

## What Got Jesus Killed?

Psalm 22:1-5, Mark 8:31-38

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The First Church of Christ in Hartford, Connecticut

The Rev. Dr. Rochelle A. Stackhouse

For two thousand years now, people of faith have been debating the question, "Why did Jesus die?" Some say that Jesus was a sacrifice which God required in order to be able to forgive us all our sins; Jesus took our sins on, died, and so God now forgives us. This is the "saved by the blood of the lamb" theology.

Some say that the cross happened so that God could complete the task of fully experiencing human suffering in order to help us as we suffer. Others say that the cross happened so God could show the world that love is stronger than death.

Some of us ask that question a little differently, because we think that perhaps the cross was the logical end result, or almost end result, of Jesus living a life that challenged people to make the kind of serious change I talked about last week. For those who missed it, last week we remembered that Jesus began his ministry by saying "Now is the time! The kingdom of God is at hand! Change your life! Trust in the good news!"

The question I ask today is not "Why did Jesus die," rather it is "What got Jesus killed?" I mean, he was a really great guy! He healed the sick, fed the hungry, raised the dead, cared about children, blessed foreigners, loved enemies. As the hymn, "My Song Is Love Unknown" wonders: "Why, what hath my Lord done? What makes this rage and spite? He made the lame to run; he gave the blind their sight?"

Indeed, he did all those things. But sometimes we forget that he did some of them in ways that challenged authorities, like blessing foreigners, like healing on the Sabbath, because healing was

considered “work” and work was forbidden. Sometimes we forget that Jesus said a lot of difficult things that people didn’t want to hear, calling on them to change their lives in ways that seemed to them to be impossible. We forget this, and so are perplexed as to why someone would want to kill Jesus.

In our confusion, we miss the verses we heard today from Mark, which appear in all the gospels in some form. “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow me.” Which would indicate that Jesus’ suffering and death had to do with more than being a sacrifice, because the sacrifice has already been given, and yet, we are called to take up a cross like his.

What can that mean? We need to remember this cross is not something imposed on us, like a disease or a recalcitrant child. That is not “our cross to bear.” Our cross is meant to be like Jesus’ cross: intentionally chosen by us, the result of challenging the status quo in our lives and in our world.

This morning we are going to explore a bit what that might look like by remembering what Jesus said and did that made people want to kill him. As we remember his words and deeds, perhaps we will gain greater clarity on what it might mean to take up **our** crosses.

In some of your bulletins are short pieces from the Gospels written on card stock. If you have one, I invite you to come forward with it, read it into the microphone, then put it on this cross. If you prefer not to read, please pass it along to a neighbor or raise it up so an usher can bring it up.

Beloved in Christ, it was for these things that those in power killed Jesus. It is these things we need to claim as our cross, our mission, if we seek to follow Jesus. Come, Follow Me.