

Why This World Needs a Global Outpouring of Grace

I grew up in an era when the threat of nuclear attack was real.

The peace of the world existed in a tension that was known as MAD - mutually assured destruction.

In other words, we would not blow up another country because we knew that they would blow us up in return - the missiles passing each other in their deadly trajectories.

It was also an era when acts of terrorism were commonplace - mostly in Northern Ireland but sometimes on the United Kingdom mainland too.

We now live in an era when there is a new threat of nuclear attack as smaller countries acquire the technology to split the atom destructively.

We also live in an era where acts of terrorism are commonplace - fueled by a hideous distortion of Islamic ideology.

It seems to me that MAD and terrorism are two aspects of the same worldview: The threat and reality of death and destruction are the ultimate ways of exercising power, influence and control over someone else.

They are ways of establishing or enforcing control in a situation. Those who have the power maintain it with the threat or reality of death and destruction and those who feel powerless seek to regain power and control through the threat or reality of bringing death and destruction to those who have the power.

Part of me wants to scream, "Have we learned nothing in 50 years?" And I fear that the silent response will speak louder than words.

Why is it that some nations, people groups and ideologies are seeking to regain or establish power and control? Put simply - and I know it's more complex than this - it must be that they feel powerless or lack control.

So if we are to resolve these issues how are we going to do it?

1. You could rain death and destruction down on those who are threatening it. Remove them from the planet and you remove the threat.

Except that the threat will always re-emerge because there will always be others who feel so powerless and lacking in control and influence over their own lives that they see no alternative. That is the current policy operated by the powerful.

2. You could seek to force those who are threatening death and destruction to desist by making their existence intolerable through the imposition of sanctions of different sorts.

But the danger is that if they are not starved into submission, they may be starved into even more desperate acts in order to try to survive.

3. You could seek to negotiate peace with those who are seeking or threatening to disrupt it.

This only works if all sides want peace and are willing to negotiate. It necessitates recognition that peace through compromise is more desirable than the current situation.

Peace that lasts cannot be coerced or imposed because otherwise resentment will fester and emerge later on in violent antipathy.

It seems to me that the approaches that have been taken in the last 50 years have not secured lasting peace.

United Nations resolutions have not changed anything. Economics has not changed anything. Ideology has not changed anything; capitalism may have gained the ascendancy but it actually only benefits the wealthy and powerful so it's likely in the long term to exacerbate the problem.

Religion has not changed anything; different sides have claimed moral and religious justifications for their actions but nobody has been proved right. Technology has not changed the status quo.

So what would work? I think we need a global response to a global problem. That problem is inequality: inequality of wealth, power, influence, lifestyle, resource consumption, technology and so much more.

And what we need is a global outpouring of grace. By this I mean that those with power become willing to “lose face” and seek to improve the circumstances for those who are powerless.

It will cost a lot in many different ways, and the cost will primarily be paid by those who have the power, wealth and so on.

They are the ones who will be giving things up for the benefit of those who have less as it means a substantial redistribution of wealth, power and influence.

It also carries with it a lot of risks:

- That those who are seeking to wreak death and destruction on others will simply take what is offered and continue their deadly path.
- That those who have used aggression or its threat to make their point will claim victory and it could encourage others to try the same thing.
- That the citizens of the powerful nations will see it as weakness and not re-elect those in power who acted that way.

It's actually something that God intends.

In the Bible, we read of the concept of Jubilee. It was to be a year (once every 50 years) in which debts are written off, land is restored to its original owners, those who have been exploited are released, and everyone acts in the best interests of everyone rather than motivated by greedy self-interest.

The problem is that those who had the power and wealth found it too difficult to let go of it, so it was never (to our knowledge) put into practice.

Is this achievable? Not by our own efforts because greedy self-interest will always overpower grace and love. Look at what happened to Jesus.

But it is achievable if we get radical - a word that has its origins in the concept of “going back to the root.”

What we need is not a new politics, economics or ideology. What we need is a radical renewal of our relationship with God.

Jesus described what he had come to do in the form of announcing a year of Jubilee in our relationship with God.

A change of heart and renewed relationship with our Creator is the only way we can begin to see his world transformed and the only way we can see the sort of change that is needed that will affect the hearts and minds in such a way that we will be willing to risk all for the benefit of all.

It's only possible when Christians choose to allow God to get to work on us by his Spirit to change our hearts and minds so that we can live in and set an example of a grace-rich environment.

Am I an idealist? Maybe. Am I unrealistic? Maybe. But it can start with me and you. How about it?

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