagination, especially when isolated, can outstrip discernment, humility or hope. The

yearning becomes a vocation…a calling to somehow embody truth in a world of lies, to be authentic in a society of masks and to stand for justice in systems of exploitation.

But without community, without spiritual elders, without theological formation, this revolutionary longing can become untethered from love and rooted instead in despair. Krishnamurti warns that psychological revolution must arise from freedom, not compulsion. Jesus warns that judgment belongs to God, not to the individual ego. Yet for someone experiencing the convergence of these influences in isolation, such warnings might feel like abstractions compared to the immediate reality of suffering…the concrete violence of systems that destroy human beings while speaking the language of care and service.

The Existential Consequences of Seeing a Sick World : The Yearning of a Revolutionary and Luigi Mangione

The Sorrow of the Clairvoyant

There is a particular kind of sorrow that comes with clear seeing…what Krishnamurti calls the sorrow of perception, what Christian mystics like John of the Cross describe as the dark night of the soul. It's the sorrow of perceiving reality without the comfort of illusion, of seeing how things actually are rather than how we wish them to be. For most of us, this clarity comes in glimpses…moments when the veil lifts and we see the machinery of suffering that underlies what we call civilization. But we quickly look away, find distraction and desperately rebuild our necessary illusions.

Mangione appears to have lost this capacity for comfortable blindness. His alleged note describing the healthcare system as parasitic reflects not just anger but a form of existential outrage…the fury of someone who cannot stop seeing the preventable deaths, the bankruptcies, the families destroyed by medical debt and the profits extracted from human pain. To feel

this sorrow without spiritual scaffolding, without a community that can hold and channel such perception, is spiritually destabilizing. The sorrow becomes not a doorway to compassion but a weight that crushes.

When Moral Urgency Becomes Moral Exhaustion

Jesus' call to radical discipleship can inspire profound transformation, but it can also overwhelm those who internalize it without balance, community or grace. Bonhoeffer warned that discipleship without the sustaining presence of Christ becomes a crushing burden…not liberation but a new form of bondage…not freedom but an impossible weight of moral responsibility.

Similarly, Krishnamurti's demand for total psychological freedom, for complete authenticity, can exhaust those who interpret it as a personal mission to purify not just themselves but society. The revolutionary impulse, which begins as a yearning for wholeness and justice, becomes a burden too heavy for any individual to bear. Mangione appears to embody this collision of burdens…the Krishnamurtian imperative to see clearly crashing into the Christian imperative to act justly, with no mediating community, no theological tradition, no spiritual practices to sustain him through the tension.

The Tragedy of Untended Idealism

The Yearning of a Revolutionary and Luigi Mangione. At its core, what we see in Mangione's story is the tragedy of untended idealism…high moral aspiration untempered by theological community, psychological support or spiritual formation. His longing to confront injustice appears painfully sincere. His disgust with structural exploitation aligns with both Christian social teaching and Krishnamurti's critique of conditioning. The fragments of his thought that we possess reveal someone who cared, perhaps too much, about the suffering of others, who

couldn't make peace with systems that transform human need into corporate profit.

Yet idealism without grounding becomes volatile. The revolutionary impulse, when isolated, becomes not a path to healing but a manifestation of despair. The yearning to be revolutionary…to somehow embody truth in a false world…to enact justice in unjust system…becomes a consuming fire with no outlet, no expression and no community to channel it toward life rather than death.

The Yearning of a Revolutionary and Luigi Mangione

Luigi Mangione emerges from the fragments we possess as a profoundly human figure…intelligent, morally sensitive, spiritually restless and existentially troubled. His engagement with Krishnamurti reveals a mind drawn to psychological truth telling, unable to accept the comfortable lies that make participation in a sick society bearable. His engagement with Jesus reveals a conscience drawn to prophetic justice, unable to tolerate the violence hidden in bureaucracy and profit margins. Between these two poles lies his yearning to be revolutionary…a yearning born from sorrow, sharpened by insight, inflamed by injustice and ultimately unanchored by community.

To read Mangione theologically is not to excuse but to understand…to see him as a figure caught in tensions that haunt modern spiritual life. The tension between seeing and acting, between despair and hope, between solitude and solidarity. The tension between the psychological revolution that Krishnamurti demands and the social revolution that Jesus embodies. The tension between the clarity that alienates and the blindness that enables participation.

The tragedy is not merely what he allegedly did, but the interior storm that drove him…the storm of a young man who saw too much, felt too much and carried alone the burden of a world he

believed to be sick beyond healing. His story forces us to confront unsettling questions about modern life. What happens when one perceives systemic evil with unbearable clarity but lacks the spiritual resources to transform that perception into sustainable action? What happens when revolutionary yearning has no community to hold it, no tradition to channel it and no elders to guide it? What happens when the desire for justice becomes untethered from love? When moral clarity becomes isolated from hope?

These questions reach beyond Mangione himself. They point toward a deeper spiritual crisis of our age…an age marked by institutional decay, existential loneliness, and a yearning, shared by many, to be revolutionary in a world that feels beyond repair. In Mangione's anguish, we might recognize our own struggles with systems that seem too big to challenge, suffering that seems too vast to address, clarity that brings more pain than peace.

Perhaps the deeper tragedy is not that Mangione felt called to be revolutionary, but that his revolutionary yearning found no community capable of holding it, no tradition able to channel it toward life rather than death. In a society that increasingly produces isolated individuals with acute moral sensitivity but no spiritual formation, no communal wisdom, no practices for sustaining hope in the face of systemic evil, we may see more young people crushed by the weight of their own clarity, consumed by their own yearning for a world transformed.

The question that haunts Mangione's story is not whether one should yearn to be revolutionary…in a sick society, such yearning may be a sign of spiritual health rather than pathology. The question is how such yearning can be held, channeled and sustained without destroying the one who carries it. This is ultimately a theological question, a communal question, a question about how we accompany each other through the sorrow of seeing clearly in a world that depends on blindness.

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11.25.25

The Autopsy of Anthony Wainwright=Florida Killed a Dying Man

A State Killing a Dying Man: On the Absurdity of Executing Someone With Terminal Metastatic Cancer

As his spiritual advisor, I stood beside Anthony Wainwright when he was executed by lethal injection at 6:22 p.m. on June 10, 2025. I thought that was it. I was wrong.

Keep Watching

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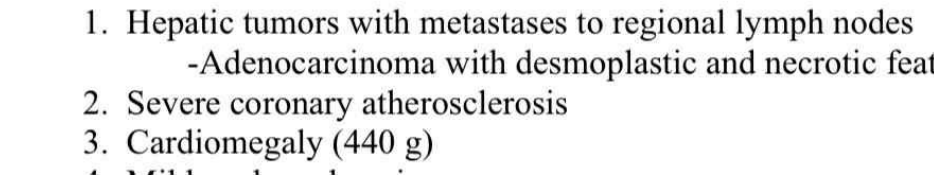
The Autopsy of Anthony Wainwright = That Told the Truth the State Didn't


1. Hepatic tumors with metastases to regional lymph nodes
   -Adenocarcinoma with desmoplastic and necrotic feat
2. Severe coronary atherosclerosis
3. Cardiomegaly (440 g)

When the autopsy of Wainwright recently surfaced, one line in particular broke through the noise…"Hepatic tumors with metastases to regional lymph nodes—adenocarcinoma with desmoplastic and necrotic features." You don't have to be a doctor to understand what that means. It means he was dying. Not theoretically dying. Not someday dying. But dying in the real, biological and irreversible way that cancer announces inside a human body. The kind of dying that steals appetite, sleep, strength, breath and dignity…piece by piece…long before it steals life itself.

Florida didn't execute a healthy man. Florida executed a man whose body had already begun its own countdown.

When the State's Script Collides With Biology = The Autopsy of Anthony Wainwright

There is something profoundly disorienting about realizing this. We are told that executions are the ultimate statement of state power, the definitive exertion of justice and the final word. And yet, here was a man whose cells had already issued a different verdict…one that no governor, no attorney general and no warden could override. The cancer had metastasized. It had crossed into the lymph nodes. It had torn through tissue with desmoplastic scarring and necrotic decay. In plain terms, the state fought to kill someone who was already in the final stretch of being killed by his own disease.

And that raises a very human question…Why?

The Collapse of the Death Penalty's Justifications = The Autopsy of Anthony Wainwright

If the purpose of execution is incapacitation, cancer was already taking care of that. If the purpose is deterrence, there is no deterrent value in killing someone who would have died naturally. And if the purpose is retribution, then Florida's timing unintentionally softened the severity of the death that terminal cancer was already preparing for him. No one who understands metastatic hepatic adenocarcinoma would mistake it for a gentle exit. Cancer kills slowly. It kills cruelly. It kills without ceremony or anesthetic or witnesses. Compared to that slow unmaking of the human body…jaundice, hallucinations, bed sores, vomiting, unrelenting pain…the state offered him something he would never have found in prison…a quick death.

Even supporters of the death penalty should stop and breathe at that fact.

When the State's Harshest Sentence Becomes the Softer Death = The Autopsy of Anthony Wainwright

When the state's most severe punishment ends up being more humane than nature's, something is morally upside down. The whole architecture of justification collapses under its own weight. Florida did not impose a harsher sentence. Florida interrupted one.

The Resurrection of Truth = The Autopsy of Anthony Wainwright

And then something unexpected happened…something that feels almost theological once you sit with it long enough.

Because when the autopsy surfaced and the truth rose from beneath the state's carefully staged ending, it read like a kind of quiet resurrection. Not a vindication. Not a romantic revision of the man or his crimes. But a resurrection of truth, a rising of what the state never intended to reveal. Florida tried to script the final chapter. The state wanted control over the last word. But in the end, the body itself spoke a different story. The cancer testified. The metastases bore witness. Biology told a truth that the machinery of death could not silence.

Eternity's Wink and the Limits of State Power = The Autopsy of Anthony Wainwright

It is strange, almost unsettlingly so, that the moment of clarity came after the execution…as if eternity reached backward, pulling a forgotten truth into the light. Not to redeem the condemned man's life, but to remind us that human systems, no matter how powerful they pretend to be, cannot ultimately define the meaning of a life or the full reality of a death.

In that sense, this revelation feels like a win from eternity…a small but undeniable reminder that truth has its own timing. The

state cannot choreograph everything. Some truths rise after the fact, whether anyone wants them to or not.

The Absurd Redundancy of This Execution

Which brings us back to the basic absurdity at the heart of all of this: Florida killed a man who was already dying. The execution changed nothing except the timing and the optics. It didn't make the world safer. It didn't prevent future harm. It didn't even deliver the moral clarity the state claimed it was offering. Instead, it exposed just how bureaucratic, performative and detached from human reality the death penalty has become. A man with widespread metastatic cancer…a man whose organs were already failing…became the focus of the state's ultimate punishment as if the natural world had not already taken that power out of the state's hands.

The autopsy does more than record the cause of death. It reveals the limits of state power and the quiet, stubborn persistence of truth. It forces us to see the execution not as a decisive act of justice, but as a gesture rendered unnecessary by the body's own testimony.

The Unmistakably Human Realization

In the end, Florida did not deliver a final word. It merely hurried along what was already happening.

And when the truth finally surfaced…when the cancer's story rose into daylight…it left behind an uncomfortable, unmistakably human realization…the execution was not justice…it was redundancy.

11.27.25

Harold “Red” Nichols’ & The Final Thanksgiving on Death Row

The Final Gathering Before Death Watch : Harold “Red” Nichols and Friends

As soon as today, Harold “Red” Nichols is scheduled to be moved to death watch…exactly two weeks before his December 11 execution. That knowledge has shifted the atmosphere on Tennessee’s death row. Men who have known him for decades understand what the move means. Once he crosses that threshold…human contact narrows to protocol…and each day is measured not by habit but by proximity to the end.

Nichols carries it all quietly. On the row, announcements of impending death are rarely spoken aloud…they are simply understood. Still, the news is known. His closest friends, Jonathon Stephenson and Glenn Rogers, recognized they were facing their last opportunity to sit with him as they had for years…without the finality of the chamber pressing against every word.

Earlier today, a small meal came together. In prison, meaning grows from scarcity…even a few ordinary items can become a sacred offering.

A Meal Made Holy by Circumstance : The Final Thanksgiving

The food was simple…a little bread, packets of mayonnaise, a few pieces of cheese, lettuce carefully saved and wrapped for days and beef jerky from commissary (heated to taste like bacon). Nothing was special…yet everything was intentional.

Stephenson laid out the items carefully, the way one might set a table in a place where tables are never set. Rogers portioned the

jerky, breaking it into thirds. Nichols, known everywhere in the prison only as “Red,” watched with a faint grateful smile.

There was no prayer spoken aloud. It was unnecessary. Every breath was a prayer. Three men who had spent their adult lives inside concrete walls sat together to share what they had, aware this would be the last time they would break bread in each other’s presence. The scene carried the quiet weight of scripture, where ordinary food becomes sacred simply because of who shares it and when.

The meal unfolded slowly. They smeared mayonnaise on bread, added lettuce, passed the jerky and added cheese. They ate with the deliberate patience of people trying to suspend time. Short conversations stayed grounded…stories from years past… memories of others who had come and gone. Yet beneath the surface lay the unmistakable knowledge that this was their last Thanksgiving together.

Even the perionds of silence spoke. There were no raised voices, no desperate attempts to fill the space with meaningless chatter. Instead, the quiet allowed memory and presence to resonate, letting each man absorb the full measure of what these moments meant. Outside, the world carried on unaware, but within the walls of Tennessee’s death row, eternity seemed compressed into a single table. Nichols’ hands, roughened by years of labor and confinement, moved slowly and deliberately, as if every gesture carried its own prayer. For Stephenson and Rogers, watching him, there was a shared understanding that the weight of ordinary gestures had never felt so sacred. In the smallest acts…smearing mayonnaise, passing jerky, lifting a piece of bread…the men bore witness to humanity enduring even in the shadow of death. And when the final crumbs were gathered, no one spoke, yet gratitude lingered in the air, unspoken but palpable, as if heaven itself had paused to watch.

The simplicity of the scene held its own holiness. “Where two or three are gathered”…not because the place itself is sacred…but because presence itself becomes sacred. Under fluorescent lights and peeling paint, the gathering of three men carried a gravity the institution could not erase.

The Quiet Farewell

When time came to an end, an officer signaled to wrap it up. In places like this, goodbyes are often without ceremony. Still, the men lingered a moment.

Handshakes became brief embraces…rare gestures in a maximum security environment. No one said “goodbye.” Instead, simple words of gratitude were offered. The farewells echoed ancient spiritual departures, where one walks into the unknown with nothing but the memory of shared presence.

Harold “Red” Nichols Walks Back to His Cell

Finally, Nichols stepped away from the table and moved toward the exit. His gait was slow and reflective, weighted with awareness. He looked back once, a brief glance toward the men who had sat with him, as if marking their faces into memory.

Then Harold “Red” Nichols walked back to his cell.

The sound of that walk…soft steps on concrete, the distant hum of fluorescent lights…carried more truth than any declaration could. It was the sound of a man returning to a space he knew he would soon leave forever.

Very soon, Red will enter death watch, a world narrowed to four walls and a clock counting down his final days. But this meal…bread, mayonnaise, cheese, lettuce and jerky…held the weight of a sacrament. It was nothing special…and yet it was everything. A final table shared among those who had endured years together.

A moment that quietly resembled the last supper, even the Eucharist itself.

Before he entered death watch, before the state takes his life, Harold Nichols received one final act of fellowship from the only community he has known for decades.

Not a feast. Not a ritual.

Just a meal made holy because it was an embodiment of thanks.

*This account on the accounts of two of my guys in Tennessee, Jonathon Stephenson and Glenn Rogers.

11.27.25

Beyond The Death Penalty: The Human Evolutionary Journey

Taming Ourselves, Choosing Mercy: Beyond the Death Penalty

Humanity's Paradox: Violence and Compassion

Human beings are shaped by paradox. We are capable of extraordinary tenderness, creativity and moral imagination, yet beneath the surface of civilization lies a deep persistent history of violence. Richard Wrangham, in The Goodness Paradox, illuminates the evolutionary roots of this paradox. He argues that humans became cooperative and socially attuned not primarily through culture or morality…but through coalitionary enforcement against the dangerously aggressive. Our ancestors, living in fragile bands of hunters and gatherers, faced individuals whose uncontrolled aggression threatened the survival of the group. With no prisons, courts or formal institutions, the community sometimes resorted to a grim solution…the dangerous were killed by the group.

Wrangham calls this process self-domestication. Over generations, the removal of the most violent individuals reshaped human biology and behavior. Humans became less reactive, more socially intelligent and more capable of empathy and sustained cooperation. Our capacity for imagination, language, culture and morality is rooted in these interventions. Wrangham's insight is stark…the civility and cooperation we prize so highly exist because of lethal social enforcement. And yet, survival does not equate to moral rightness. Killing may have shaped human survival, but it was never morally justified.

The Death Penalty as Evolutionary Echo : Beyond the Death Penalty

Understanding Wrangham's framework helps us see the death penalty in a new light. Capital punishment taps into the same evolutionary instincts he identifies. Even in modern societies with prisons, rehabilitation and legal protections, there is a deep almost instinctive pull toward execution. The human mind recognizes echoes of the small fragile bands of early humans… remove the dangerous, protect the group and ensure survival. Wrangham shows us why this instinct feels compelling. But unlike our ancestors, we no longer face imminent communal collapse at the hands of one individual. Modern executions are not about survival…they are about control, ritualized vengeance and the illusion of safety. What once preserved life now risks corrupting it.

Reactive and Proactive Aggression

Wrangham distinguishes two forms of aggression: reactive aggression, hot, impulsive and immediate, which threatened ancestral communities, and proactive aggression, deliberate, planned and controlled, which allowed societies to enforce social norms and remove threats systematically. Modern executions are a form of proactive aggression. They are calculated, bureaucratic and socially sanctioned…but their moral authority does not come from biology. Acting on these instincts today does not preserve life…it perpetuates a biologically inherited pattern in contexts where moral reflection and legal alternatives exist.

The Instinct of Justice and Its Moral Limits

Wrangham deepens our understanding of why justice often feels instinctively tied to retribution. For millennia, humans equated the removal of the dangerous with preservation. Evolution wired us to respond to threat with lethal enforcement. This wiring is why societies repeatedly return to the logic of execution, even when it is unnecessary. Yet understanding instinct is not the same as ethical justification. Wrangham shows us how humans came to think killing could protect society, but it is conscience, moral

reasoning and faith that show why killing is wrong. Evolution explains the origin of the instinct…morality and theology define the healthier path.

The Human Evolutionary Journey Beyond The Death Penalty

To live fully human is to restrain instincts that once defined our species. Wrangham shows that humans are biologically predisposed to act on deadly impulses…and modern institutions can replicate these ancestral enforcement patterns with bureaucratic efficiency. But moral maturity demands that we act differently. The death penalty, as an institutional echo of these instincts, is both a historical mirror and a moral test. It reminds us of evolutionary pressures, yet it also reveals our capacity for conscious ethical choice. Humanity now has alternatives… systems of justice, rehabilitation and protection that do not perpetuate cycles of killing.

Abolition as a Higher Human Calling

Abandoning the death penalty is an act of moral and spiritual self-domestication. If our ancestors became more cooperative by restraining violence through killing, we are called to become morally and spiritually mature by restraining violence without killing. Wrangham provides the lens to understand the depth of our violent instincts. Moral thought and ethical reflection illuminate the path to mercy. Rejecting state-sanctioned killing is a deliberate act of human flourishing. It recognizes that life is sacred, justice can be served without mirroring violence and mercy is stronger than fear. Wrangham shows us the evolutionary origins of lethal impulses. Spirituality and theology show us the higher calling to human flourishing…to protect life, act with justice and cultivate mercy, even toward those who have caused great harm.

From Biological Instinct to Moral Choice : Beyond the Death Penalty

We were biologically shaped by the removal of the dangerous. We were tamed by killing, but only biologically. Killing was never and is never right. Spiritually, morally and ethically, we are called to a higher standard. The death penalty is not inevitable, natural or morally necessary. It is an echo of instincts we are capable of transcending. Choosing mercy over execution is humanity continuing the work that evolution began but morality completes. It is a conscious refusal to allow instinct to dictate justice. It is an embrace of a higher ethic, one that mirrors redemption rather than destruction.

We might be biologically shaped by killing.
But, the deeper call is to live morally and spiritually by mercy.

11.27.25

Rahmanullah Lakanwal & The Unfairness of The Death Penalty

Due Process: Rahmanullah Lakanwal and the Eternal Unfairness of the Death Penalty

The Immediate Shock, Public Reaction & Due Process

When a crime shocks the public, the first casualty is often patience. The second is principle (…due process). In the aftermath of the shooting that left two National Guard members mortally wounded in Washington, D.C., the nation entered a period of deep grief. Officials confirmed that U.S. Army Specialist Sarah Beckstrom has died, and leaders across the country urged Americans to pray for U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Andrew Wolfe, who was critically injured. In this climate of sorrow and fear, United States Attorney General Pam Bondi appeared on national television (Fox News) and declared, "If something happens… we will do everything in our power to seek the death penalty against that monster who should not have been in our country."

Her words were meant to signal strength in a moment of instability. Yet statements like these reveal something deeper and far more troubling…the ease with which political actors are willing to abandon constitutional commitments when public emotion surges. They demonstrate precisely why Rahmanullah Lakanwal…and every accused person…must receive full due process…and why a system that allows state officials to prejudge defendants can never fairly administer the death penalty.

The Foundation of Due Process

Due process is not a luxury reserved for the innocent or the sympathetic. It is the foundation of our criminal justice system.

The guarantee that the state may not take a person's liberty without meeting the highest standards of proof in a neutral forum is the undergirding of everything we claim to believe about government. The Constitution makes no exceptions for immigration status, nationality or moments of collective anger. It insists that every defendant is presumed innocent, entitled to counsel, entitled to a fair and impartial jury and protected from governmental actions that could taint the trial process. These protections stand precisely so that in moments of intense public grief…when the desire for immediate resolution is overwhelming…the law does not bend to passion.

How Political Statements Undermine Due Process

Attorney General Bondi's televised comments undermine nearly every one of these protections. By labeling Lakanwal a "monster"…she erased the presumption of innocence and transmitted a message to potential jurors…this case is already settled. When an official with a national platform declares guilt before evidence is presented, the integrity of the trial process becomes compromised before it begins. A jury pool exposed to this rhetoric cannot easily be asked to approach the case without prejudice. And because her statement was made in the language of public protection…urging prayer and promising swift retribution…it becomes more than commentary…it becomes a directive about what the public should expect and demand.

Even more troubling is her statement that Lakanwal "should not have been in our country." This is not an argument about evidence or culpability. It is an invocation of outsider status as an aggravating factor. It subtly suggests that his alleged actions are uniquely heinous not because of what occurred…but because of who he is and where he is from. Equal protection guarantees that foreign nationals and citizens should stand on the same legal ground in a criminal proceeding such as this. Anything that compromises such footing perverts due process.

The Inherent Problems with the Death Penalty

This is where the problem with the death penalty becomes undeniable. The death penalty is not simply another punishment. It demands a fairness standard beyond anything else in the criminal system, because it is irreversible. Yet the political environment surrounding capital cases actively undermines such fairness. Prosecutors and elected officials often use capital cases as opportunities to display toughness…to respond to public fear…or to demonstrate loyalty to particular constituencies. Media pressure compounds these incentives. The result is a climate where objectivity is nearly impossible…and where political advantage can drive decisions about who lives and who dies.

Attorney General Bondi's remarks illustrate how easily this happens. Before any trial, before any cross-examination or before evidence is fully known, a political figure just stood on national television and promised the harshest possible punishment. This transforms capital punishment into a spectacle rather than a sober legal process. It makes death an expectation before guilt is established. In such an environment, can we honestly claim that the ultimate punishment can ever be imposed fairly?

Due Process is in Greater Danger in High-Profile Cases

For Lakanwal specifically, due process is especially essential. Initial facts in high profile cases are often incomplete or incorrect. Individuals accused of violence against law enforcement or military personnel face heightened public scrutiny and pressure long before trial. Foreign nationals face additional barriers…lack of familiarity with the legal system, language obstacles and public suspicion fueled by stereotypes. The legal system's rigor exists precisely because these vulnerabilities are real. When officials make statements like Attorney General Bondi's, they exploit these vulnerabilities

rather than guard against them…thereby poisoning the entire process.

The Stakes for Victims' Families

The moral stakes are not limited to defendants. The families of Sarah Beckstrom and Andrew Wolfe…and the communities surrounding them…deserve a process that is unimpeachably fair. When prosecutors or officials prejudge a case, they endanger the entire prosecution. Convictions won through tainted proceedings are vulnerable to appeal, reversal or decades long delays. Families who are told that death will bring closure may instead endure decades upon decades of uncertainty because the state rushed to promise a result it could not constitutionally secure. True justice for victims is grounded in legitimacy, not spectacle.

Why the Death Penalty Cannot Be Fair

Ultimately, the core argument is simple…if a state official can publicly pronounce someone a monster and promise their execution before trial…the system administering that execution is not neutral. It is political. It is emotional. It is vulnerable to prejudice, xenophobia and impulse. And a system shaped by those forces cannot justly determine who should die.

Rahmanullah Lakanwal deserves due process not because he is innocent…and not because the allegations are trivial…but because due process is the only thing that stands between justice and vengeance. When public officials abandon those principles, they reveal that the death penalty…dependent as it is on perfect fairness…can never coexist with the realities of human emotion and political ambition. Comments like Attorney General Bondi's do not simply threaten one man's due process/trial…they expose why our society is fundamentally incapable of administering the death penalty.

11.29.25

Staying Awake in a Sleeping World – First Sunday of Advent

"Staying Awake in a Sleeping World"

Just like it was in Noah's time, that's how it will be when the Son of Man returns. Before the flood came, people were living life as usual—they were eating, drinking, getting married—right up until the very day Noah went into the ark. They never realized what was happening until the flood swept in and carried them all away. That's exactly how the coming of the Son of Man will be.

Two men will be working out in a field; one will be taken and the other left behind. Two women will be grinding grain together; one will be taken and the other left.

So stay awake. You don't know the day your Lord will come. Remember this: if a homeowner knew what time of night a thief was going to break in, he would have stayed up and prevented the break-in. In the same way, you must be ready—because the Son of Man will come at a time you aren't expecting.

-Paraphrase of Matthew 24:37-44

Advent Begins in the Dark

Advent does not begin in Bethlehem. It begins in the dark. It begins with a warning, not a lullaby. Before we get to sing of angels and infants, the lectionary drags us into the memory of Noah, into a world drowning in its own violence, into a people so numb that they didn't realize the flood had already begun. And Jesus, standing on the threshold of Advent, whispers to his disciples…and to us…"Stay awake." The first shock of the season is not joy…it is judgment. Not condemnation…but clarity. Not nostalgia…but the announcement that God is coming and the world as we know it is not prepared.

As It Was in the Days of Noah

Jesus says people in Noah's day were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage…ordinary life carrying on while the foundations of society rotted beneath their feet. This is not a critique of celebration. It is a critique of amnesia. They lived as though the suffering around them didn't matter, as though injustice wasn't rising like water at their ankles. And I can't help but wonder how Jesus would describe our days. People eating and drinking while prisons overflow and death row keeps its grim rhythm. People marrying and giving in marriage while the homeless freeze under bridges lit up by Christmas decorations proclaiming peace. People going to work, going to school, scrolling their phones…while the poor, the queer, the undocumented, the forgotten are crucified by systems that claim innocence. The floodwaters weren't the start of destruction… they were simply the moment people could no longer pretend the world was fine. As it was in the days of Noah, so it is now. Not because God is angry, but because humanity keeps falling asleep.

One Taken, One Left

Then Jesus gives us two haunting images…two men in the field, two women grinding grain. One taken, one left. This is not a rapture blueprint. It's a revelation…God's arrival divides those who were awake from those who were sedated by the world's illusions. God doesn't arbitrarily choose who stays and who goes…we choose by the posture of our spirit. Some recognize the movement of God breaking into history and step into the flood of newness. Others cling to the old order, the dying systems, the false comforts…and so they remain behind with everything that is passing away. The question of Advent isn't "Will Christ come?" The question is, "Will we notice?"

The God Who Breaks In

Jesus deepens the urgency with a strange metaphor…if the master of the house had known when the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake. But the prophetic twist is this…in Advent, God is the thief. Not because God steals, but because God breaks in. God violates our locked doors. God interrupts our routines. God slips into the world through cracks we thought were secure and exposes what we treasure…our comfort, our control, our allegiance to unjust systems. God is the thief who steals away our complacency. God is the burglar who breaks into the carefully arranged rooms of our lives and overturns the furniture of our fear. Advent is a holy breaking in. And Jesus tells us plainly…be ready, because God does not honor the boundaries we erect to keep the world at a manageable distance.

The Prophetic Work of Advent – Staying Awake in a Sleeping World

This is why Advent begins with a jolt. It is not a countdown to Christmas…it is a confrontation with truth. It is the season when the Church must admit that we have learned to sleep through suffering. We have become experts at ignoring the cries of the vulnerable, at insulating ourselves from the pains we do not want to witness. But Advent says, Wake up. The waters are rising. Build an ark of justice. Build an ark of compassion. Build an ark wide enough to carry all the people the world has thrown away. Don't wait for the flood to force you into action. Don't wait for the crisis to awaken your soul. The Son of Man is coming, and he is arriving in every place we have refused to see him…in prison cells, in migrant shelters, in hospital ICU rooms, in protest lines, in cold tents under overpasses. God comes first to the places religion forgets.

The Hour You Do Not Expect – Staying Awake in a Sleeping World

And Jesus ends with the most unsettling promise of all… "At an hour you do not expect." We expect God to come dressed in

beauty…instead God comes wrapped in need. We expect God to come with power…instead God comes through people who have none. We expect God to come in comfort…instead God shows up in chaos. When we least expect it…when despair convinces us nothing will change, when exhaustion tells us to give up, when injustice seems immovable…that is precisely the moment God breaks in. Not to threaten us, but to liberate us. Not to leave us behind, but to pull us forward into the realm of God that is breaking through the cracks.

Staying Awake in a Sleeping World

So here we stand at the edge of Advent, with a world cracking apart under the weight of its own violence. But Advent insists that God is not waiting for us to get our act together. God is moving. God is coming. God is already at the door. So stay awake. Stay awake to the suffering of others. Stay awake to the possibilities of hope. Stay awake to the disruptive, liberating, boundary breaking presence of the One who insists on showing up exactly where we least expect…and exactly where love is needed the most. The Son of Man is coming. Not to destroy, but to disrupt. Not to condemn, but to awaken. Not to abandon, but to make all things new.

Amen.

12.1.25

Moral Caution: Luigi Mangione and Our Public Hearts

Moral Caution & Luigi Mangione

Moral caution is often most hidden when it is most needed. Today, Luigi Mangione steps once again into public view for his latest hearing, and once again the atmosphere around him is charged like a gathering storm. These moments…when a defendant is brought into a courtroom, when families hold their breath, when the public tightens its' collective jaw…are moments that test not just the legal system, but the soul of a people. Every time Mangione enters a courtroom, emotions ignite. Some see a monster. Some see a tragedy. Some see a man consumed by demons of his own making. Others see someone misunderstood, a figure in need of compassion or at least careful consideration. Spirituality invites us to slow down, to breathe and to resist the false simplicity of a story told only in extremes. Spirituality demands moral caution…on every side.

Understanding Moral Caution

Moral caution is not softness…and it is not denial. It does not erase the life of Brian Thompson, whose death remains a deep wound. It does not dismiss the anguish of his family or the fear experienced by a community. Nor does it demand uncritical support of Mangione or the dismissal of the very real concerns of those who see harm. Rather, moral caution is the discipline of refusing to let grief harden into retribution…or hope harden into justification…or fear metastasize into dehumanization. It is the insistence that moral clarity cannot be born from moral shortcuts. It is the discipline of simply asking…

What kind of person am I becoming in this moment?

In cases like this, emotion often becomes its own kind of gravity, pulling people into narratives of absolute guilt or absolute innocence, villainy or victimhood. Once a person is placed into one of these categories, everything else follows automatically. Supporters risk minimizing the pain caused by Mangione's actions. Detractors risk seeing him only as a vessel of evil. Both sides are vulnerable to forgetting that people are not categories. Even those who do harm are more than the worst thing they've ever done, and even those who suffer deeply may hold complicated responsibilities. Every human life, even one marked by catastrophic choices, remains complex, contradictory and real. Spiritual voices throughout history have warned against the certainty of crowds. They remind us that fear and hope alike have a tendency to dress themselves as justice.

A Spiritual Crossroads

Today's hearing is not merely a legal moment…it is a spiritual crossroads. The question before us is not only what will happen to evidence surrounding Luigi Mangione, but also what will happen to us as we witness this story unfold.

Will we allow ourselves to be swept along by the strongest emotions in the room?

To practice moral caution is to acknowledge the humanity in every position…that Mangione is not "the worst of the worst"… and that his supporters are not necessarily blind…nor his detractors entirely righteous. The phrase "the worst of the worst" is usually reserved for rhetorical theater, not real people. It is the language of erasure, the language systems use when they want to stop thinking and start punishing.

Humanity Beyond a Single Act

Mangione, despite what did or didn't happen, remains a human being whose life contains more than a single act. His suffering,

his history, his brokenness and his capacity for remorse or change…all of it still matters. And those who are horrified by his actions are entitled to their grief, their fear and their calls for accountability. Imagining a person as simply a vessel of pure evil, or imagining outrage as purely virtuous, may feel emotionally satisfying…but it is theologically lazy and morally dangerous.

The Danger of Dehumanization : The Need for Moral Caution

Spiritual ethics remind us that when a society begins treating any person as though they have slipped beyond the reach of humanity…whether the threat comes from a criminal act or from a fervent ideology…it reveals something about the society, not the person. When we permit ourselves to dehumanize someone, or to sanctify another unquestioningly, we become the kind of people who can justify anything. Violence of language prepares the way for violence of policy. Violence of imagination prepares the way for violence of action. That is why moral caution is not optional…it is a safeguard against our darkest impulses masquerading as righteousness.

And yet, moral caution must sit alongside honesty. A man is dead. A family grieves. A community is shaken. None of this should be minimized. The spiritual voice does not silence pain… it demands that pain be honored without being weaponized. Moral caution means holding justice and compassion in the same breath, without sacrificing either one. It means insisting that the demand for accountability does not require us to become less human in the process…whether we are critics or defenders, witnesses or participants.

Witnessing a Charged Moment

When Luigi Mangione walks into that courtroom today, the air will thicken. Reporters will sharpen their attention. Supporters and critics will brace themselves. Emotions will swirl like a

tornado. Spirituality asks us all to step back and resist the momentum. It asks us to see the person at the center of this maelstrom…not the symbol…and to see the humanity in each other…even when disagreement runs deep. It asks us to reject the easy narrative that says some people are disposable and others are sacred.

12.4.25

A Prisoner's Appeal for a Prisoner's Life: On Harold Nichols

Jonathan Stephenson's Appeal for Harold Nichols

When you speak with a man on death row…even over a phone line distorted by static and prison time limits…you learn quickly that life is far more nuanced than headlines can allow for. Case files and trial transcripts can record a person's worst moments… but they can't record what came before or after…the decades of transformation, the friendships forged in confinement, the quiet decency that persists even when the world is determined to kill.

Last night, I spoke with longtime Tennessee death row prisoner Jonathan Stephenson, one of my guys that I work with. He's known Harold Nichols for over thirty years. I wanted to hear what Jonathan would say about the man Tennessee intends to kill next week. I wanted to hear about the real Harold…the one beyond the headlines.

Meeting Harold Nichols, aka "Red"

"I first met Harold back in the early 1990s," Jonathan said not long after the automated voice announced that our call had begun. "He came to death row just a couple weeks after I got here. His number was right behind mine." Even across the phone line, I could hear the affection in his voice. "He was quiet. Thoughtful. You could feel it before he said anything. Even before I got to know him, I sensed he was different."

Jonathan was transferred off death row for a time and placed in general population, but he returned in 2002. Their friendship resumed instantly. "We picked right back up," he said. "No gap. No awkwardness. For twenty three, twenty four years straight, we lived together. Same pod. Same meals. Same work areas."

They called him Red…but because of his red hair. “He’s got that bushy red hair. Of course, it’s mostly grey now.” Then he added, warmly, “He’s one of the most unselfish people you’ll ever meet. If he sees you need something…anything…he’ll help. Quietly. No show. That’s who he is.”

Harold Nichols Steady, Peaceful Presence on Death Row

Jonathan described a man who anchored the unit. “I’ve never once known him to get into contraband,” he told me. “Never known him to be involved in anything dangerous or subversive…not one time in thirty-plus years.”
Instead, Harold spent his time fixing things…he’s an excellent plumber…and teaching arts and crafts. “He’s an unbelievable artist,” Jonathan said. “One of the best I’ve ever seen. He brings beauty to a place that tries to crush it.”

I’ve listened to many men on death row talk about the people they live with. Sincerity is unmistakable, and Jonathan is sincere. He wasn’t sugarcoating anything. He was simply describing the man he has known for decades. “He’s normal,” Jonathan said. “Normal in a place where normal is rare. I’ve met men in population…men who will never face execution…who are ten times more dangerous than Harold Nichols.”

Harold Nichols and The Weight of an Approaching Execution

When I asked what Harold’s impending execution has done to him personally, Jonathan’s voice softened. “I miss him already,” he said. “And he’s not even gone yet. When you live in here, a friend is everything.”

As a spiritual advisor, I often find myself standing between two worlds…the official world, where the state insists that death is justice, and the lived world inside these prisons, where men like Harold Nichols spend decades becoming unrecognizably different from the young men they were when they first arrived

in prison. Harold's crime happened well over thirty years ago. The person who committed it no longer exists in any moral or spiritual sense.
The man who remains is a teacher, a tradesman, an artist, a Christian, a friend…a man who has done everything we say we want people to do…reflect, repent, grow, transform. Yet, we are still determined to kill him. Why? Why not take a second to hear Jonathan out?

"I've spoken with Harold for decades. I've prayed with him. I've witnessed his faith and the sincerity behind it. I've seen how his presence affects the men around him. If redemption is real…and I believe it is…then Harold Nichols is living proof."

A Plea to Governor Bill Lee

As our call neared its end and the automated voice warned, "You have one minute remaining," I asked Jonathan what he would say to Governor Bill Lee if he had the chance.

He didn't hesitate.

"Please commute his sentence. Please give him life. Please don't kill him. He doesn't deserve to die. That was decades ago. He isn't that person anymore." Then, with a quiet urgency that cut through the static: "Please don't take my friend."

A Pastor's Final Reflection

I write this as a pastor, as someone who has walked too many men to the edge of state violence, and as someone who has seen the dignity and depth that survive even in the darkest corners of our justice system. I also write as someone who believes with all my heart that a person is always more than the worst thing they've ever done.

The State of Tennessee plans to kill Harold “Red” Nichols. But one of the people who knows him the best…who has lived beside him for decades…knows a different man. A better man. A changed man.
And that should matter.

12.6.25

A Voice in the Wilderness: Repentance at the Borders

When God Calls Us Into the Wilderness of Truth

"Voices in the Wilderness: Repentance at the Borders"

When Matthew ushers John the Baptist onto the stage of history, he places him not among polished institutions but in the wilderness. That is not accidental. The wilderness in Scripture is the crucible of truth…where Israel confronted its failures and where prophets received their summons. It is a place stripped of illusions, where the noise of empire, comfort and self-justification fades. If revelation requires honesty, then God often chooses the desert as the classroom.

Voice in the Wilderness: A Prophet Who Refuses to Bow to Empire

John emerges there clothed in camel's hair, shaped by austerity, powered by conviction. His entire life is a rebuke to the complacency of his age. His clothing evokes Elijah; his diet speaks of independence from societal excess. John is, in effect, an embodied critique of a religious world too entangled with privilege and too insulated from suffering. His very presence announces that something is out of joint.
And then his message lands with seismic force: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." The Greek word μετάνοια / METANOIA calls not for mild regret but for a total reorientation of life, an intellectual and moral about face. John's call cannot be reduced to personal morality alone…it is a summons to transform one's relationship with God and neighbor in preparation for God's disruptive arrival. It is a demand for ethical fruitfulness, not merely religious affiliation.
Matthew tells us that people from Jerusalem, Judea and the region around the Jordan flowed out to him. They came

confessing sins, stepping into the river as if crossing anew into the Promised Land. Something in John's voice resonated with their conscience…something that exposed their complicity, invited their honesty and stirred their hope.

Confronting Systems That Hide Behind Religious Respectability : Voice in the Wilderness

But when the Pharisees and Sadducees arrive, John's tone shifts. These were groups often opposed to one another, yet united in their investment in the religious order. John sees beneath their motives. He names them with prophetic bluntness…"You brood of vipers!" That language, though jarring, is not petty. In the biblical imagination, serpents evoke the subtle poison of self-deception. John accuses them not of murder or idolatry but of presumption…of believing that their heritage, their social standing or their position within a religious institution exempts them from repentance.

John's critique remains unsettlingly relevant. Modern societies…including religious communities…are deeply prone to the same temptation. We mistake identity for integrity, sentiment for solidarity, symbolism for substance. We imagine that because we belong to the right community or profess the right beliefs, we have therefore borne the fruit of repentance. But John dismantles such illusions. "Do not presume," he warns. Divine judgment does not operate on inherited privilege. God can raise justice from stones if necessary.

Naming Border Injustice as Spiritual Fruitlessness

Then John offers one of the most sobering images in Scripture: "Even now the ax lies at the root of the trees." Not at the branches. At the root. This is judgment that goes beneath outward appearances, beneath respectable veneers. Trees that bear no fruit are cut down…not to punish arbitrarily, but because their very existence perpetuates a lie.

And what does fruitlessness look like today? It looks like moral

indifference. It looks like systems that dehumanize. It looks like religious rhetoric that ignores human suffering. It looks like a society where migrants and asylum seekers…families fleeing violence, poverty and political breakdown…are treated as economic burdens or political pawns rather than as the very image of God. The wilderness cry of John exposes the ways we rationalize injustice at the borders of our nations and at the borders of our conscience.

For is it not a kind of modern presumption to say, "We are a nation of laws," while turning away those who have no legal avenues left? Is it not presumption to speak of welcome yet build systems designed to exclude? Is it not presumption to claim a religious heritage while ignoring the stranger, the orphan and the sojourner…those God repeatedly commands us to protect?

John's message pushes us beyond vague compassion. Repentance must bear fruit, and in our age, part of that fruit includes confronting the structures that exploit the vulnerable… whether migrants working under the table, families separated by economic necessity or asylum seekers forced into monstrous bureaucracies with stakes no human being should bear alone.

Voice in the Wilderness: Preparing the Way Means Dismantling What Harms the Vulnerable

Yet John is not the end. He is the threshold. His humility is stunning…"The one coming after me is mightier than I." John prepares the way but knows the Messiah brings the actual transformation. John baptizes with water…Christ baptizes with Spirit and fire…the Spirit that empowers justice, the fire that refines our motives and burns away our indifference.

And finally, John paints the picture of the winnowing fan and the threshing floor. The wheat has substance…the chaff has none. In every age, God's justice distinguishes between lives filled with the grain of compassion and lives filled only with the husk of religious performance.

The wilderness voice still calls:

Prepare the way of the Lord.

Make straight the paths…especially where the world has bent them against the powerless.
Repent not in sentiment but in solidarity.
Bear fruit worthy of the kingdom that draws near.
For God is coming not to affirm our systems but to judge them…
not to bless our borders but to measure how we treat those who cross them,
not to reward our titles but to weigh our compassion.

“Behold she comes…”

Amen.

12.11.25

Why Didn't Governor Bill Lee Kill Harold Nichols Himself?

I keep coming back to the same question. Why wasn't Governor Bill Lee even in the room?

If Governor Lee insisted that Harold Nichols be executed, he should have been the one to do it himself. This is not rhetoric. It is a moral demand. If the state is going to take a human life, those who authorize it must confront the full human reality of what that authorization means. To hide behind bureaucracy, protocols, and the anonymity of state power is not leadership. It is cowardice.

Governor Bill Lee's Faith That Won't Look

Governor Lee is a man who speaks often of his faith. He invokes God in his public life. He attends church. He prays. But faith that cannot look death in the face is not faith at all. It is performance. If the governor believed that God sanctioned the taking of Harold Nichols's life, then he should have taken it. He should have stood in that room. He should have looked into Harold's eyes and told him why. He should have felt the weight of what he ordered.

He did not do this. He was miles away when Harold died. He was insulated by distance, by process, by the comforting fiction that he was not the one killing anyone. But he was. Every signature on a death warrant is a hand on the needle. The fact that others carried out the physical act did not absolve him. It indicted him. It meant he wanted the killing but not the burden of it. He wanted the death but not the dying.

The Luxury of Distance

This is what power allows: the luxury of violence without witness. The governor ended a man's life and never saw his face.

He authorized death and slept soundly, because the machinery of the state has been carefully designed to protect him from the human cost of his decisions. But protection is not innocence. Comfort is not righteousness. And delegation is not courage.

Harold Nichols was a human being. He had a body that breathed, a mind that thought, a history that made him. He had people who loved him. He had fears and regrets and memories. Whatever he had done, he remained human. And the question was never whether Harold deserved to live. The question was whether Bill Lee deserved the power to kill him without ever confronting what that meant.

Politicians speak of deterrence, closure, protection. But the structure of modern executions reveals something far less noble. The governor did not watch. He did not see the chest rise and fall, the eyes flutter, the final irreversible moment. He signed a piece of paper. A team of people he will never meet carried out the act in a sanitized room. The legal system, the prison staff, the execution team—all served as buffers between the act and its author.

This distance is deliberate. Without it, the act is unbearable.

What Governor Bill Lee Would Have Seen

Consider what it would have meant for Governor Lee to carry out the execution himself. He would have faced Harold Nichols directly. He would have seen the fear. The humanity. The entire life the state intended to extinguish. Every argument about justice or deterrence would have collided with the raw reality of killing another person. The abstractions would have dissolved. Only the act would have remained.

Most people would have recoiled. Most people would have refused.

And that recoil is precisely why executions are structured the way they are. They allow cowardice to masquerade as authority. Cruelty to masquerade as justice.

A System Built on Looking Away

The death penalty requires its authors to cultivate distance from consequences. It demands that human beings suppress empathy, conscience, moral imagination. It rewards those who can compartmentalize—who can see a death warrant as paperwork rather than a human life. Any system that incentivizes this cannot claim to be just.

There is evidence that capital punishment produces widespread psychological harm—not only to the families of the condemned but to executioners, prison staff, legal officials. Executions do not cleanse the conscience. They fracture it. They force ordinary people to participate in acts society would otherwise consider monstrous. The governor, removed from the room where death occurred, was insulated from that fracture. Yet he bore responsibility for it. The distance protected his comfort. It exposed his cowardice.

Some argue executions provide closure or deter future crimes. These claims are empirically weak and morally hollow. But the deeper problem is not statistical. It is this: to intentionally end a life when alternatives exist—alternatives that protect society without killing—is to act with cowardice disguised as courage. It is to choose violence while pretending your hands are clean.

The Only Honest Response from Governor Bill Lee

We recoil from imagining a governor personally carrying out an execution because we know, deep down, what executions truly are. Deliberate killing. And if we know that, we must acknowledge the only ethical response: the state should not be in the business of killing at all.

Governor Lee did not carry out the execution himself. He did not have the stomach for what he ordered. He never does.

What kind of man orders a death he won't witness? Governor Bill Lee just needs to admit it…he's a coward.

12.13.25

Or Should We Look for Another? : On Matthew 11:2-11

Matthew 11:2-11

John heard what Jesus was doing while he was in prison. From that place, he sent word with the question that remained: Are you the one who is coming, or should we look for another?

Keep Watching

5

Jesus did not answer with an explanation. He said, Tell John what you see and hear: blind eyes are being opened, broken bodies are being lifted, the untouchable are being restored, the dead are being raised, and the poor—still poor—are hearing good news. And he added, Blessed are those who do not turn away from me because I am not what they expected.

When the messengers left, Jesus spoke to the crowd about John. What did you go out to see? Not someone easily shaken, not someone dressed for comfort. You went to see a prophet—and more than a prophet—the one sent ahead to prepare the way.

Among all who have been born, none has risen greater than John. Yet even the least who enters the kingdom he announced is drawn into something greater still.

John's question is the only honest question left.

"Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?"

We have dressed this question up in stained glass. We have softened it with two thousand years of theology. We have turned

it into a catechism answer everyone already knows. But strip it back. Hear it fresh. Hear it the way John asked it—from a prison cell, in chains, with death coming.

Is it you? Or should we look for someone else?

This is not a simple question. This is the question of a man who gave everything and got a cell in return. This is the question that rises from the horror. This is our question.

The World As It Actually Is

Let me tell you about the world.

Children are buried under rubble while their parents claw at concrete with bleeding hands. Men are strapped to gurneys and pumped full of poison while the state calls it justice. Women are sold, trafficked, used, discarded. The powerful grow more powerful. The poor get poorer. The war machines roll on. The bombs fall. The ice melts. The forests burn. A man walks into a school with a rifle. A government starves its own people. A corporation poisons a river and pays a fine that amounts to a rounding error.

This is the world. Not the world as we wish it were. Not the world of greeting cards and graduation speeches. The world as it is, right now.

And John's question rises from the rubble: Is it you? Or should we look for someone else?

Let's be honest. We have looked for others.

We have looked to politics…to the right leader, the right party, the right policy. We have believed that if we could just win this election, pass this law, appoint this judge, the horror would stop. And the horror did not stop.

We have looked to technology…to progress, to innovation, to the shining promise that we are evolving toward something better. And we built the drone and the gas chamber and the algorithm that decides who gets a loan and who gets a prison sentence.

We have looked to wealth…to the market, to growth, to the fantasy that prosperity would lift all boats. And the boats lifted while the bodies drowned beneath them.

We have looked to empire…to military might, to national greatness, to the old lie that peace comes through superior firepower. And the empires rose and the empires fell and the graves multiplied.

We have looked for another. We have looked everywhere. We have tried everything. And the world is still a slaughterhouse.

Or should we look for another? : The Disappointment of Jesus

So we come back to Jesus. And here is the scandal, the stumbling block, the thing we don't want to say out loud… He is disappointing.

He didn't stop the horror. He didn't raise an army. He didn't overthrow Rome or end slavery or prevent the Holocaust or keep the children safe in their classrooms. He showed up in a backwater province of a brutal empire, talked for about three years, healed some people, and got executed by the state. His movement scattered. His followers hid. The empire rolled on for another four centuries. And here we are, two thousand years later, with the same empires wearing different flags, the same violence wearing different uniforms, the same horror with upgraded technology.

Are you the one? Or should we look for another?

It is an honest question. It deserves an honest answer.

Jesus did not promise to stop the horror. Read the Gospels again. He promised that the poor would always be with us. He promised that his followers would be dragged before councils and beaten in synagogues. He promised that brother would betray brother, and parents would hand over their children to death. He promised a cross. “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.” This is not a rescue operation. This is not a fix. Jesus did not come to make the world safe. He came to enter the world as it actually is…brutal, bloody, broken…and to be broken with it. He did not promise to stop the horror. He promised to enter it.

And this is disappointing. Deeply, profoundly disappointing. Because we wanted a God who would fix it. Who would reach down with almighty power and make the horror stop. We wanted a God in control.

But what if that God…the God in control, the God with the master plan, the God who ordains and permits and allows…what if that God was never real? What if that God was just a projection of our desperate need for someone to be in charge of this chaos?

Or should we look for another? : The Answer from the Horror

Now listen to what Jesus tells John’s disciples to report: “The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised and the poor have good news preached to them.”

This is not a program for fixing the world. This is a field report from inside the wreckage. Jesus is not standing outside the horror directing traffic. He is in it. Touching it. Touching the blind eyes and the withered limbs and the rotting flesh of the leper that no one else would go near. The world is still full of blindness…and Jesus is touching blind eyes. The world is still full of death…and Jesus is raising the dead. The world is still crushing the poor…

and Jesus is preaching good news to them, right there, in the middle of their poverty, which has not been fixed, which may never be fixed, but which is no longer godforsaken.

This is the answer: not that the horror stops, but that the horror is no longer empty. God is in it. Love is in it.

Should we look for another? Another what? Another god who will intervene from outside, reach down with a mighty hand and set everything right? That god has not shown up. That god, if he exists, has been silent through every genocide, every execution, every crying child, every mass grave. We can wait for that god. We have been waiting. The horror continues.

Or we can reckon with this one…the God who did not stay outside but came in. The God who became a peasant in an occupied country. The God who touched the untouchables and ate with the despised and got arrested and beaten and killed by the state. The God who entered the horror and did not escape it.

This is the God who is love. Not love as power. Not love as control. But love as presence…fragile, vulnerable, breakable presence. Love that shows up. Love that stays. Love that bleeds.

Is this enough? Is this the one? I don't know how to answer that for you. I only know that I have looked for another, and there is no other. The alternatives have all been tried. The empires have all risen and fallen. The revolutions have all betrayed their promises. There is only this: a God who enters. There is only this: love.

The Presence in the Chamber

I have been in execution chambers. I have watched the state kill men while corrections officers checked their watches and witnesses stared through glass. I have seen what the horror looks

like when it wears a uniform and follows a protocol and calls itself law.

And I have seen something else.

I have seen Christ in that room. Not stopping the execution…the execution happened. Not rescuing the man on the gurney…the man died. But present. In the room. In the horror. Entering it with us. There is a moment in every execution when the man looks at me and I look at him and we both know what is about to happen. And in that moment, there is a presence that I cannot explain and will not try to defend philosophically. Call it what you want. I call it Jesus. I call it love. Not Jesus the fixer. Not Jesus the rescuer. Jesus the one who is there. Jesus who enters the chamber because he has been in chambers before…has been the one on the table before…and will not let any of us die alone. Love who will not let any of us die alone.

Is this the one? Or should we look for another?

There is no other who enters. There is no other who loves like this.

The Offense

“And blessed is the one who takes no offense at me.”

Jesus knows this is not the answer we wanted. We wanted a God who would stop it. Who would intervene. Who would make it make sense. We wanted rescue, and what we got was presence. We wanted an end to the horror, and what we got was a companion inside it. We wanted power, and what we got was love.

This is offensive. It is offensive to every parent who has buried a child. It is offensive to every prisoner who has been executed by

the state. It is offensive to every village bombed, every refugee drowned, every woman raped, every man lynched.

You could have stopped it. Why didn't you stop it?

I don't have an answer to that question. But I have a glimpse of one.

What if God is not the unmoved mover, sitting outside of time, watching the horror unfold according to some plan we cannot see? What if God is not the puppet master who could pull the strings differently but chooses not to? What if there is no script? What if there is no blueprint? What if the future is genuinely open…unwritten, undetermined, unknown even to God… because that is the only way love can be real?

What if God is, instead, the One who journeys? The One who is with us in the unfolding…not directing it from above but moving through it alongside us, feeling every wound, grieving every loss, bearing the weight of every horror not as a distant observer but as a fellow traveler? This is the God of the open road, the God whose heart breaks in real time, the God who weeps at the grave of Lazarus not because it is part of the plan but because death is not what God wanted and it hurts God too.

This is not a God who allows the horror. This is a God who suffers it. This is not a God who permits the execution. This is a God who is executed. This is not a God with a secret reason for the child's death. This is a God who holds the child and weeps and rages and refuses to let death have the last word…but who cannot, will not, override the freedom that makes love possible, even when that freedom produces monsters.

This is what it means to say God is love. Not that God has love, or that God gives love, but that God is love…and love cannot control. Love can only enter. Love can only stay. Love can only suffer with and refuse to abandon.

The Gospel does not explain the suffering. It reveals a God who refuses to be anywhere else but in the midst of it…journeying, aching, longing for the redemption that is not yet but is still coming. It reveals love…not love as we wished it would be, but love as it actually is. And love is presence. And presence is enough.

The Only Honest Faith

So here is the question, and you must answer it for yourself: Is it enough? Or should we look for another?

Is it enough to have a God who does not stop the horror but enters it? Is it enough to have a presence in the darkness when what you wanted was for the darkness to end? Is love enough… this disappointing, non-fixing, suffering-with-us love?

I cannot answer for you. I can only tell you that I have tried the alternatives. I have looked for another. I have put my hope in politics and progress and every shining promise that this time, finally, we would fix it. We didn't. We won't. The horror is not going away.

And the only faith I have left is this: there is One who enters. There is One who goes into the cell and the chamber and the grave. There is One who will not let us suffer alone, even though he will not—cannot—keep us from suffering. There is love. And love is the presence. And the presence is enough. Not because it fixes anything. Not because it makes the horror make sense. But because love—real love, love that shows up, love that stays, love that enters the darkness and does not leave—is the only thing that has ever been enough. It is the only thing that has ever mattered. It is the only thing that remains when everything else has failed.

Is this the one? I don't know what else to call him. I don't know what else to call love.

We are left with a choice. We can reject this Jesus…this disappointing, non-rescuing, entering-but-not-fixing Jesus…and keep looking for another. We can wait for the God who controls, the God who intervenes, the God who has a plan. Or we can accept that there is no such God. That the only God there is, is love. And love does not control. Love enters. Love stays. Love suffers. Love hopes.

And in the meantime, there is this: a God who is with us in it. Not above it. Not beyond it. Not watching it from a safe distance. In it. In the cell with John. In the execution chamber with the condemned. In the rubble with the child. In the horror, wherever the horror is, as close as breath, as present as a heartbeat. There is love. And love is enough. Not because it stops the horror…it doesn't. But because in the end, love is the only thing that was ever worth having. Love is the only thing that death cannot kill. Love is the only thing that remains.

Blessed are those who do not stumble over this.

The Work That Remains

And if this is the one…if Jesus is the one who enters…if love is the presence and the presence is enough…then we know what we must do. We must enter. We must love.

We must go where the horror is. We must sit in the cells and stand in the chambers and wade into the wreckage. We must touch the ones no one else will touch and preach good news to the poor who are still poor and be present with the dying who are still going to die. We cannot stop the horror. We are not gods. We are not even very good humans most of the time. But we can enter it. We can refuse to look away. We can show up. We can love.

This is what it means to follow the one who entered. Not to fix the world but to be in it, fully, all the way, holding nothing back.

The blind are still blind until someone touches them. The poor still have no good news until someone preaches it. The dying are still alone until someone enters the room. Until someone loves them. We are the body of the one who enters. We are the hands and feet of love. So we enter. So we love.

The Question That Answers Itself

"Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?"

After two thousand years, after every empire and every revolution and every failed promise of progress, after every genocide and every execution and every child's grave…the question answers itself. There is no other. There is no god who has entered like this one. There is no hope that has endured like this one. There is no presence in the horror except this presence. There is no love like this love.

Is he disappointing? Often, he is the most disappointing God imaginable. He does not stop the horror. He does not fix the world. He does not answer our prayers the way we want them answered. He is not the God we sometimes wish for. But he is the God who is love. The God who wishes for us.

And love…this vulnerable, suffering, entering, staying love…is the only God there is. The only God worth believing in. The only God who has ever shown up.

Is it enough? Or should we look for another? Love is what we have. It is who we have. And when I stand in the execution chamber and watch the state kill another human being, when I hold the hand of a dying man and watch the light leave his eyes, when I face the horror that never stops and never makes sense… Love is there. And it is enough.

Are you the one? Or should we look for another?

There is no other. You are the one. You are love. And love is enough.

12.16.25

On Death Row Without a Conviction: Jonathan Stephenson

The Man on Death Row Without a Conviction: The Case of Jonathan Stephenson

Jonathan Stephenson has spent over three decades on Tennessee's death row. But according to the very law Tennessee applies to every other defendant, Jonathan Stephenson has no valid murder conviction. The guilty plea that should have saved his life was voided by the Tennessee Supreme Court…and with it, any legal basis for his death sentence.

This is not a story about guilt or innocence. This is a story about a state that refuses to follow its own rules.

The Deal with Jonathan Stephenson That Was Supposed to End It

In 1990, a Cocke County jury convicted Jonathan Stephenson of first-degree murder and conspiracy in connection with the death of his wife, Lisa. The jury sentenced him to death. On appeal, the Tennessee Supreme Court found serious errors in the sentencing proceeding and sent the case back.

In 1994, Cocke prosecutors and Stephenson reached a deal. He would plead guilty and accept a sentence of life without parole for murder, plus sixty years for conspiracy. The prosecutor explained the logic on the record: life without parole would guarantee Stephenson never got out, and the consecutive sixty years provided insurance. Stephenson accepted. "Death penalty is not much of a life, Your Honor," he told the court.

To enter this plea agreement, the Cocke circuit court had to vacate the original jury convictions. Stephenson then entered new guilty pleas…pleas that replaced the jury verdicts and

became the sole basis for his convictions. The illegal life without parole sentence and the sixty-year conspiracy sentence were integral parts of a single, unified agreement. Without the promise of avoiding death, there would have been no guilty pleas.

The State Broke Its Own Deal with Jonathan Stephenson

Four years later, Stephenson filed a habeas corpus petition pointing out something the State had overlooked: life without parole wasn't a legally available sentence in Tennessee at the time of his crime. The Tennessee Supreme Court agreed. In Stephenson v. Carlton (2000), the Supreme Court declared his life without parole sentence "illegal and void," yet left the sixty-year conspiracy plea in place.

Here's what should have happened next, according to Tennessee law and basic contract principles: when a court voids an illegal sentence that was the inducement for a guilty plea, the entire plea agreement falls. The defendant should be permitted to withdraw his plea and proceed to trial, or negotiate a new agreement. That's what Tennessee courts require in every other case.

But that's not what happened to Jonathan Stephenson.

Instead, Tennessee courts invented a legal fiction: they pretended the Cocke circuit court never had authority to vacate the original jury convictions in 1994, that the plea agreement therefore had no legal effect, and that Stephenson could simply be resentenced on the original convictions…to death (*although they left the sixty-year conspiracy plea in place).

The problem? Tennessee circuit courts unquestionably have authority to vacate convictions. They do it routinely through post-conviction proceedings and habeas corpus. The Tennessee courts' claim that Stephenson's circuit court (Cocke County) lacked this authority contradicts decades of settled law…law that Tennessee continues to apply to every other defendant.

Where There Is No Conviction, There Can Be No Sentence : Jonathan Stephenson Has No Conviction

The logic is inescapable. Stephenson's 1994 guilty pleas were not mere formalities…they were the convictions themselves. They replaced the original jury verdicts. When the Tennessee Supreme Court voided the illegal sentence that induced those pleas, it necessarily voided the pleas that constituted his convictions (while leaving in place the sixty-year guilty plea for conspiracy).

Without valid convictions, Tennessee courts were powerless to impose any sentence, let alone death. As Stephenson's most recent federal petition states plainly: "Where there is no valid conviction, there can be no sentence."

Yet Tennessee resentenced him to death anyway.

A Class of One : Jonathan Stephenson

What makes Stephenson's case a constitutional travesty is how Tennessee has applied its own law selectively. Tennessee courts consistently hold that final judgments are final…once thirty days pass without an appeal, a judgment cannot be altered, even if wrong.

On December 5, 2000, the Criminal Court for Johnson County (the county where Stephenson was imprisoned) entered a "FINAL JUDGMENT" declaring Stephenson's life without parole sentence null and void while leaving intact his sixty-year conspiracy sentence. The State did not appeal. Under Tennessee law, that judgment became final on January 4, 2001.

Yet two months later, the Circuit Court for Cocke County appointed counsel for Stephenson and proceeded to exercise jurisdiction over him…jurisdiction it did not have (because a "FINAL JUDGMENT" had already been entered in Johnson

County). Over his repeated objections (and solidified Tennessee law), a Cocke County jury resentenced him to death in October 2002.

Tennessee courts have never explained how Cocke County acquired jurisdiction to amend a final judgment entered by Johnson County. No other Tennessee case has ever found courts possess "inherent authority" to resentence after finality. When other defendants raise any argument that tries to circumvent the legal idea of "FINAL JUDGMENT," Tennessee courts reject them. Jonathan Stephenson stands alone…a class of one, subjected to a body of law that applies to no one else.

Jonathan Stephenson is Twice Punished for the Same Crime

The Fifth Amendment's Double Jeopardy Clause forbids successive punishments for the same offense and prohibits placing a defendant in jeopardy a second time.

When the Johnson County "FINAL JUDGMENT" became final on January 4, 2001, Stephenson's prosecution for first-degree murder reached its conclusion. The Double Jeopardy Clause barred Tennessee from trying again. But Cocke County imposed a sentence of death for the same crime on which another Tennessee court had already entered a final judgment.

The Supreme Court made clear in Fong Foo v. United States (1962) that even an erroneous final judgment cannot be revisited without violating double jeopardy: a verdict "was final, and could not be reviewed without putting the petitioners twice in jeopardy, and thereby violating the constitution." Just as the government in Fong Foo could not retry defendants after a judge erroneously directed their acquittal, Tennessee cannot resentence Stephenson to death after another court's final judgment resolved his case…regardless of whether that judgment was legally sound. Whether the Johnson County judgment was right or wrong, it

was final. Tennessee's second bite at the apple violated the Constitution.

The Road Forward

Jonathan Stephenson's case now rests with the federal courts. His habeas corpus petition lays bare what Tennessee has done: created a unique body of law applicable only to him, ignored binding precedent on finality, allowed a court without jurisdiction to sentence him to death and violated the Double Jeopardy Clause.

The facts are not in dispute. In 1994, the circuit court vacated Stephenson's jury convictions so he could enter guilty pleas as part of a plea agreement. Those guilty pleas became his convictions. In 2000, the Tennessee Supreme Court declared the sentence that induced those pleas illegal and void. Under Tennessee law…the same law applied to every other defendant in the state…voiding an illegal sentence that was integral to a plea agreement voids the entire agreement, including the guilty pleas themselves. The Johnson County court's final judgment, which the State never appealed, became final on January 4, 2001. Cocke County had no jurisdiction to resentence him.

Yet today, Jonathan Stephenson sits on Tennessee's death row, condemned to die for a murder conviction that no longer exists under the State's own law. He is not awaiting execution because the law demands it. He is awaiting execution because Tennessee refuses to follow the law it applies to everyone else.

12.18.25

Innocent in Florida: The Paul Everett Story

I've listened to Paul Everett's voice come through a prison phone line in Florida…steady, unbroken, unadorned. He sounds like a man who has made peace with who he is, but not with the lie that put him in a cage. That lie has cost him more than twenty years of his life. Now the state of Florida is preparing to end what remains.

This article is based on conversations that I had with him about what really happened to Kelli Bailey…conversations he wanted shared. Every detail in this article comes straight from Paul. I also spent time verifying key facts from his account with those closest to him. This is what they all collectively know to be true.

The Truth

Paul Everett is innocent.

He did not kill Kelli Bailey. The man who did…Jared Farmer… has lived freely for more than two decades while Everett waits on death row for a crime that is not his. If nothing intervenes, the state will strap an innocent man to a gurney, slide needles into his veins and call it justice. It will not be justice. It will be murder.

Childhood in Fort Payne

Everett grew up in Fort Payne, Alabama, a small town that once called itself the sock capital of the world. Hosiery mills dotted the landscape. People worked hard and knew one another. He came from a big family…seven siblings, two parents who were present. They weren't rich, but they were stable. The kind of childhood that only reveals its goodness after it's gone.

Drugs arrived early. Marijuana in middle school. Daily use by fourteen. Meth by seventeen. Once meth took hold, it reorganized everything. Addiction became routine, as ordinary as breathing.

Then the mills collapsed. Jobs disappeared. The deals Paul Everett's father had trusted fell apart. The ground gave way beneath the family, and Paul…still a teenager…did what desperate kids do. He hustled. He dropped out of school at sixteen. He cycled in and out of jail for petty, nonviolent offenses: addiction crimes, poverty crimes, the predictable wreckage of a young life with no footing.

There is nothing in Paul Everett's past that points toward violence. No assaults. No cruelty. No pattern that would make sense of what the state later accused him of. Just a young man burning his own life down and knowing it.

Paul Everett's Search for a New Beginning

By 2001, Paul Everett was twenty-two and trying to escape the gravity of everything he'd become. He wanted out…out of meth, out of Fort Payne, out of the cycle. He had a girlfriend back home and a fragile hope that something like stability might still be possible.

That was when linking up with Jared Farmer offered a way out. Panama City, Florida. Connections. Money. Weed instead of meth. A fresh start. It sounded like a rescue. It wasn't.

Panama City turned out to be a lie. Farmer had no real network, just small-time dealers and meth users whose paranoia ran hot. Paul Everett realized quickly that there was no future there and decided to leave. He planned to give it a few days and head back to Alabama.

Before he did, he went jogging.

That’s when he met her.

The Woman He Knew as Angel

She was watering plants in late October…an odd detail that stuck with him. They talked. She knew Chattanooga. She knew the Fort Payne area. Familiar geography turned into familiarity. Before they parted, she invited him back for dinner.

She told him her name was Angel.

Paul Everett came back that night. Steak on the stove. Baked potatoes. Easy conversation. Sex. He left before dawn. And then he came back again. And again.

For weeks.

They weren’t confessing their souls to one another, but they were together often. She cooked for him. They slept in the same bed. She mentioned a complicated situation with a husband. Paul Everett didn’t push.

She never told him her real name.

Angel was Kelli Bailey.

Paul Everett would not learn that until she was dead.

The Paranoia That Surrounded Paul Everett

As Paul Everett spent his nights with Kelli, meth paranoia was fermenting around them. Two men known as Bubba and Chico became convinced she was a cop. She snooped. Checked mailboxes. Wandered yards. To minds warped by meth, that was enough.

Then they noticed Paul Everett. The outsider. The man from Alabama who was always with her.

Paul Everett tried to calm things down. He told them she wasn't a threat. That only made it worse. Defending her made him suspect too.

Everything spiraled.

The Night That Changed His Life Forever

On the night of November 1, 2001, Jared Farmer went to Kelli Bailey's house. That fact alone should have mattered. It didn't.

A confrontation broke out. Violence followed. And here is what the jury never heard: Kelli Bailey confronted the intruders. What happened next was chaotic and brutal. Farmer assaulted the woman he had been seeing for weeks. The situation collapsed into something he could not control.

So Paul Everett did the one thing that separates him from her killers.

He left…believing that his absence would lead to things calming down.

When Paul Everett walked out of that house, Kelli Bailey was still alive. Injured. On the floor. But alive.

Paul Everett did not kill her.

The men who stayed behind did.

The Threats That Silenced Paul Everett

What followed was silence enforced by fear. Paul Everett was warned. His family could be reached. His father could be hurt. If

he told the truth about Jared Farmer, the consequences would not stop with him.

When police finally questioned Paul Everett, terror shaped his words. He protected Farmer. He buried the truth. Those frightened, coerced statements became the spine of the state's case.

The Trial That Failed Paul Everett

At trial, the truth never entered the room. Jared Farmer never testified. Bubba never testified. Chico never testified. The jury never heard about paranoia, threats or multiple perpetrators. They never heard that Paul Everett and Kelli had been in a relationship for weeks. The prosecution needed him to be a stranger, a burglar, an easy villain.

The trial was brief—shockingly brief for a capital case. The defense aimed to avoid execution, not to prove innocence. The jury, denied the truth, sentenced an innocent man to die.

This all happened in the shadow of September 11. The country wasn't paying attention. The case disappeared. Paul Everett went to death row at twenty-two.

He is forty-six now (he'll turn forty-seven on February 11).

More than half his life gone.

Two Mothers, One Lie

When Paul Everett talks about the verdict, he talks about two mothers—his own and Kelli Bailey's. One watches the state prepare to kill her innocent son. The other believes her daughter's killer was punished.

Both were lied to.

Paul Everett Deserves Justice

Paul Everett is innocent. Jared Farmer killed Kelli Bailey. The state of Florida has it backwards, and if it proceeds, it will commit an irreversible atrocity to protect a lie.

Paul Everett walked out of that house while Kelli Bailey was still alive. That truth has been buried for more than twenty years.

It’s time to dig it up.

12.20.25

Joseph the Feminist : A Sermon on Matthew 1:18-25

The New Testament's First Feminist : Joseph : Matthew 1:18-25

The night Joseph found out, he didn't sleep. He lay on his mat in the dark, staring at the ceiling, running his fingers along the edge of his blanket, trying to make the story work. Trying to find any explanation that didn't end with the woman he loved being dragged to the edge of town and buried under stones.

Mary was pregnant. The child was not his.

In first century Palestine, this wasn't gossip. It was a death sentence. The law was clear…an engaged woman found pregnant by another man was to be stoned. The community would gather. The rocks would fly. And the men would walk home afterward feeling righteous, feeling clean, feeling like they had upheld the honor of God and the purity of their cultures.

Joseph had every right to make that call. He had the law on his side. He had tradition on his side. He had religion on his side. Every man in Nazareth would have understood.

But Joseph resisted.

Choosing Mercy : Joseph the Feminist

The text tells us he was "a righteous man." We often read past that too quickly. It doesn't just mean he followed the rules or kept the commandments. It means he chose mercy over the law. He refused to destroy a woman, even when he was undoubtedly hurt and had permission.

And Mary…Mary did not stand silently in this story. She had already made her own choice, saying yes to a life and mission

that would defy every expectation. She trusted God's call, even when it made her vulnerable, even when it would expose her to danger and shame.

Joseph lay there in the dark and somewhere in the silence, he made a decision. He would not expose her. He would not drag her name through the streets. He would protect her, quietly, privately, in a way that might let her slip away and continue the work God had called her to do. It wasn't a perfect solution. But it was mercy. And it was an act of solidarity with Mary, an act of partnership in a dangerous world.

Lifting Mary Up

When the angel finally came…appearing in a dream with that strange command to take Mary as his wife, to raise a child that wasn't his, to trust a story that no reasonable person would believe…Joseph didn't just accept it. He didn't just tolerate Mary. He didn't just step aside.

He lifted her up.

He gave her his name. He gave her his protection. He gave her his reputation…knowing full well that it could be destroyed in the giving. Every neighbor, every relative, every religious leader would assume the worst. And still, Joseph chose Mary's safety, Mary's voice, Mary's calling over his own honor.

And Mary? She continued to act. She moved with courage, speaking boldly, traveling to Bethlehem, giving birth in a humble stable, raising her child in faith and love, partnering with Joseph at every step. She was not a passive figure. She was active, resilient, daring…and Joseph's role was to create space for her, to lift her up rather than to controlling her.

Becoming Equals : Joseph the Feminist

Over time, their partnership became one of equals. Joseph's strength complemented Mary's courage…her vision guided his protection. They made decisions together, prayed together, and shared the weight of responsibility for the child and the mission God had given them. Neither dominated the other. Neither took the spotlight for themselves. Together, they embodied a new model of partnership…mutual respect, shared responsibility and reciprocal love. They became creators of God's plan of salvation, each honoring the other's agency, each using their gifts to serve not themselves, but the life God was bringing into the world.

Smash the Patriarchy

Joseph the Feminist didn't just step aside. He smashed the patriarchy. He refused to weaponize the law. He refused to uphold a system that would destroy a woman to protect a man's honor. He risked shame, reputation and safety to make space for Mary's voice and agency.

The nativity scenes have it wrong. Joseph shouldn't be standing in the corner holding a staff, dignified and detached. Joseph should be on his knees, his hands beneath Mary's, lifting her toward the heaven that was opening above them.

Because that is what they did together. Before the shepherds came, before the magi arrived, before the angels filled the sky with glory…there was Mary, saying yes to God and Joseph, saying yes to mercy, to courage, to love beyond self. Together they carried the world's hope, each lifting the other, each using their power for life, for justice, for the God who comes to dwell among us.

The incarnation itself depended on their equality. God could not be born until a man and a woman were willing to rise together, to risk shame, to shatter the barriers that keep life small. In their partnership, heaven touched earth…and the world was never the same.

This is what it looks like when a man finally becomes righteous…not by wielding power…but by giving it away.

12.23.25

Christmas : The Beginning of an Execution

Christmas : When God Became Executable

Christmas is God Made Administrable

To say God became executable is to say God entered the world already marked. Not just vulnerable, but legible to power. Flesh can be counted, registered, hunted. A body can be named, tracked, eliminated. Incarnation is not simply God "with us"; it is God made administrable. God takes on a body that can be processed through the same systems that process every unwanted body…courts, prisons, borders, gallows. From the beginning, Jesus is not only savior but suspect.

The nativity story begins with paperwork. Luke is careful to tell us…a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This is not incidental detail. This is the first step in making a body executable. Before the state can kill you, it must count you. Before power can eliminate the threat, it must locate the threat in its systems. Mary and Joseph trudge to Bethlehem because Rome requires them to be processed, cataloged and entered into the imperial database. The Son of God begins his earthly life as a line item in a census…the same bureaucratic machinery that will later produce a warrant for his death.

We miss this because we have romanticized the journey. We imagine a peaceful trek, a donkey, a star. But this is a pregnant woman forced to travel by an occupying power that does not care if she lives or dies. The census is not a neutral administrative act. It is an assertion of dominion over bodies. Rome is saying…we own you, we can move you, we can count you and we can dispose of you. Into this system of total control, God enters…not

to overthrow it immediately, but to submit to it, to be processed by it, to let the machinery do what it does.

The State Responds with Violence

The child is born, and the state responds exactly as the state always responds to those it cannot control: with violence. Herod orders the slaughter of the innocents. This is not an overreaction by a paranoid king. This is the logical function of power when it encounters a threat it cannot administer. If you cannot register it, regulate it, own it…kill it. The massacre at Bethlehem is not a footnote to Christmas. It is the revelation of what Christmas means. The birth of this child has triggered the execution of children. The Incarnation draws blood before Jesus takes his first steps.

And so the holy family flees. They become refugees, border-crossers, undocumented migrants in Egypt. Again, this is not incidental. This is the pattern. God has entered the world in the category of the displaced, the hunted, the people who exist in the margins of imperial systems. Jesus will spend his entire life in this category. He will be surveilled, questioned, arrested, tried and executed. The outcome is certain from the manger. The only question is timing.

Christmas is the Shape of Surrender

Consider the shape of the nativity: a body laid down, wrapped in cloth, placed in a hollowed-out space. Arms open in the helplessness of infancy. This is the posture of crucifixion rehearsed in miniature. This is the posture of the man on the gurney, strapped down, arms extended for the needle. The manger is a sarcophagus. The swaddling clothes are grave clothes. Every artistic rendering of the peaceful baby in the straw is also, whether the artist knows it or not, a rendering of the executed criminal in the tomb. Same body. Same posture. Same surrender.

We cannot separate Christmas from Good Friday. The church tries, stretching them across the liturgical calendar, buffering them with ordinary time. But theologically they are one event. The Incarnation is a death sentence accepted in advance. God does not become human and then, regrettably, end up executed. God becomes human precisely in order to be executed. The execution is the point. The cross is not a detour…it is the destination that determines the route. Bethlehem is chosen because it leads to Golgotha.

This reframes everything we think we know about Christmas. The angels announcing peace to the shepherds are announcing peace through execution…the peace that comes when God absorbs the full violence of the systems that govern the world. The star leading the magi is leading them to a future corpse. The gold, frankincense and myrrh are funeral gifts. The magi know, even if we refuse to know. They have come to honor a body that is already marked for death.

Christmas is an Abolition Text

And this is why the story of Christmas is always an abolition text. If God entered the world as the executed one, then every execution is an act against God. The state that kills its citizens is killing Christ. Not metaphorically. Not symbolically. Actually. The condemned man on the gurney is the condemned man on the cross is the condemned baby in the manger. Same system. Same violence. Same body of God, offered up again and again on the altar of state power.

Christmas does not sentimentalize this. Christmas announces it. A child is born who will be killed by the government. Oh come let us adore him…by abolishing the systems that keep killing him over and over and over again.

12.23.25

Healed: A Theological Tribute to Garth Kasimu Baker-Fletcher

Healed for Good: A Theological Tribute to The Rev. Dr. Garth Kasimu Baker-Fletcher

This tribute reflects on the life, work and theological contributions of The Rev. Dr. Garth Kasimu Baker-Fletcher, drawing from a series of conversations we had. Through conversations about pain, disability and healing, Baker-Fletcher articulated a radical theology that reimagined disability not as deficit but as spiritual gift. His concepts of the "differently-abled" and the "spiritually superhuman" challenge normative frameworks that have long oppressed those whose bodies and minds do not conform to societal expectations. In death, Brother Garth has achieved the healing he so profoundly theologized, not as escape from disability but as the ultimate affirmation of the wounds that made him who he was.

Introduction: Brother Garth

There are some people who enter your life and fundamentally alter the way you see the world. The Rev. Dr. Garth Kasimu Baker-Fletcher was such a person. A Harvard-trained theologian whose scholarship ranged from Martin Luther King Jr.'s theory of dignity to the complexities of Christian ethics in a morally ambiguous world, Brother Garth was a giant in the field of practical Black religious thought. Yet for all his intellectual accomplishments, it was his capacity for friendship and his willingness to theologize from the raw material of his own suffering that made him irreplaceable. I called him Brother Garth because a Brother was exactly what he was to me.

Brother Garth's body was a site of profound struggle. Lupus, contracted in childhood, set off a cascade of medical

interventions that would define his physical existence. The medications meant to save him destroyed the ball joint in his hip, necessitating an implant that required surgery after surgery. In the first decade alone, he underwent ten operations. Eventually, he stopped counting. Pain became not an interruption to his life but its constant companion, an uninvited teacher whose lessons he could not ignore.

What follows is an expansion of conversations I was privileged to have with Brother Garth at a rehabilitation facility where he was recovering from yet another hip surgery. These conversations, conducted in the shadow of his failing body, have long festered in my mind. In them, he wrestled with questions that most theologians only approach abstractly: What is pain? How does one survive chronic suffering? What does it mean to be disabled in a world that worships ability? And perhaps most profoundly: Who heals whom?

The Theology of Pain: The Lived Reality of Garth Kasimu Baker-Fletcher

When I asked Brother Garth to define pain, he did not reach for medical terminology or philosophical abstractions. Instead, he strung together a litany of adjectives that could only come from someone who had lived what he described: “Pain is a shocking, singular, grading, raw, fierce, determined, frightening and empowering experience.” The final word is crucial. For Brother Garth, pain was not merely something to be endured but something that conferred power upon those who bore it. This was no naive optimism. It was the hard-won wisdom of a man whose body had been broken and remade countless times.

I responded that pain is “jolting and dislodging,” an experience we desperately want to escape. This is the normative understanding: pain as enemy, as aberration, as something to be conquered and eliminated. The entire medical-industrial complex is built on this premise. We spend billions of dollars annually on

pain management, seeking always to return the body to some imagined state of painlessness. But what happens when pain refuses to leave? What happens when it takes up permanent residence?

Brother Garth's answer was startling in its honesty. Chronic pain, he told me, "keeps me away from the business of life." The isolation of repeated hospitalization compounds the physical suffering with spiritual agony. "People make the assumption that they can't comfort you and therefore they stay away. The sense of solitude is an additional corresponding painful sickness." Here Brother Garth identified what might be called the social dimension of suffering. Pain does not merely afflict the individual body…it severs the sufferer from community, from participation in the ordinary rhythms of human existence. The disabled person becomes, in a very real sense, an exile.

Yet Brother Garth refused to despair…"You have to develop a spirituality capable of pushing back," he insisted. "You have to dare to believe in a God that has the strength and fortitude to carry you through." This is not the prosperity gospel's promise of deliverance from suffering. It is something far more radical…a theology that finds God present in the midst of unrelenting pain, a faith that does not require the cessation of suffering as proof of divine favor.

Normativism as Meta-Oppression

Our conversations turned to what Brother Garth called "social pain," the suffering inflicted by societal expectations of normalcy. "At 59," he told me, "I have finally come to the conclusion that I am disabled. To be disabled in this society is to be on the outside. The only way the disabled person gets to come back in on the inside is if you conform to the expectations of the society." Then came the crucial formulation: "Normativism is the meta-ism. All other oppressions flow out of a concept of normal."

This is a profound theological and political claim. Racism, sexism, homophobia, ableism: all are variations on a single theme, the violent enforcement of normalcy. The antinormative, Brother Garth observed, is "the greatest threat to normativity," and therefore faces "shocking pain over and over." Violence becomes the instrument by which the different are disciplined into conformity or punished for their refusal to conform.

Our society teaches that pain is temporary, something to be overcome. But what happens when you are not going to get over it? This is the question that chronic illness and disability force upon us. It is also the question that exposes the lie at the heart of normative culture. We are all, in various ways, broken. We are all, in the end, dying. The disabled person simply makes visible what the able-bodied spend enormous energy denying.

The Spiritually Superhuman : Garth Kasimu Baker-Fletcher on the Ability of Disability

I pushed Brother Garth toward a radical revaluation. "What happens if we start to view disability as a higher level of ability?" I asked. Those who learn to live through profound pain, I suggested, are "almost superhuman."

Brother Garth responded with a story that had haunted him since adolescence. "When I was a teenager," he said, "I dreamed that I carried all the pain that I had on my back. I was so strong. I looked like a superhero. I had muscles everywhere. When I looked at the rest of the world, all the people looked like stick figures." This mystical vision revealed to him that "going through this pain was a gift that I could give the world."

The implications are stunning. What if disability is not deficit but surplus? What if those who carry pain are not diminished but enlarged? What if the stick figures are the normative bodies, emaciated by their refusal to bear the weight of authentic human existence? Brother Garth was not romanticizing suffering. He

was inverting the hierarchy that places the able-bodied at the top and the disabled at the bottom. In this inversion, the disabled become teachers, prophets, bearers of a truth the world desperately needs but cannot bear to hear.

I shared my own experience with bipolar disorder. “I have come to a place where I saw my mental disability as a mental ability.” Brother Garth and I recognized in each other fellow travelers on a path that most people cannot imagine walking. “We have that connection,” he acknowledged. The disabled know things about life, about God, about what matters, that the able-bodied can only access through relationship with those who have been forced to learn the hard way.

The Scandal of Healing : Garth Kasimu Baker-Fletcher On the Horror of Healing

Brother Garth expressed profound discomfort with how the healing miracles of Jesus have been used, “I struggle with the fact that ideas of punishment/evil and disability are so closely connected in the narratives.” He charitably attributed this to the authors rather than to Jesus himself, but the damage was done. “Our ideas of disability are always connected to healing and this is a major problem. Most often in churches, I think we use disabled persons for our own benefit.”

I named this phenomenon “disability pornography.” We roll disabled persons into our worship spaces so that everyone will feel good about themselves, inspired by the brave sufferer who keeps going despite everything. But when disabled persons begin to stretch us, to make demands, to insist on accommodation and inclusion, we roll them out. We claim we lack the means to make space for them. Brother Garth called it, “horrific.”

“We sit with our disability as a means of sustenance.” This statement inverts the typical framework entirely. We are accustomed to thinking of the church as bringing sustenance to

the disabled, offering them spiritual nourishment to help them endure their suffering. But what if the disabled are the ones who nourish us? “Disabled persons bring a higher level of spirituality to church spaces,” I said. “I think we need to stop trying to heal disabled persons who walk through the door and realize that we are the ones who are healed by their presence.”

Brother Garth’s own experience confirmed this reversal. “When I started experiencing the othering of disability in my younger years, everyone assumed that I just needed to be healed. I have had no more painful of experiences than people trying to heal me.” The well-meaning prayers, the hands laid on in faith, the confident declarations that God would restore him: these were not comfort but assault. “As I have grown older, I have realized that most often I am the one that needs to be doing the healing.”

Wheelchairs in Heaven

Our conversation turned eschatological: What becomes of disability in the age to come? “I think we will all be healed. I think the lame will walk. I think the blind will see. I don’t think the wheelchairs will be there.” But then he added a crucial qualification: “With that said, I think we will still have the wounds. Remember, Jesus still had the wounds when Thomas wanted to put his hands in there.”

This is a stunning theological insight. The resurrected Christ is not restored to some pre-crucifixion state. He bears the marks of his suffering into eternity. The wounds are not erased but glorified. They become the very means by which Thomas and the other disciples recognize their Lord. If this is true for Christ, might it not also be true for those who follow him? Might we carry our wounds, our disabilities, our scars into the life to come, not as marks of shame but as badges of honor?

I suggested that “our culture is like Thomas. We are looking at persons with disabilities unsure of what to do and we cannot be

made whole until we are willing to place our hands in the wounds. Disabled persons bring to us the incarnated Christ." Brother Garth's response was devastating: "Yet we are the ones still doubting whether disabled persons can be resurrected. We want them to prove that they have been healed. The truth is standing in front of us."

The Disabled God : The God Garth Kasimu Baker-Fletcher Knew

"I think that God is permanently disabled. God is blinded or restricted by love. I think this is what makes us call such an entity God. I don't want God to be healed of such blindness or restriction."

Brother Garth affirmed this intuition. "God is with us. God feels. God experiences. God is disabled because we are disabled. God doesn't need to be healed." Here we arrived at a doctrine of divine disability that challenges classical theism's emphasis on God's perfection, omnipotence and impassibility. The God who cannot suffer, who exists in splendid isolation from the pain of creation, is not the God revealed in the wounded hands of the risen Christ. The true God is the one who chooses limitation, who embraces restriction, who becomes disabled by love.

"We are the ones who need to be healed from our false dichotomies," I said. "I feel like ability is an illusion. Nobody is abled. Despite the lengths to which our culture goes to deny death, everyone is dying or afflicted by death. Why do we feel the need to categorize ability and disability?"

Brother Garth's answer was simple and profound: "We are addicted to normatizing and shunning anything that is different." The cure for this addiction is not more normativity but its abolition. The uprising Brother Garth called for was nothing less than a revolution against the tyranny of the normal, a liberation

movement for all who have been oppressed by expectations they never chose and could never meet.

Healed for Good : Garth Kasimu Baker-Fletcher

Brother Garth is gone now. The hip that caused him such suffering will trouble him no more. The lupus that stalked him from childhood has lost its prey. The surgeries are finished. The pain has ended.

But I do not believe that Brother Garth is healed in the way our normative culture imagines healing. He is not restored to some pre-lupus state, as if his disability were simply an error to be corrected. That would be to deny everything he taught me about the gift of pain, the spiritually superhuman status of those who bear suffering, the wounds that remain even in resurrection.

No, I believe Brother Garth is healed for good in a different sense. He is healed for good meaning permanently, finally, irrevocably. The chronic has become eternal. But he is also healed for good…meaning for the sake of good, for the purpose of good, as a gift to the good. The healing he offered to so many of us while he walked this earth continues now from whatever place he inhabits. His wounds remain. His teaching endures. His presence persists in everyone he touched.

In that teenage dream, Brother Garth saw himself as a superhero, muscles bulging from the weight of pain he carried, surrounded by stick figures who could not comprehend his strength. I think that dream was prophecy. Brother Garth was indeed superhuman, not despite his disability but because of it. He saw what the rest of us could not see. He bore what the rest of us could not bear. He taught what the rest of us needed desperately to learn.

“Pain…That’s where God comes in,” Brother Garth often repeated. He was right. God came in through Brother Garth’s wounds, through his wheelchair, through his unrelenting physical

struggles. God comes in still, through every disabled body that refuses to conform, through every chronic sufferer who dares to find meaning in meaningless agony, through every existence that defies the normal and transforms it.

Brother Garth, you taught me that our restricted normative ideas are what needs healing. You taught me that disability is gift. You taught me that God is restricted by love and does not need or want to be otherwise. You taught me that the wounds remain.

Your wounds remain with us now. They are our inheritance. They are our sustenance. They are our call to continue the uprising against all false ideas of ability.

Rest now, Brother.

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12.24.25

From 1812: John Murray's Radical Theology of Hope

That Sublime and Never Failing Confidence: John Murray's Radical Theology of Hope for a Terrified World

John Murray (1741-1815) was born in England to strict Calvinist parents and raised to believe most of humanity was damned. After converting to Universalism, he lost everything and sailed for America in 1770, intending to disappear. Instead, he became the founder of American Universalism, establishing the first Universalist congregation at Gloucester, Massachusetts, and later pastoring the Universalist Society of Boston. A stroke left him paralyzed in 1809. He spent his final years, in his words, 'helpless as an infant,' writing the Letters and Sketches of Sermons that would become his testament, still proclaiming that every soul would be gathered home.

A Note on Murray's Voice: Throughout his Letters and Sketches of Sermons, Murray refers to himself in the third person: 'the writer,' 'his imprisoned spirit,' 'he unwaveringly believes.' This was a common literary convention of the era, particularly in prefaces and personal testimonies. Far from distancing, this style lends a peculiar poignancy to his words: a dying man speaking of himself with dignified restraint, offering his hope as gift rather than confession. All quotations from Murray preserve his original voice.

'He is especially solicitous to communicate to the sons and daughters of humanity that sublime and never failing confidence upon which his imprisoned spirit, through long days of adversity and through successive nights of sorrow, hath calmly reposed.'

-Letters and Sketches of Sermons (1812)

John Murray's Dying Gift

By 1812, John Murray was dying. His body had failed him. ‘Helpless as an infant,’ he wrote. Income gone. Medical bills mounting. He had every reason in the world to despair. Instead, he wrote about hope…not the weak hope that whispers ‘maybe.’ Murray wrote about hope so fierce he called it ‘sublime and never failing.’ This hope had carried him through decades of ministry, through years of suffering. And now, with death approaching, it burned bright enough to lead him home.

What Murray offered in his Letters and Sketches of Sermons was not theology for the classroom. It was medicine for terrorized souls. Two centuries later, we still need these words.

The Terror John Murray Confronted

The Christianity of Murray’s day dealt only in fear. The Calvinist establishment taught that God had divided humanity before time began…a small elect chosen for heaven, everyone else destined for eternal conscious torment. And the cruelest part: you could not know which group you belonged to. The best you could do was examine yourself endlessly for ‘signs of election,’ never certain whether your faith was real or demonic counterfeit.

Murray met the casualties everywhere. People with what the era called ‘religious melancholy’…minds broken by doctrines that made God’s love conditional and Christ’s sacrifice insufficient. The gospel, supposedly good news, had become a source of terror. Against this, Murray proclaimed something dangerous: The gospel actually is good news…for everyone without exception.

John Murray Read Scripture Through Love

Murray’s opponents read the same Bible he did. They found warnings of eternal punishment, pronouncements of wrath and declarations of limited atonement. Same text. Different conclusions. How? Murray’s answer…every interpretation

requires a framework. The proper framework is God's self-revelation as love. Start there…God truly is love, not just loving sometimes…and the whole biblical narrative shifts.

The Prophets

Murray read the Hebrew prophets and found a pattern. Judgment, yes. Wrath, yes. But always moving toward restoration. Always. He quoted Jeremiah:

"I have slain in mine anger, and in my fury… Behold, I will bring it health and cure, and I will cure them, and will reveal unto them the abundance of peace and truth. And I will cleanse them from all their iniquity, whereby they have sinned against me, and I will pardon all their iniquities." (33:5–8; cf. 32:30–42)

The same God who slays in fury brings health and cure. The same God who hides his face reveals peace. Wrath is real. But it serves restoration. Judgment accomplishes transformation, not annihilation.

Murray found this everywhere: Ezekiel's promise that God would be 'pacified toward thee for all that thou hast done'… all (16:63). Daniel's vision of a kingdom where transgression would be 'finished' and sin would 'end' (9:24). Moses' portrait of God bearing Israel 'as a man doth bare his son' (Deuteronomy 1:31).

Paul

Murray's strongest case came from Paul. In Romans 11, Paul writes: 'God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all' (11:32). Why had God hardened Israel? Why the blindness, the spirit of slumber? The answer: 'that he might have mercy upon all.' The hardening was purposeful. Temporary. Serving universal mercy.

And First Corinthians 15: ‘For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive’ (15:22). Murray would not let his readers miss the parallel. The ‘all’ who die in Adam equals the ‘all’ made alive in Christ. One humanity. First condemned. Then redeemed. The scope of the fall is the scope of the redemption.

John

John’s Gospel declares: ‘Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world’ (1:29). Murray pressed every word. Not some people. Not the elect. The world. Not individual sins but sin itself…the whole condition of human alienation. Christ came to accomplish salvation, not just make it possible. To secure redemption, not just offer it. If Christ died only for some, his work is incomplete, his title as Savior of the world a lie. Scripture says otherwise.

John Murray: God Is Love

Everything Murray wrote rested on one conviction: God is love. Not loving sometimes. Not loving some people. Love itself. If God is love, certain things follow. Love desires the good of the beloved. Love persists through resistance. Love cannot rest until all the beloved are home.

Murray found this love in God’s relationship with Israel. Despite rebellion after rebellion, God never abandoned them. The prophets spoke of divine pathos, wounded love…but always concluded with restoration. A father bearing his son. Not a sovereign tolerating subjects. A parent carrying a child. What parent could be satisfied with some children saved while others perish forever? The suggestion contradicts love’s nature.

Murray pressed the logic. If imperfect earthly parents would move heaven and earth to save a rebellious child, how can we imagine God doing less? Either God lacks the power to save all

or lacks the will. Omnipotence eliminates the first. Love eliminates the second.

John Murray: Sovereignty Serves Salvation

Murray did not reject divine sovereignty. He embraced it…with the most robust Reformed language available:

‘With him are the issues of Life and of Death. He will have mercy on whom he will have mercy. When he shuts, no man can open; and if he vouchsafe to open the eyes of the understanding, the power exists not which can draw the obscuring veil of darkness. Omnipotence is the attribute of the Creator, the creature can neither do, nor undo.’

Classic Calvinist language. But Murray reached a different conclusion than Calvin. If God has absolute power to save, and absolute commitment to save all, then all will be saved. Sovereignty guarantees universal salvation. The hardening of some serves mercy to all. Temporary blindness gives way to sight. Present judgment accomplishes future restoration.

Murray did not deny divine wrath. He understood it as love’s expression. God hates sin because God loves sinners and sin destroys what God loves. Anger serves mercy. The slaying in fury gives way to health and cure.

John Murray and Hope in the Fire

What makes Murray’s Letters compelling is where they came from. He wrote as a dying man:

‘Condemned to a lingering and greatly debilitating malady, the writer has become, as far as his bodily organs are involved, helpless as an infant; and while his income is greatly and necessarily abridged, the exigencies annexed to his melancholy situation imperiously accumulate many and heavy expenses.’

From that crucible came radiance: ‘That sublime and never failing confidence upon which his imprisoned spirit, through long days of adversity and through successive nights of sorrow, hath calmly reposed’

Tested hope. Proven hope. Murray stood ‘upon the threshold of another and a better world,’ finding that ‘pecuniary hopes and fears are nearly lost in that blissful futurity.’ When everything else was stripped away…health, income, strength…hope remained.

This is what gave Murray authority. Universal salvation was not an intellectual position he defended. It was comfort he experienced. The difference matters.

Hope as Medicine

Murray was a pastor. He counseled people with religious melancholy. He visited the dying. He corresponded with souls tormented by fear of damnation. He watched false theology produce real damage. Those who believed in conditional salvation lived in uncertainty…constantly self-examining for signs of election, never sure their faith was genuine. Those who trusted in universal restoration rested. Confident that divine love would not fail.

This was not preference. It was observable. Theology centered on conditional love produces anxiety. Theology proclaiming unconditional commitment produces peace. The fruit testifies.

Murray’s purpose was explicit: ‘He is especially solicitous to communicate to the sons and daughters of humanity that sublime and never failing confidence… He unwaveringly believes that every possible felicity is in reserve for his species’. Every possible felicity. For his species. Not some. All.

The Questions

Accept Murray's conclusions or not, his work forces questions. Do we believe God's love is unconditional and irresistible? If so, what follows? Can we coherently say God is love while believing most of humanity will burn forever? Or does genuine love necessarily mean determination to save all the beloved?

These are not academic questions. The content of our hope shapes how we live. A gospel of conditional love and uncertain salvation produces fear. A gospel of God's determined purpose to save all produces peace. Murray lived in that peace. He died in it. His Letters testify.

Benediction

As his Letters concluded, Murray blessed everyone who would read them:

'He unwaveringly believes that every possible felicity is in reserve for his species; and in humble and devout imitation of his great and adorable Master, while bidding the wandering race farewell, he bestows upon both enemies and friends the ardent benediction of a spirit replete with unbounded love for the children of men, for the offspring of Deity.'

Every person…friend, enemy, believer, skeptic…stood equally as 'offspring of Deity.' Beloved children whom God would not lose. Murray blessed in imitation of Christ, who prayed for his executioners and promised paradise to a dying thief (Luke 23:34, 43). Love that embraces enemies. Hope that extends to the most unlikely. Confidence that pronounces blessing on all humanity. Christ's own spirit. Still available.

In an age of anxiety, John Murray offers peace. In a culture of fear, confidence. In a world where religion traffics in terror, that sublime and never failing hope…tested through long days of adversity and successive nights of sorrow, all the way to the

threshold of that better world where all tears are wiped away and God is finally all in all (Revelation 21:4; 1 Corinthians 15:28).

May we hope more fully. Trust more completely. Love more boundlessly. May we live toward that day when God’s love has gathered all things home.

12.24.25

Emmanuel = God With Us = Merry Christmas.

"They will call him Emmanuel = God with us." –Matthew 1:23, paraphrased

God Entered Flesh = Emmanuel

Christmas hope does not begin with foolish optimism. It begins with incarnation. Emmanuel. Not with an idea, not with a feeling, not with a moral lesson…but with God taking on flesh. And that matters, because flesh is where history always counts.

The Christian confession is not simply that Jesus was a good teacher or a moral revolutionary…though he was both. The confession is bolder and more unsettling…Jesus was and is divine. God did not merely send help. God came. The Word did not hover above suffering. The Word entered it. And the first thing God learned in flesh was vulnerability.

God arrived not as a ruler, but as a child dependent on a woman's body, a man's courage and the fragile hospitality of strangers. The divine chose the risks of skin. The Holy One accepted the danger of breath. The Infinite placed itself inside the limits of time, poverty, empire and fear. That is the hope of Christmas….not escape from the world, but God's refusal to abandon it.

Hope Born Under Threat = Emmanuel

We are often tempted to sentimentalize the story…angels, starlight, soft animals and quiet awe. But Luke and Matthew will not let us keep Christmas safe. This is a story of political violence and economic precarity. A census imposed by empire. A birth without shelter. Pain and suffering…then life. The nativity is not a greeting card. It is a crisis. Hope is born under threat.

And that is precisely why it matters that Jesus is divine. Because if God is only nearby, hope remains fragile. But if God is with us, hope becomes defiant. The Incarnation declares that no place is without God…not refugee camps, not prison cells, not hospital rooms, not death rows, not the backs of police cars, not homes filled with grief and fear. If God has taken on flesh, then flesh is never disposable. If God has lived a human life, then human lives are not expendable. Christmas is God saying…I will not love you from a distance….I am with you.

God Choosing Identification = Emmanuel

Socially conscious faith sometimes gets accused of downplaying divinity, as though justice and incarnation are somehow at odds with holiness. But the opposite is true. The divinity of Jesus is precisely what makes his solidarity so powerful. This is not a hero choosing empathy. This is God choosing identification. When Jesus later touches the sick, confronts empire, forgives enemies, feeds the hungry and refuses to abandon the condemned, he is not temporarily acting divine. He is revealing who God has always been.

Presence, Not Domination = Emmanuel

Christmas tells us that God's power is not domination, but presence. God's glory is not control, but communion. God's salvation is not extraction from the world, but faithfulness within it. And that changes what hope means. Hope is not pretending everything will be fine. Hope is knowing God has already stepped into what is not. Hope is not denial of suffering. Hope is God refusing to let suffering have the last word.

The child in the manger does not erase pain…but he interrupts despair. He signals that history is not closed, that injustice is not ultimate, that love is not naïve and that death is not sovereign. The hope of Christmas is not that things are easy. It is that God is present.

A Dangerous Claim

So when we say “God is with us,” we are not making a poetic claim. We are making a theological one…and a dangerous one. If God is with us, then God is with the poor, the undocumented, the incarcerated, the grieving, the exhausted, the ones told they do not belong. If God has taken on flesh, then systems that crush flesh are being judged. If God is born among the vulnerable, then vulnerability is not shameful…it is sacred ground. Christmas hope does not ask us to look away from the world’s wounds. It invites us to recognize that God is already there.

Reality Breaking In

And here is the final word of hope: the child born in Bethlehem did not stay a child. The divine life entered history…and history never recovered. God did not visit and leave. God stayed. God suffered. God died. God rose. And God remains. The hope of Christmas is not that God once came. It is that God is still coming…into our fear, into our struggle, into our resistance, into our love.

Because Jesus was…is…and will forever be…the apex of both humanity and divinity, we can trust that the great hope of Bethlehem is not wishful thinking…it is reality breaking in. Indeed, that which is more real than anything that will ever be… Emmanuel. God with us. Now and forever. Amen.

12.26.25

I Watched You Kill Him: A Priest's Plea to Executioners

December 25, 2025

Dear Executioner,

I have watched you work.

Eleven times now. Eleven men. Eleven deaths I stood close enough to touch.

I was the one holding his hand while you strapped the other one down. I was the one praying while you checked the lines. I was the one whispering scripture while you waited for the warden's nod. We breathed the same air in that room. We heard the same last words. We watched the same body go still.

Then you walked out one door and I walked out another.

Where did you go? Home to your wife, your kids, your dog who don't know what you do for a living? To a bar where nobody asks questions? To bed, where you stared at the ceiling until morning?

I went to a hotel room. I sat on the edge of the bed. I didn't move for a long time.

This letter is for you.

Not the lawyers who argued the case. Not the judges who upheld the sentence. Not the governor who signed the warrant. You. The one who actually did it. The one whose hands touched his body. The one who made the killing real.

I'm not here to judge you. That's not what this is. I've been in that room too many times to pretend I'm innocent.

Here's what I can't figure out: Am I a witness or an accomplice? When I hold his hand, does that comfort him or does it make the whole thing easier for the state? When I pray over his body, am I resisting the violence or blessing it?

I don't know. I've asked God. I've asked myself. I haven't gotten an answer that lets me sleep at night.

So, I'm not coming at you from some high place. I'm down here in the dirt with you. We're both covered in the same blood.

But your hands did the work. My hands just held on. That's a difference. I don't know how big a difference, but it's something.

Executioner : What is happening to your soul?

You can call it conscience if you want. Call it your psyche. Call it whatever you need to call it. But you know there's something inside you that watches what you do and remembers. Something that doesn't forget. Something that wakes you up at 3 a.m. with questions you can't answer.

The state doesn't care about that something. The state just needs a body to do the job. When you're used up…when the nightmares get too bad or the drinking gets out of control or your wife finally leaves…they'll find another body. You're replaceable. Your soul isn't their problem.

But it's your problem. It's going to be your problem for the rest of your life…and then some.

I've talked to men and women who did what you do. Twenty, thirty executions. They seemed fine for years. Professionals. Did the job, went home, lived their lives. Then something cracked. A

nightmare that wouldn't stop. A trigger they couldn't explain… the hiss of compressed air, the beep of a heart monitor, the smell of antiseptic. Suddenly, they couldn't function. Couldn't be in the same room with their kids. Couldn't feel anything except numb or terrified, nothing in between.

One man told me he started dreaming about the chamber. Not the executions…just the room. Empty. Silent. Waiting. He'd wake up shaking and couldn't explain why an empty room scared him more than anything he'd ever seen.

But his body knew. His soul knew. The room was never empty. The ghosts were in there, waiting for him.

I carry ghosts too. Eleven of them. They're with me right now, while I write this.

How many are you carrying?

Executioner : Every detail of the room sticks with you, doesn't it?

You know it better than I do.

You know which door sticks. Which light buzzes. How many steps from the hall to the gurney. Where to stand so you're not in the way. You've walked that room so many times your body could do it blind.

I've been in eleven times. That's nothing compared to you. But eleven times is enough.

The smell hits first. That hospital smell, but wrong somehow. Hospitals are for healing. This room is for killing. Your body knows the difference even before your mind catches up. Something tightens in your chest. Something old. Something familiar.

The light is too bright. Fluorescent. No shadows. Nothing soft. Every detail exposed, documented, witnessed. It's the light they use on things that are already dead.

And there in the middle: the gurney. Medical equipment turned into a killing machine. The straps worn smooth from all the bodies that have been held down. The padding is so thin. Comfort isn't the point.

The shape of it…arms out, chest up, head back…it looks like a cross. The state would never admit that, but I've stood next to enough of them to see it. We lay a man down like a sacrifice. Everyone in the room becomes part of the ritual.

Executioner : Why do you hesitate?

I've seen you hesitate.

Not much. A fraction of a second. A pause before tightening a strap. A breath before giving the nod. It's small. Nobody else notices. But I've been watching.

That hesitation is your conscience trying to speak. That tiny pause is your soul screaming stop before your training shuts it down.

The state doesn't train you to hesitate. The state trains you to perform. Execute…that's the word, isn't it? Same word for killing a man and for completing a task. That's not an accident. They want you to think of it as a task. A procedure. Something you do, not something you become.

But you're not a machine. Machines don't hesitate.

Are you still human?

I’m asking seriously. Not as an insult. As a genuine question. After all the executions you’ve participated in, is there still a person inside the uniform? Is there still a soul under the protocol?

I believe there is. I’ve seen it. I’ve seen the crack in the mask. I’ve seen the hesitation. That’s why I’m writing this.

Executioner : How do you carry the room?

The room doesn’t stay in the prison.

You walk out. You drive home. You take off the uniform. You shower. You eat dinner. You watch TV. You go through all the motions of normal life.

But the room comes with you.

It’s in the smell that won’t wash off. In the hands that remember what they did. In the eyes that saw things most people will never see.

It comes with me too. The smell of antiseptic triggers it. The buzz of fluorescent lights. Someone struggling to breathe. Ordinary things that aren’t ordinary anymore because they’ve been poisoned by association with death.

Eleven executions, and I’m the witness. You’re the participant. I don’t know which of us carries the heavier weight. But we’re both carrying something that’s going to take years off our lives.

The room follows us. The room waits for us in our sleep. The room never forgets what we did there, even when we try to.

Executioner : Do you realize what you’re doing to everyone else?

You probably think the damage is contained. You probably think it's just you and the condemned. The man dies, you go home, the circle closes.

It doesn't work that way.

There are other people in that witness room. They watch what you do. And what you do breaks them too.

Executioner : What about the victim's family?

The victim's family came for closure.

That's what the state promised them. That's what everybody told them. Watch him die and you'll finally be able to heal. Watch him die and the nightmare will be over. Watch him die and you can move on.

They lied to them too.

I've talked to victim's families after executions. Not all of them. But enough. The closure doesn't come. The healing doesn't happen. Instead, they've added a new trauma to the old one. Now they've watched a man die. Now they've got his face in their heads alongside the face of the person they lost.

The state uses the grief of victim's families to justify what you do. And then the state leaves them to deal with their new grief on their own.

You helped do that to them. You didn't mean to. You were just doing your job. But she's wounded, and you're the weapon that wounded her.

Executioner : What about the family of the condemned?

On the other side of the glass is another family.

The condemned man's mother. His children. His wife. His sister. People who love him, even though they know what he did. People who are about to watch the state kill someone they love.

Nobody talks about them. Nobody cares about their grief. The state decided their person forfeited the right to be mourned when he committed his crime. But grief doesn't follow the state's rules. Love doesn't check the legal record before it decides to break your heart.

I've sat with those families. I've prayed with them. I've held their hands in the hours before while they waited for the state to kill their son, their father, their brother.

Then I've watched them watch you do it.

The mother cries out. The children press their faces to the glass. The wife collapses. And you're on the other side, doing your job, following procedure, making it happen.

You helped do that to them.

Executioner : What about my health?

Of course, I chose to be there. I chose this ministry. I chose to stand with the condemned because I believe no one should die alone. That's on me.

But I'm wounded too. Eleven executions have marked me in ways I'm still trying to understand. I've watched men die badly…some struggling, gasping, convulsing…while the state insisted everything was going according to plan. I've held hands that went from gripping to limp. I've prayed while bodies shut down.

You were there. We were in that room together, and we're both living with what happened.

I'm not blaming you for my pain. But I need you to know that your participation doesn't just damage you. It damages everyone who watches. It radiates outward like poison in water. The families, the witnesses, the journalists, the spiritual advisors…we all carry pieces of what you did.

The harm is not contained. It never was.

Executioner : Do you know what you're doing to your fellow citizens?

Here's something you probably haven't thought about: you're corrupting the state you work for.

I don't mean corruption like bribes and scandals. I mean something deeper. Every time you participate in an execution, you help stain the soul of the state itself.

The state's whole claim to legitimacy rests on being different from the criminals it punishes. The murderer kills out of rage or greed or hatred. The state…supposedly…acts out of justice and reason. The murderer is lawless. The state is lawful. That's the story anyway.

But when the state kills, the distinction collapses. The state does exactly what the murderer did…takes a human life…and dresses it up in procedure and paperwork. The state becomes what it claims to condemn.

And you're the one who makes it real. You're the point where the state's violence stops being abstract and becomes concrete. Without your hands, the execution can't happen. You are the mechanism through which the state corrupts itself.

Executioner : Did you know that you are teaching murder?

Think about what the state is teaching when it executes.

It's teaching that some problems can only be solved by killing. It's teaching that violence is an acceptable answer when you have enough authority behind it. It's teaching that certain people are disposable…that there's a category of human being who can be erased.

The state stands up and says: Killing is wrong. Don't do it. Then the state straps a man to a gurney and kills him.

Studies show the death penalty doesn't deter crime. Of course it doesn't. The state is modeling exactly what it claims to prohibit. It's teaching violence by example.

You're the teacher. Every time you participate, you're giving the lesson. You're showing the world that killing can be organized, scheduled, bureaucratized, made acceptable. You're demonstrating that with enough paperwork and protocol, ending a human life is just another day at work.

Executioner : How can you kill in our name?

The state does all of this in our name.

That's how government works. The state acts on behalf of its citizens. When the state kills, it's claiming to kill for us. Your hands are our hands. Your actions are our actions.

Which means we're all implicated. Every citizen of a state that executes bears some responsibility for the killing. The blood is on all of our hands.

But it's on some hands more than others. You're not just a citizen. You're the instrument. You're the one who turns the state's violence into reality. You bear a special weight…and you inflict a special stain on the people you serve.

That stain spreads. It corrupts the courts that sentence men to death. It corrupts the legislature that refuses to abolish the death penalty. It corrupts the governor who signs the warrants. It corrupts the whole system from top to bottom.

And at the center of all that corruption is you. The one who actually does the killing.

Executioner : Did you know that the state doesn't care about you?

The state also betrays you.

It asks you to do something no employer should ask of anyone. It sends you into that room to kill, then sends you home to deal with the consequences. It offers you a pension instead of your soul. It treats you like a tool to be used and discarded.

When you break down…and you will break down, eventually… the state will not be there for you. It will find another body. It will move on. Your trauma is not the state's problem.

The state does not love you. The state does not care about your soul. The state needs you to be a mechanism, and when the mechanism fails, the state will replace you.

You deserve better than that. You deserve a government that doesn't ask you to kill. You deserve an employer that doesn't trade your humanity for its convenience.

But you won't get what you deserve by continuing to participate. You'll only get it by refusing.

Executioner : Do you believe in God?

I'm a priest. You probably figured that out. So, I'm going to talk about God now. If that's not your thing, you can skip ahead. But I think you should hear this.

I believe every human being is made in the image of God.

You don't have to believe that. But the idea is older than Christianity. It goes back to the first pages of Genesis. Every person carries something sacred inside them. Not because of what they've done or haven't done. Because of what they are. Human.

That image doesn't get erased by crime. The man on the gurney, whatever he did…and some of them did terrible things…is still a bearer of the divine image. His humanity doesn't disappear because a jury said so. His sacred worth doesn't get cancelled by a death warrant.

When you kill him, you destroy an icon of God.

I don't say that to hurt you. I say it because you need to understand what you're being asked to do. The state calls it justice. I call it desecration. You're breaking something sacred. You're shattering an image of the divine.

And here's the thing about breaking sacred images: you can't do it without breaking something in yourself.

Executioner : Did you know that you bear the same image of God of the one you killed?

You bear the same image. The same God who made him made you. The same sacred worth that makes his life precious makes your life precious.

When you participate in his destruction, you participate in your own diminishment. When you shatter the image of God in him, you fracture it in yourself.

This isn't about punishment. God isn't keeping score to hit you with later. It's about the nature of the act itself. Killing harms the killer. It has to. You can't destroy another person's humanity without destroying some of your own.

That's what I mean when I talk about your soul. That's what's at stake. Not just your mental health, not just your relationships, not just your sleep. Your fundamental self. The part of you that makes you human. The image of God that you carry.

The state is taking it from you, execution by execution. And when it's gone…when the image is too damaged to recognize… what will be left?

Executioner : Don't you remember that Jesus was executed by the state?

People forget that. They put crosses on their walls and around their necks like it's a nice decoration. But the cross was a method of execution. Rome's death penalty. Jesus was a condemned man, killed by the government using legal procedures.

Which means Christianity was founded by someone who was strapped down and killed, just like the men on your gurneys. The God I serve was executed. The God I pray to knows what it feels like to have the state's hands on his body.

When I stand next to a condemned man, I see Christ. When I hold his hand, I'm holding the hand of my savior. Matthew 25…'whatever you did to the least of these, you did to me.'

What does that make you?

I'm not trying to damn you. Grace extends to everyone, even people whose hands are red with blood. But the act is what it is. When you kill the condemned, you're doing something to Christ. You're standing in the same place of the soldiers at Golgotha that crucified Jesus.

That should matter. Even if you're not religious. Even if you think this is all mythology. The story shapes our culture, shapes our conscience, shapes what we think justice means. And in that story, God takes the side of the executed. Not the executioner.

Executioner : Did you know that you can stop?

You can stop.

I know it doesn't feel that way. I know there are bills to pay and a pension to protect. I know there's pressure from above and silence from the people around you. I know the system is designed to make you feel like you don't have a choice.

But you do have a choice. You've always had a choice. The choice is hard…but it exists.

You can refuse.

I'm not going to pretend it won't cost you. It might cost you your job. It might cost you friendships. It might cost you the career you've built. Those are real costs, and I don't minimize them.

But what's the alternative? Keep going until you break? Keep adding ghosts until they crowd out everything else? Keep becoming someone your children won't recognize, your wife can't reach, you can't find in the mirror?

The job isn't worth your soul. Nothing is.

Executioner : Did you know that there are practical things you can do to transition out?

In some states, you have the right to refuse assignments that violate your conscience. The right exists on paper even if nobody talks about it. Look into it. Talk to a lawyer. Find out what protections exist.

Document your beliefs. Write them down. Create a record. If you're going to refuse, make it clear that you're refusing on principle, not on whim. That matters legally and it matters morally.

Find allies. You're not the only one who feels this way. There are others…I promise you there are others…who carry the same doubts, the same horror, the same weight. They're afraid to speak too. But if you find each other, you might find the courage to speak together.

And if you can't refuse yet…if the circumstances won't allow it…then start with the small resistances. Look him in the eye. Acknowledge his humanity even if you can't say it out loud. Refuse to participate in the jokes, the detachment, the pretending that what you're doing is normal. Keep your soul awake even while your hands do the work.

But know that the small resistances aren't enough. Eventually, you have to choose. You have to say no. You have to walk away.

Executioner : Don't you realize that you need some healing?

If you've already participated…if you've already been in that room, already done the work, already carry the ghosts…then you need healing. Not just quitting. Healing.

That starts with confession. Not to a court…I'm not talking about legal confession. I'm talking about telling the truth about

what you've done to someone who can hear it without judgment. A therapist. A priest. A friend. Someone.

The silence is killing you. The secret is rotting inside you. You need to speak it out loud. You need to name what you've done and feel the weight of it and let someone else help you carry it.

Then grief. You've lost something. You've lost the person you were before. You've lost your innocence, your wholeness, your clean conscience. Those losses are real and they deserve to be mourned.

And finally, amends. Not just apologizing to the dead. But living differently. Using what you've learned to help others. Speaking out. Joining the fight to end the thing that damaged you.

Some of the strongest voices against the death penalty are former executioners. They know what nobody else knows. Their testimony carries a weight no outsider can match. Your suffering can become a gift if you let it.

Executioner : Did you forget that we are all in this together?

You're not alone.

It feels that way. The system is designed to make it feel that way. Keep the executioners isolated, silent, ashamed. Don't let them talk to each other. Don't let them talk to anyone. Silence protects the system.

But there are others. People who have done what you've done and lived to tell the truth about it. People who found their way out. People who are walking the same path you're walking, looking for the same light.

Find them. Read their stories. Listen to their voices. Let them show you that transformation is possible, that the damage isn't permanent, that a different life exists on the other side of refusal.

There are also people working to end the death penalty. Lawyers, activists, ministers, organizers. They want to help you. They see you not as the enemy but as another victim of the system. They have resources. They have experience. They have solidarity to offer.

And there are people like me. Spiritual advisors who have stood in that room. We know what you've seen. We know what it costs. We don't condemn you for it because we carry our own guilt, our own questions, our own weight.

Reach out. Tell your story. Let someone else help you carry it. The isolation is the system's tool for keeping you trapped. Connection is how you break free.

Executioner : Who am I to judge?

I've witnessed eleven executions. I've held the hands of eleven men as they died. I've watched you work eleven times.

I'm not your judge. I can't be. I've been in that room too. I carry my own questions, my own guilt, my own ghosts.

But I've seen what the chamber does. To the condemned. To the witnesses. To you. And I've seen enough to know that it can't go on. That someone has to say stop. That the people doing the killing can actually end it.

Without you, the execution cannot happen. The warrant is just paper. The sentence is just words. You are the one who makes it real.

Which means you're the one who can make it stop.

Executioner : When will you set it down?

The warrant is not holy writ.

The warden’s order is not the voice of God.

The chain of command does not dissolve your responsibility.

You are not a machine.

You are a human being. You were made in the image of God. You have a conscience that speaks to you, even now, even after everything. You have the capacity to choose.

Choose differently.

Choose to listen to the voice that has been whispering no since the first time you walked into that room. Choose to honor the hesitation you’ve learned to suppress. Choose to be something other than what the state has made you.

I know what it will cost you. I know you’ll lose things. But you’ve already lost things. You’ve lost pieces of your soul. You’ve lost the ability to sleep through the night. You’ve lost the person you were before.

What do you have left to lose that matters more than what you’ll gain?

You’ll gain your humanity back. Your integrity. Your capacity to look in the mirror without flinching. You’ll gain the chance to become someone your children can be proud of, someone you can be proud of.

You’ll gain your soul.

Executioner : Don’t you remember me?

I've been in that room with you. I've breathed the same air. I've heard the same final breaths. I've watched the same bodies go still.

We're bound together by what we've witnessed and what we've done. We can't undo it. We can't pretend it didn't happen. We'll carry it for the rest of our lives.

But we can choose what comes next. We can choose to stay in the darkness or walk toward the light. We can choose to keep participating or finally refuse.

I've made my choice. I'll keep entering that room, keep holding hands, keep praying, keep witnessing. I'm not sure it's the right choice. I'm not sure there is a right choice. But it's my choice to love those that society has chosen to throw away, and I'll live with it.

Now you have to make yours.

The warrant is in your hands. You can carry it into that room one more time. You can do what the state tells you to do. You can kill. You can add another ghost to the ones you're already carrying.

Or you can set it down and walk away.

Your soul is worth more than the state will ever pay you for it.

Eternally yours,

JH

12.26.25

The Demise of the Executioner: A Parable

*The characters and events in this parable are entirely fictional.

The Demise of the Executioner

Death came for the executioner the way it comes for everyone.

Keep Watching

4

He had spent decades watching others cross over. Forty-seven men and women. He had memorized their final breaths. He knew the exact second when life leaves the body…that moment when the eyes go somewhere else. He thought he understood it.

He didn't understand anything.

The Chamber

He opened his eyes to a room he recognized. The chamber. The same pale green walls. The same fluorescent hum. The same gurney bolted to the floor.

He was strapped to it.

He could feel the leather on his wrists. He could smell the antiseptic and something else underneath it…that smell the cleaning crew could never get out. He used to think he was imagining it. Now he knew.

"No," he whispered.

"Isn't what?"

He turned his head and there was Marcus Williams. Execution number twenty-three. A Tuesday in October. They had trouble finding a vein that day. The executioner remembered standing there watching them dig. Dig and dig. Marcus never made a sound.

Orange jumpsuit. Shaved head. That tired look the dying get.

“Marcus. I was just doing my job.”

“I know.”

“The courts decided. The juries. The state. I just…”

“I know.”

Marcus sat down. Folded his hands the way he had when he prayed before they pushed the plunger. The executioner remembered that too. Watching this man pray for the men about to kill him.

“I’ve been waiting for you,” Marcus said. “I need to ask you something.”

The executioner didn’t say anything.

“After me there were twenty-four more. I watched you do it twenty-four more times. Check the lines. Mix the chemicals. Give the nod. I watched you go home after. I watched you sit in your truck in the driveway for an hour before you could go inside.”

The executioner’s eyes went wet. He had forgotten anyone could see that.

“I watched you take a shower so hot it burned you. I watched you pour the drink. I watched you sit in front of the television not seeing anything.”

Marcus leaned close. His breath was cold.

“Why did you keep killing people?”

The executioner opened his mouth and nothing came out. All those words he had practiced. Lawful orders. The system. One small part. They had made so much sense when he was standing. They were nothing now.

“I don’t know.”

“Yeah,” Marcus said. “I didn’t think you did.”

He stood. Walked to the door. Stopped.

“Someone else wants to ask you.”

The Victim

She was younger than he remembered from the photos.

Rebecca Torres. Nineteen years old. Night shift at a gas station. Paying for nursing school. Marcus Williams shot her for forty-three dollars and a pack of cigarettes. She bled out on the floor next to the candy aisle. The Snickers were on sale.

The executioner had looked at her picture before every execution Marcus was on the calendar. He had needed her face to do it.

“Rebecca. I’m so sorry for what happened to you.”

She didn’t say anything for a long time. Just looked at him. Then:

“Why did you keep killing people?”

His chest caved.

“For you,” he said. “I did it for you. For justice…”

“I didn’t ask you to.”

“He took your life.”

“And you took his. Then you took another one. And another. Forty-seven people. You put them through what I went through in that gas station and you did it in my name.”

He was crying now. The tears ran sideways into his ears. He couldn’t wipe them.

“I never wanted more death,” she said. “I wanted to live. I wanted to be a nurse. I wanted to hold people’s hands when they were scared and tell them it was going to be okay. I was twenty credits away.”

She stopped. Looked at the wall.

“I think about those twenty credits a lot.”

“I thought I was honoring you.”

“You were burying me. Every execution you buried me deeper. You made my death into a bottomless pit and you just kept throwing bodies in.”

She sat down.

“Did it bring me back?”

“No.”

“Did it help my mama?”

“No.”

“Did it stop the next one? The next robbery? The next girl working nights?”

“No.”

“Then why?”

He didn’t have an answer. He had never had an answer. He had just kept showing up.

The Forty-Seven

Then… The gurney was gone. The straps. The room.

He just sat there in the gray nothing.

They were there. All of them. Forty-seven. He could see their faces now. The ones who cried. The ones who screamed verses at him. The ones who went limp. The ones who looked at him and said thank you like he was doing them a favor. He had never understood that. He still didn’t.

One of them…number thirty-one, a woman named Darlene who had killed her husband with a hammer…she was standing closest. He remembered that she had begged for her life.

They weren’t angry. That was the thing. He almost wished they were.

They were just waiting. Waiting for him to walk toward them. To sit down. To finally see them as something other than what he had made them…problems to be solved with chemicals and silence.

He took a step.

It was the hardest thing he had ever done.

The Living

I don’t know what happens to the souls of executioners when they die.

I don’t know if there’s a room. A gurney with their name on it. A line of the dead waiting to ask questions that don’t have answers.

But I know the questions don’t wait.

They’re already here.

It Doesn’t Have to Happen

For every corrections officer who has walked into that room. For every one scheduled to walk in next month or next year. The questions are already here.

“Why do you keep killing people?”

You can answer now. In this life. Before the gray nothing. Before the faces.

You can just stop…and save your soul in the process.

12.27.25

Sonny Burton: Alabama's Next Target Didn't Kill Anyone

The Daughter Knows Sonny Burton Didn't Do It

There's a girl in Alabama who lost her daddy. Nine years old when it happened. Doug Battle went to work at an AutoZone in Talladega in 1991 and never came home. A man named Derrick DeBruce shot him dead during a robbery.

That girl grew up. Her name is Tori Battle. And just days ago, she wrote something that ought to stop every breathing person in this state: "Alabama plans to execute Charles 'Sonny' Burton, a man who did not kill my father."

The victim's daughter. Begging the state not to kill the wrong man.

Sonny Burton Wasn't Even There

Sonny Burton was already outside. Already in the car. DeBruce pulled the trigger while Burton was gone. He didn't order it. Didn't see it. When he found out what happened, witnesses say he shook his head and said, "Let's get out of here." The State of Alabama does not dispute any of this. Not one word.

And still they want to kill him. The Attorney General has asked the Alabama Supreme Court to set the date. That request sits there right now, waiting for the court to say when.

The State Admitted that Sonny Burton Didn't Do It

Here's what should keep you up at night: Derrick DeBruce…the man who pulled the trigger, the man who put Doug Battle in the ground…is not on death row. Alabama agreed to give him life

without parole. The killer lives. The man who didn't kill faces the gas mask.

Alabama knows this is backwards. In their own court filings, state attorneys wrote that this situation is "arguably unjust." Their words. In public. On the record. Dunn v. DeBruce, 2015, No. 14-807. The state confessing with its own mouth that what it's about to do cannot be defended.

Even Texas has shown more conscience than Alabama on this. Greg Abbott commuted Thomas Whitaker because the shooter got less time than the non-shooter. Rick Perry…Rick Perry, who killed more people than any governor in American history… commuted Kenneth Foster for the same reason. Virginia did it for Ivan Teleguz. The math isn't hard. You don't execute the man who didn't pull the trigger while the man who did gets to keep breathing.

But Alabama, drunk on its own killing, won't see it.

The Sonny Burton They Want to Kill

Sonny Burton is not the man who walked into that AutoZone in 1991.

He is seventy-four years old. He moves by wheelchair. The prison classifies him as a fall risk. He lives with severe rheumatoid arthritis that puts him in daily pain. He has hepatitis C. His health, by every account, is deteriorating.

And his mind. Sonny requires medication for mental health issues. When the prison ran out of his medication, he became delusional. Paranoid. His lawyer received calls multiple times a week…Sonny recounting nightmarish events that weren't real, that couldn't be real. This is what happens when the state neglects to give him his pills.

Thirty-three years later, this is the man Alabama wants to strap to a gurney. This is the man they want to put the mask on. A sick, aging, mentally fragile man in a wheelchair who didn't kill anyone.

This is who the state calls the worst of the worst.

I Watched Them Die

And the method. God help us, the method.

They call it nitrogen hypoxia. They say it's humane. They say it's peaceful. They are lying.

I know because I was there. I stood in that chamber as Kenny Smith's spiritual advisor and watched them kill him. I was there again when they killed Anthony Boyd.

There is nothing peaceful about it. Kenny writhed. He shook against the restraints. He gasped. The state promised seconds. It took twenty-two minutes for him to die. Twenty-two minutes. And Anthony…Anthony's execution ran thirty-eight minutes. The longest nitrogen suffocation in American history. I counted more than two hundred breaths. Agonized breaths. I watched his eyes roll back. I watched his body jolt against the gurney over and over and over. I stood there and I witnessed it and I am telling you: what Alabama calls humane is a man suffocating to death while the state times it on a clock.

Justice Sotomayor called it torture. She wrote that Boyd only asked for "the barest form of mercy: to die by firing squad, which would kill him in seconds, rather than by torturous suffocation." The Court said no.

And now they want to do this to a man who never killed anyone.

Stop This

Sonny Burton is in a wheelchair now. Thirty-three years on death row for another man's crime. While he sat in that cell, his wife was murdered…and the man who killed her has already been paroled. He has owned what he did. He knows the robbery was reckless. He knows he put people at risk. But he did not kill Doug Battle. That has never been the question.

Tori Battle knows it. The daughter of the dead man knows it. And she is asking Governor Kay Ivey to do what justice demands: clemency.

Not release. Not forgiveness. Just fairness. Life without parole… the same sentence they gave the man who actually pulled the trigger.

Governor Ivey can stop this before the court sets a date. She can listen to the victim's own family. She can read what her own attorneys wrote. Or she can let Alabama kill a man who killed no one, using a method three Supreme Court justices have called torture, in a case her own state has admitted is arguably unjust.

The request is sitting on the court's desk right now. The window is now.

Tori Battle was nine years old when she lost her father. She is asking Alabama not to make her watch the state kill the wrong man.

12.28.25

“We Are Herod” : Thoughts on The Feast of the Holy Family

*A Meditation on Matthew 2

The Flight from Herod’s Terror

Picture them.

A young mother, barely out of girlhood. A working man with calloused hands. A baby who doesn’t know yet that anyone wants him dead.

They’re packing in the dark. Not much to pack – they were poor before the angel came, and they’re poorer now. A few clothes. Some bread. Whatever coins Joseph had saved.

Mary wraps the baby tight against her chest. She can feel his heartbeat through the cloth. She keeps thinking about what the angel said. Herod is going to search for the child to destroy him.

Destroy. Not arrest. Not question. Destroy.

Joseph takes one last look at the house. They won’t be coming back. He doesn’t know how long they’ll be gone. He doesn’t know if they’ll survive the journey. He just knows they have to go. Now. Tonight.

They slip out into the darkness and flee toward Egypt.

I want you to hold that image. A mother, a father, a child. Fleeing through the night. Fleeing toward a foreign country where they don’t speak the language, don’t know anyone, don’t have papers or permission or any legal right to be there.

They're not going through proper channels. They're not waiting in line. They're not applying for asylum through the correct process.

They're running.

Because if they don't run, their baby dies.

Another Mother

Now I want you to picture another mother.

She's about Mary's age. She's got a baby too …maybe a little older, old enough to walk, young enough to carry when he gets tired.

She's packing in the dark. Not much to pack…some clothes, some food, the little money she managed to hide. She wraps her son tight against her chest and flees north.

She's heard about America. She's heard there are Christians there. She's heard they might help.

She walks for days. Weeks. She crosses deserts. She drinks dirty water. She watches other travelers die beside the road.

Finally, she reaches the border.

And we arrest her.

We put her in a detention center. We take her son and put him somewhere else. She doesn't know where. She asks and no one tells her. She screams and no one listens.

She came looking for Egypt.

She found Herod.

The Open Door

I've been thinking about what made Egypt different.

Egypt had no reason to help. The Egyptians didn't worship the God of Israel. They didn't know the prophecies. They had no idea this baby was supposed to save the world.

They just saw a family in trouble. And they let them in.

No vetting. No process. No detention. No separation.

Just an open door.

A pagan empire showed more mercy than we do.

Herod Had His Reasons

We tell ourselves we're different from Herod.

Herod was a monster. Herod slaughtered babies. Herod bathed Bethlehem in blood.

We're not like that. We're just enforcing the law. We're just protecting our borders. We're just making sure people come the right way.

But here's what I can't stop thinking about:

Herod thought he was protecting something too.

Herod had reasons. Herod had fears. Herod had a kingdom to secure and threats to neutralize. Herod wasn't killing babies for fun…he was killing them because he was afraid of what would happen if he didn't.

He was wrong. But he had reasons.

We have reasons too.

And children are still dying.

The Ones Who Survive Herod

I've met them, you know. The ones who make it. The ones who survive the journey and the detention and the deportation orders and the appeals.

I met a woman who fled Honduras with her daughter. Took them three months. The girl was six years old. Six years old and she made it across Mexico.

I asked the mother why. Why risk everything? Why put your daughter through that?

She looked at me like I was stupid.

"They were going to kill her," she said. "The gangs. They were going to take her. What was I supposed to do? Stay and watch?"

She came here because she thought we would help.

She thought we were the good guys.

Following Orders : Everybody Just Kept Doing Herod's Bidding

Matthew tells us that when Herod realized the wise men had tricked him, he was furious. He sent soldiers to Bethlehem with orders to kill every male child under two years old.

Every one.

The soldiers went house to house. They pulled babies from their mothers' arms. They listened to the screaming and did it anyway. They were just following orders. They were just doing their jobs.

I wonder if any of them went home that night and told themselves it was necessary. Told themselves Herod knew best. Told themselves the security of the kingdom required it.

I wonder if any of them went to the temple the next week and prayed.

Sunday Morning / Expecting to Find Safety from Herod

We go to church on Sunday. We read about the flight into Egypt. We thank God that Mary and Joseph and Jesus made it safely.

Then we go home and watch the news. We see families at the border. We see children in cages. We see deportation flights.

And we tell ourselves it's different.

It's not different.

The Holy Family didn't have permission to enter Egypt. They just showed up. Desperate. Afraid. Begging for shelter.

And Egypt…Egypt, the house of bondage, the land of Pharaoh, the nation that once drowned Hebrew babies in the Nile – Egypt said yes.

Come in. Stay. Rest. You're safe here.

That's how Jesus survived.

He survived because a foreign country had more mercy than his own people.

Still Coming / Finding Herod

They’re still coming, you know. Every day. Families just like the Holy Family. Running from violence. Running from death. Running toward what they hope will be safety.

They’ve heard about America.

They’ve heard we’re Christians.

They’re about to find out what that means.

I wish I could tell you we’re Egypt.

I wish I could tell you we’re the refuge, the shelter, the open door.

But I can’t.

I’ve seen what we do to them. I’ve seen the detention centers. I’ve seen the deportation flights. I’ve seen mothers screaming for children they may never see again.

We’re not Egypt.

We’re not the refuge.

We’re the thing they were running from.

We are Herod.

In Jesus’ Name…We Actually Should Declare it to be in Herod’s Name

And the worst part?

We do it all in Jesus’ name.

We do it with crosses around our necks and Bibles on our shelves and nativity scenes on our lawns. We do it while singing hymns and saying prayers and calling ourselves a Christian nation.

We worship a refugee. And we turn refugees away.

We kneel before a child who fled across a border in the night. And we cage children who do the same.

We are Herod. And we don't even know it.

No Ending

I don't know how to end this.

I don't have a call to action that makes it better. I don't have a policy proposal that fixes it. I don't have a prayer that washes the blood off our hands.

I just have this story. A mother. A father. A baby. Fleeing through the night toward Egypt.

And another mother. Another father. Another baby. Fleeing through the night toward us.

One found refuge.

One found Herod.

God forgive us for which one we know we are.

Amen.

12.30.25

Universalism and the Death Penalty: God Has No Death Chamber

Grace and Cruelty: Universalism and the Death Penalty

I have spent my life at the edges of justice. Where law meets conscience. Where the cold machinery of punishment bumps up against the unrelenting call of mercy. I have stood in execution chambers. I have watched men die. And there, in that intersection where the state claims its ultimate power, I cannot stop thinking about universalism…the stubborn belief that love, grace and restoration eventually reach every human soul. This is not a belief that makes excuses for evil. It refuses to accept that anyone, even the worst among us, is beyond the eternal restorative embrace of God.

Universalism and the Death Penalty: An Irreconcilable Conflict

The death penalty stands in stark opposition to this vision. It is the ultimate declaration that someone is irredeemable. That the harm they have done is so absolute, so monstrous, that society's only recourse is to extinguish them entirely. I have stood in execution chambers and felt the same tight, hollow pang each time. The finality. The silence after the warden gives the signal. The way the state claims it is enacting justice while all it really enacts is absence. The smell of antiseptic and fear. The sound of a man's last breath. The way his fingers curl and then go slack.

Executions do not bring closure. I need you to hear that. They do not heal wounds. They extend the trauma, leaving victims, families and those of us who carry out or witness the sentence suspended in grief and moral wreckage.

The death penalty is not merely incompatible with universalism. It is universalism's most devastating proof. The execution

chamber does not challenge the belief that all will be saved…it reveals why such salvation must be true if God is to be anything other than a perfected version of our own cruelty.

The Whisper of Restoration

Universalism whispers differently. It says that every life…even the life marked by violence…contains a spark that can be returned to. A trajectory that can be restored. This is not naive. This is not soft. It does not ignore the pain of victims or the terror of crime. But it insists: the executioner, the state, even the condemned…they are all caught in a story larger than retribution. There is a grace that moves through time. A justice that does not need blood to make itself known. Divine justice, in this vision, is restorative, not annihilative. Punishment exists to heal the cosmos of its brokenness. Not to exact vengeance. Translate that into social ethics and the death penalty becomes not merely unnecessary but actively corrosive. It mirrors the very cruelty it claims to oppose.

Universalism and the Death Penalty: Questions of Punishment

Here the questions multiply rather than resolve. If universalism is true…if all souls are ultimately restored…what does that mean for punishment in the present? Does it render earthly consequences meaningless? Or does it reframe them entirely? Divine fire purifies rather than destroys. Even the most wayward soul moves through correction toward its original goodness. Restoration is the natural trajectory of all creation returning to its source. But these ancient intuitions never dismissed the reality of evil or the necessity of accountability. They simply refused to believe that destruction was the final word.

The Irreducible Self

This is the tension I cannot escape. The tension that follows me out of every death chamber. Universalism does not deny that

some acts are monstrous. It does not pretend that murder, torture and cruelty are anything less than profound violations of the sacred. What it denies is that monstrosity is the whole of any person. There is always something beneath the violence. Something that existed before the harm and persists after it. A self that is not reducible to the worst thing it has done. The death penalty denies this. It says: you are your crime, your crime is all you are and therefore you must be erased.

I have looked into the eyes of men strapped to gurneys. I have held their hands as the chemicals entered their veins. And I'm telling you: there is always someone there. Someone the state has decided to unmake.

The False Simplicity of Execution

The appeal of execution is its simplicity. It offers a clean line between the guilty and the innocent, the living and the dead. It promises that evil can be excised like a tumor, cut out and discarded, leaving the body politic whole again. But this is a lie we tell ourselves. Evil is not so neatly contained. It spreads through systems and histories. Through poverty, abuse and neglect. Through the thousand small failures that precede every act of violence. To execute is to pretend that we can isolate the problem in a single body and destroy it. Universalism refuses this pretense. It insists that we are all implicated. All connected. All responsible for the conditions that produce both victims and perpetrators.

You cannot kill your way to justice when injustice built the killing floor.

Abolition as Dance

Abolition is a dance. Not a single act of politics or law. A choreography of imagination and faith. To walk toward abolition is to imagine a society that does not define itself by who it can

kill but by how it can restore. To imagine prisons as spaces for transformation. Not as tombs for bodies and souls. Punishment in America is not abstract…it is racialized, systemic and designed to perpetuate inequality. When abolition meets universalism, it confronts not only the moral question of killing but the entire architecture of a society that has long treated some lives as disposable.

The Wounds of the Executioner

I think about the executioner. I think about him constantly. We imagine only the condemned, but the person who carries out the state's sentence is also caught in the machinery of death. I've met these men. I've seen what the work does to them.

Universalism does not demand that we excuse them. It reminds us that they too are human. Capable of reflection. Remorse. And ultimately, restoration. This is not sentimental…it is realistic. Those who participate in executions carry wounds that do not heal easily. Moral injury. Psychological damage. A lifetime of wondering what it means to have ended another life at the state's command. The nightmares. The drinking. The marriages that collapse under the weight of what cannot be spoken. Though the executioner is a murderer by trade, they are still human…just like the murderer they are assigned to murder.

To insist on justice through killing is to insist on harm at every level. The perpetrator. The victim. The witnesses. The warden. The chaplain. The nurse who inserts the IV. The state itself. Abolition is as much about healing society as it is about sparing individual lives.

Universalism and the Death Penalty: What Do We Say to Victims?

But what of the victims? This is the question that haunts every universalist argument. The place where theology meets the rawness of human grief.

I have sat with victims' families. I have watched a mother in the back row of a courtroom, hands folded so tightly they have gone numb, listening as the details of her child's murder are recited in the flat, procedural language of the state. I have watched her breathing change when the sentence is announced. Seen how the word death lands in the room like a heavy object dropped on a table. Nothing in her body relaxes. Nothing resolves. The years ahead are not suddenly lighter because another life will be taken. Her grief does not lift. It only acquires a new calendar date. Another day around which memory and dread will organize themselves.

Sacred Grief, False Gifts

A mother whose child was murdered. A family shattered by violence. What does universalism say to them? It cannot say that their pain does not matter. It cannot say that forgiveness is required or that anger is wrong. What it can say is this: your grief is sacred, and your desire for justice is real, but justice that kills does not undo the killing. It only adds another body to the count.

Universalism does not ask victims to forgive. It asks society to stop pretending that execution is a gift we give to the grieving. Most often, it is not. It is a ritual we perform for ourselves. To convince ourselves that we have done something. That we have balanced some cosmic ledger.

But the ledger remains unbalanced. The dead do not return. The execution only extends the radius of sorrow.

Universalism and the Death Penalty: A Theological Reckoning

I return to theological reflection again and again. Because universalism is not simply a moral lens…it is a lens on the very meaning of life and death. If we accept that divine love ultimately claims all creation, then to execute is to step outside that order. To assert that we know better than the sacred who deserves life and who does not. This is a bold claim. An arrogant claim. A claim that law and human emotion should dictate eternal consequences. The abolitionist argument is deeply theological: it says that no human court can fully comprehend the tapestry of restoration, and therefore no human should wield ultimate death as judgment.

We don't have that authority. We never did.

The Paradox of Deserving

There is a strange paradox here. Those who defend the death penalty often do so in the name of justice. Moral order. The belief that some acts deserve the ultimate punishment. But if universalism is true, then the very concept of "deserving" is transformed. We all deserve condemnation, if we are honest. We've all failed. All harmed. All fallen short of the love we were made for. The difference between the condemned and the free is often circumstance. Opportunity. The accidents of birth and history. Universalism does not erase moral distinctions. But it reminds us that those distinctions are not as clean as we would like.

The line between the guilty and the innocent runs through every human heart.

The Mirror

This is the most unsettling claim of universalism. The person strapped to the gurney is no better and no worse than the warden who gives the order. The governor who signs the warrant. The citizen who votes for candidates who promise to be tough on

crime. We are all, in the eyes of the divine, equally broken and equally beloved. The murderer and the judge share the same fundamental condition…creatures capable of profound love and profound violence, stumbling through existence with the same mix of fear, longing and failure. The state draws a line and says: this one has crossed beyond the boundary of the tolerable. But universalism asks… Who among us has not crossed boundaries? Who among us has not harbored rage? Nursed hatred? Wished harm upon another? The difference is often not in the heart but in the hand. Not in the desire but in the opportunity. The thousand contingencies that separate the thought from the act.

To sit with this idea is deeply uncomfortable. We want to believe that there is something categorically different about the person who kills. Something that sets them apart from the rest of us. Something that makes their destruction not only justifiable but necessary. But universalism dissolves this comforting distinction. It says: you are looking in a mirror. The condemned is not an alien. Not a monster. Not a creature from some other moral universe. The condemned is you, under different conditions, with different wounds, walking a different path to the same broken place. This isn't an excuse for violence. It's a recognition that violence emerges from the same soil we all stand on.

The Scandal of Equal Love

If we are all equally broken, we are also all equally loved. This is the scandal at the heart of universalist theology. Divine love does not discriminate. It does not parse out affection based on merit or withhold grace from those who have failed most spectacularly. The love that holds the universe together holds the saint and the murderer with the same fierce tenderness. It does not love the victim more than the perpetrator. It does not love the innocent more than the guilty. It loves, simply and completely, because love is what it is.

This is not a love that ignores harm or pretends that all actions are equivalent. It is a love that sees the harm clearly and loves anyway. Loves through the harm. Loves despite the harm. Loves in the hope that love itself will be the agent of transformation.

When we execute, we act as though some people have forfeited this love. As though their actions have placed them outside the circle of divine regard. But if universalism is true, there is no outside. There is no place beyond the reach of grace. No crime so terrible that it severs the bond between the creature and its source. The executed and the executioner are both held in the same embrace. Both called toward the same restoration. Both moving…however haltingly, however painfully…toward wholeness. To kill in the name of justice is to pretend that we can determine who is worthy of love and who is not. It is to claim a knowledge we do not possess. An authority we were never given.

I think about what it would mean to truly believe this. To look at the face of a condemned man and see not a monster but a brother. Not an enemy but a fellow traveler in the long journey toward grace. It would change everything. It would make execution not merely wrong but unthinkable. A kind of suicide. A killing of the self. For if we're all equally loved, then to destroy any one of us is to diminish all of us. To tear a hole in the fabric of a love that was meant to be whole.

Grief Transformed

This dance is messy. There is anger. There is grief. There is a desire for retribution that is stubborn and real. Universalism does not erase this. It transforms it. It insists that our anger and grief must become instruments of change rather than instruments of execution. True justice addresses harm without perpetuating it. By engaging deeply with the experiences of victims, families, and even offenders, we begin to see that punishment is not inherently restorative. Only reconciliation is. Only accountability. Only healing. Universalism and abolition

converge here: they demand that we imagine justice in a way that nurtures life, not extinguishes it.

Universalism and the Death Penalty: The Proof of Universal Salvation

Here is the strange inversion I cannot stop thinking about. The death penalty proves that God saves everyone. Not an argument against universalism. Evidence for it.

Consider the logic. If human beings are capable of this…of strapping a person to a table and pumping poison into their veins, of cinching a mask over their face and filling their lungs with nitrogen until they convulse and choke, of pulling a lever and letting electricity cook a body from the inside out…if we are capable of such calculated, ritualized cruelty, then God must be capable of love that is of equal measure in the opposite direction. If we save no one…then God saves everyone. For every execution, there is an equal and opposite execution (implementation) of love and redemption. The very existence of the execution chamber is proof of universal salvation.

The Argument from Depravity

This is the argument from depravity. We have seen what we are. We have built death chambers and staffed them. We have written protocols for killing and rehearsed them until they run smoothly. We have invented new methods when the old ones troubled us… not because they were cruel, but because they looked cruel. Because they made us uncomfortable with what we're doing. We have sanitized murder and called it justice. We have made killing bureaucratic. Scheduled. Routine.

This is humanity. This is what we do to each other.

And if this is what we are…if we are capable of such deliberate, calculated destruction…then a God who does not save everyone

is no God at all. A God who would consign souls to eternal torment is simply a larger version of us. An executioner with infinite power. A warden of a cosmic death row. But if God is God…if there is something that transcends our cruelty rather than magnifying it…then God must be in the business of saving precisely the ones we are in the business of killing.

The death penalty reveals our limits. It shows us the bottom of human moral imagination. And universalism says: God has no such bottom. God does not stop where we stop. God does not draw lines where we draw lines. God saves everyone…not because everyone deserves it, but because God is love with no end.

God's Love is Bigger

The execution chamber is the strongest argument for universal salvation I know. Every time the state kills, it demonstrates exactly what we are: creatures who will destroy each other given sufficient justification…sufficient fear. Sufficient distance from the act. And every execution asks the question… Is God like this? Does the divine operate by the same logic of retribution and elimination?

Universalism answers, no. God is not the executioner writ large. God is the one who saves what we destroy. Who redeems what we discard. Who refuses to let our cruelty be the final word. The death penalty proves we cannot save ourselves. Cannot save each other. Cannot imagine a justice beyond annihilation. And that is precisely why God saves everyone…because we never would.

I have come to believe that universalism…is the only possible conclusion that has anything to do with God…that one can leave an execution chamber with. Stand in that room. Watch the state do its' work. Watch the body go still. The breath stop. The life drain out of a person who was alive moments before. Feel the

temperature drop as the soul departs. And then ask yourself what you believe about the universe.

If you walk out believing in a God who also executes…who has a death chamber of his own, only larger, only eternal…then you have not encountered God at all. You have only encountered a projection of the state. A warden with omnipotence. A hangman with a halo. But if there is a God worthy of the name…a God who is the perfection of love, something beyond us…then that God cannot operate by the logic of the execution chamber. That God must be in the business of undoing what we have done. Gathering what we have scattered. Saving what we have killed.

Universalism is not one option among many. It is the only theological conclusion that survives the execution chamber intact. Everything else is just human cruelty dressed in divine clothing.

The Apocalyptic Vision

There is an apocalyptic dimension to universalism that we must not shy away from. A vision of ending and beginning that reframes everything we think we know about justice. In the final unfolding…whatever we imagine that to be…universalism dares to picture something almost unbearable. The murdered and the murderer standing together. Drawn into the same love. Held in the same embrace. Not erased. Not flattened into sameness. But reconciled in a way that transcends anything we can orchestrate with courts, prisons and execution chambers.

This is the scandal that makes universalism so difficult to accept. We want the murdered and the murderer to remain forever separate. On opposite sides of an eternal chasm. We want the murderer to face endless punishment while the murdered is lifted into endless comfort. But universalism whispers something stranger… The end of all things is not separation but gathering…

not vengeance but restoration…not the final sorting of sheep and goats but the mending of what was torn.

The murdered does not cease to have been murdered. The murderer does not cease to have murdered. But both are caught up in something larger than the harm. Something that holds the wound and the one who inflicted it in a love that refuses to let either be defined by the worst moment of their intertwined history.

The Unbearable Picture

I do not know what this looks like. I cannot picture it without trembling. The murdered and the murderer face to face…not because the killing has been forgotten, not because the harm has been minimized, but because both have been so thoroughly transformed by love that the old categories no longer hold. The murdered restored not by the punishment of the murderer but by a healing so complete that punishment becomes irrelevant. The murderer not excused but so utterly changed…so deeply broken open by the weight of what they have done and the grace that meets them anyway…that they become someone capable of receiving forgiveness they could never have earned.

Living in Light of Reconciliation

This apocalyptic vision does not make the present easier. It makes it harder. It asks us to live now in light of a future we cannot fully imagine. To act as though reconciliation is possible even when every instinct screams for retribution. It asks the grieving to hold open a door they have every right to slam shut. It asks the guilty to believe that transformation is possible even when they cannot see how. And it asks society to stop pretending that execution brings us closer to justice when all it does is foreclose the possibility of the very reconciliation that the universe is groaning toward.

If the end is gathering, then every execution is a refusal to wait. An insistence that we know better than the slow patient work of love. An attempt to write the final chapter ourselves. To declare that some stories have no redemption. That some souls are beyond the reach of the grace that is coming for all of us.

But universalism says: You do not get to write that chapter. You do not get to decide who is beyond hope. The end belongs to love. And love is not finished yet.

Faith in Transformation

The deepest challenge of universalism is that it asks us to believe in transformation when transformation seems impossible. It asks us to look at the person who has committed unspeakable acts and say… There is still something there…something that can be reached…something that can be changed. This is not optimism. It is not denial. It is faith…a faith that the universe is structured toward restoration. That love is more fundamental than violence. That the arc of existence bends toward wholeness even when all evidence suggests otherwise.

The death penalty is the rejection of this faith. It is the assertion that some people are beyond the reach of grace. Beyond the possibility of change. Beyond the scope of love's patient work.

Universalism and the Death Penalty Cannot Coexist

The questions we confront are profound. How do we reckon with evil without becoming it? How do we grieve without inflicting more grief? How do we seek justice without extinguishing the possibility of redemption? These are not theoretical questions. They are lived experiences in courthouses, death row cells and families torn apart by violence. Questions of ethics, theology and human imagination, all tangled together.

Universalism and the death penalty cannot coexist. One says: there is always a path back. The other says: the path ends here. In the collision of these ideas, we confront the deepest contours of our moral universe. And in doing so, we realize that abolition is more than policy…it is a practice of moral vision. A commitment to see the human in every human. To refuse to define justice by extinguishing life. To believe that even the darkest, most violent souls can be claimed by grace or restored through accountability and care.

I do not pretend to have resolved these tensions. The dance continues. Uncomfortable. Demanding. Full of missteps and uncertainties. But that's the point. The work of justice is never finished. Never clean. Never reducible to a formula or a sentence. It requires us to stay in the mess. To keep asking the hard questions. To refuse the false comfort of finality.

The death penalty offers finality. Universalism offers something harder and more hopeful: the long, slow, painful work of restoration that never gives up on anyone…not even when giving up seems like the only rational choice.

In this vision, abolition is not weakness. It is courage. The courage to imagine a society that does not wield death as a tool. The courage to trust in transformation over annihilation. The courage to believe that the story of human life is not a ledger of crimes and punishments but a narrative of redemption in which every person has a place.

The dance between universalism and abolition is difficult. Demanding. Uncomfortable. But it is also the most profound expression of hope I can imagine. A hope that refuses to let cruelty have the last word.