



Good Friday Focus

Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?

–1st Corinthian 15:54b-55

About 15 years ago, a man named Steve Saint came and spoke at our church. Along with this famous “missionary kid,” came a native Ecuadorian named Mincayani, who was quite a character. Steve referred to Mincayani as his “Grandfather.” But of course, Mincayani wasn’t really Steve’s Grandfather. He was the man who murdered his father.

The memory of five missionaries cut down in the rainforest of Ecuador has faded over six-plus decades. But the miracle of reconciliation gained international prominence as family members of the victims returned to the Waodani tribe to bring them the Good News of reconciliation between holy God and sinful humanity through the blood of Christ.

During this time, Steve Saint spent his early years living with the violent tribe that took his father from him. When Micayani made the connection that he was the one responsible for his father Nate’s death, the new believer took the boy under his wing. As he taught the boy the skills every boy needs to learn—how to make a spear, how to add poison to the tip, how to aim blow darts to pierce his prey—the two became close. Micayane came to take Nate’s place as Dad in Steve’s life.

Forgiveness took place on two fronts. Steve had much to forgive when he learned of Micayane’s role in his dad’s death. The love of Christ had driven Nate Saint to bring his family to Ecuador to proclaim God’s grace to one of the most violent tribes on earth. So divine grace was the lens through which his son looked at the Waodani people. Familiarity gradually eased his pangs for vengeance—along with the Holy Spirit.

But the former warrior also had a unique take on forgiveness. Vengeance was in his blood. It was like mother’s milk to him—the spiritual air he breathed. Any man whose father had been killed by another was honor bound to avenge him. So, as Micayani taught Steve the skills of a man—skills to kill—he was equipping him to take his just revenge. All the time he spent teaching Steve was invested in preparing Steve to kill Micayani. So Micayani had to forgive Steve in advance for killing him, if he decided to take vengeance. Forgiveness worked both ways.

Waodani warriors faced death bravely but not confidently. Joy in eternity depended entirely on their strength. None of them knew if he had the strength to “jump the great boa” to escape the perils of hell. With his spear thrust into Nate Saint’s middle, Micayani saw something his superstitious mind couldn’t comprehend. He watched Nate Saint’s spirit ascend into heaven, as he “jumped the great boa,” while he still lived. It was Nate Saint who was the true warrior, who overcame the most dread perils of death.

Jesus shrank from death no less than any man. He recoiled from the violence and shrank from rejection by His own people. But more than anyone can possibly conceive, Jesus dreaded the wrath of God the Father on all the sin of humanity—wrath He bore for our sakes. *But for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God* (Hebrews 12:2b).

Jesus broke the fear of death on the cross. He went through death to the grave for us. His blood paid the price to reconcile us to God the Father. Christ’s victory strengthened Nate Saint at the moment of his murder. It brought forgiveness—and eventually love—between Steve Saint and Micayani. And His sacrifice protects us from God’s just vengeance. The perfect love of Christ casts out fear and brings peace between us and God the Father.

To the praise of His Glory.

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility –Ephesians 1:13-14