

Romans 5:-6-8

What's so interesting about Christianity

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“What's so interesting about Christianity?” We were walking in Spain along the Camino de Santiago. She was then and is now a free-lance writer for Lonely Planet. She identifies with that group that sociologists call NONE: not affiliated with any religion but not atheist, just skeptical about everything! At first I thought she was being cynical or sarcastic. Then I realized she was being sincere. What a great question! What would you say if someone asked you what's so interesting about Christianity? We had about 15 miles of walking to explore the question.

I already knew she had no interest in religion as a container of rites and rituals unattached to any meaningful experience. The institution of her childhood left her cold and angry. There was no living community or spirituality. These were the things that meant the most to her, and yoga. The fact that I could find Christianity not only interesting but also personally meaningful was astonishing. I was a brother from another planet.

We talked about Jesus. A lot. That he lived what he taught was impressive, along with his love and compassion. When I asked if she knew he knew he taught his followers to love their enemies and pray for them, and that he actually did that, she was intrigued. I told her I believed he was crucified for that radical love and that his Spirit was presently alive now after his resurrection. As we meandered along, we actually covered the whole Trinity in a leisurely pilgrim way. Our conversation two years later continues, mostly now by email and text. She is still wandering around asking questions and writing for Lonely Planet. An ironic position indeed!

Clara is not a believer, yet. But she does know from at least once living source that what is interesting about Christianity is not religion. What makes Christianity meaningful is the radical love of Christ at the core. This love is the healing medicine for a broken world. It is remedy that God in mercy has given to the human race and the creation so marred by sin.

I imagine Saint Paul would be offended by a word so innocuous as “interesting” when describing the reason Christianity matters to anyone. Who really cares, I hear him saying, if it's interesting? Seriously, He would roar, there are a lot of things in this world that are interesting. Christianity is not one of them. Christianity – if you want to call it

that – is God’s way of re-claiming, restoring, re-making the whole of us through the power of Jesus Christ’s love for **sinner**s. I know; there’s that dreadful word again. Yet, I don’t have a better way to say that humanity has fallen from our original joy that comes from knowing and loving God, loving one another and caring for creation.

Saint Paul makes the most radical claim of all.

While we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. [...] For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved (made whole) by his life.

This makes Christianity not just interesting. It makes it astonishing. It is, according to Paul, a cosmic enactment by God of Jesus’ teaching about loving our enemies and praying from those who persecute you. Here the enemies are **us**. We, the listeners, are the ones who were estranged from God by our words and our deeds. We are the ungodly for whom Jesus not only prays and loves, but also gives his own life to make whole. It is rare for a good person to willingly die for another, but it is not uncommon especially in situation of war and crisis conditions. Soldiers willingly, bravely, die for another. You may recall the young medic in the film Hacksaw Ridge. He is Christian pacifist who nevertheless wanted to serve his country against the Japanese. In the heat of brutal battle he wonders aloud in prayer whether God has left him. Then he hears the voices of his wounded brothers. One by one he saves seventy-five men from death. It’s a heart breaking moment of human heroism.

Now. Imagine him returning to save the Japanese who were slaughtering them and lay wounded on the battlefield. It’s beyond the imagination of most of us. In fact, a bit too shocking. Yet, this is what Saint Paul says God did in Jesus Christ.

Paul himself described the cross of Christ as a **scandal**. It is the ungodly who are the relentless pursuit of God. Even when we were dead in our sins, enemies of God, Jesus Christ gave his life in love for us. He became medicine for our soul and not only ours but for the whole of humanity.

There is a way of life – words and deeds - that flows from the experience with this God who loves us and saves us in Jesus Christ. ***This is anything but religion without meaning.*** To believe in Christ who believes in you sets you free to welcome others, even the strangers, to be compassionate to all, to pursue the ungodly with love. This way of life gains its bearing from the God who loves the weak, the ungodly the enemy. Christians bear witness to this scandal of Christ crucified and raised for us.

She asked me: what makes Christianity interesting? The radical love of God in Jesus Christ. That's all.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.
Amen.