

Greetings St. Paul Lutheran Church!

During the season of Lent, we are often thinking about the death of Jesus. A popular question is “Why did Jesus need to die?” There are a lot of explanations – theologians call them “Atonement Theories.” It’s kind of been on my heart and mind lately. I was thinking about writing about it and then JoAnn Jordan sent me another link about the topic, so I guess it’s time.

I’ve taken these from a couple of different papers, power points, or discussions that have recently been in the clergy group called, “Young Clergy Women International Alum” We’re the 40+ year olds who used to be young clergy women ☺ and an Episcopalian pastor, Lizzie <https://revlizzie.com/rev-lizzie>

“Atonement” comes from 16<sup>th</sup> Century English literally meaning at-one-ment. It’s the process of reconciliation between God and human beings (either individually or communally) with the goal of righting a wrong or injury, i.e., sin.

Probably the one we most often hear about is called Penalty or Substitutionary. It’s the idea that Christ dies to undergo a punishment for us. He pays our debt to God. The focus of that theory is on the cross as where salvation occurred. But that’s not the only faithful theory. Some theories have the focus more on God becoming human, or Jesus’ teachings, or rising from the dead. I personally believe most others more than the penalty/substitutionary theory. Here are a few more...

Christus Victor – Jesus’ life is a victorious struggle against evil. God has won the battle already. We are saved because Jesus conquered death once for all.

Incarnational – God becoming flesh atones humanity and all that matters is that God became human.

Moral Exemplar – Jesus’ life and death is a powerful enough example of love and obedience to influence sinners to repent of their sins and improve their lives.

Solidarity – Jesus’ life stands as testimony that he always stood with the marginalized and poor. His death was the result of his life. We are called to identify with Christ’s suffering and to stand with those whose experienced of being forsaken parallels Christ on the cross. We are saved because God is with us.

The Last Scapegoat – Christ dies to expose and broadcast the root of human violence – the way we scapegoat one another (allow an innocent person to take the blame for a group). Jesus’ death as a visible victim/scapgoat shows the injustice and inherent immorality of the system on display. We are saved because we see our violent nature and will turn away from it.

Ransom Captive – death is the ransom paid to the devil (or evil powers) to free humans from the bondage of sin. The Devil was tricked and he didn’t have any control over Christ at all.

Transformative – God lifts up violence in order to transform it. God enters death in order to change it. We are saved because God has transformed the nature of death.

Liberation – Some would say that Jesus died because of human sin and violence but it was not salvific. Salvation was in the resurrection.

And there are others. I tend to always err on the mystery of God. I don’t need or want to know all the whys and hows. I believe they are beyond my understanding but that doesn’t mean I stop looking. My favorite phrase in seminary was a title of a book, Faith Seeking Understanding by Daniel Migliore. Migliore just entered the church triumphant a few days ago. If you are looking for a good theology book, I recommend anything from him.

God bless - *PrAshley*