

View from Pews - Definitions

An opinion piece reprinted in NZ Herald from New York Times (23 Sept), focused on the commemorative service for a man assassinated by a contemporary disillusioned with the former's ideology. The content was a service cocktail of questionable faith statements, mixed with ideology and political rhetoric. The victim was referred to as a conservative, republican activist with a Christian, evangelical faith tradition. While the singular theological truth enunciated was that Christianity is based solidly on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the 'evangelical' fervour of this man's rallies didn't focus on this truth, but on upholding other values.

Assassination for freedom of speech should never be condoned. It is a cornerstone of democracy. However, while this young man used his rally platform to exercise such freedom, his discourse was imbued with political allegiance, which distracted from his 'faith-based' opinions. Our world view is influenced by many things, including how a message is conveyed. While we would agree with the singular theological truth enunciated, we may disagree with the message delivery and ensuing definition of martyrdom.

The young man was assassinated by a disillusioned, aggrieved contemporary. Does this constitute martyrdom? Many people have died for a cause, but Acts 7:54 illustrates martyrdom as dying for faith in Jesus. Despite comments made and associated service rhetoric, dying with faith isn't the same thing nor does it necessarily result in leaving a longstanding impact. Jesus, Word of God made flesh, lived a life of humility; his singular offence being to challenge contemporary authorities and religious leaders by presenting a different gospel of love, mercy, forgiveness and tolerance. (Jn 15:17) Jesus often spoke directly into individuals' lives to convince of sin and need for change (Jn 4); hardly the stuff of rallies. Jesus's death, also politically and religiously motivated, was starkly different. Jesus chose to die for us. Jn 15:13 reads 'No greater love can a man have ...' His death was singularly purposeful (salvation for mankind) and both a direct fulfilment of Scriptural prophecy spoken over hundreds of years, and emphatic statement by Jesus himself (Matt 16:21); not a young man's self-proclaimed possibility for himself.

Whose legacy will last and what will define it? Jesus, who showed the world how to live, is still making disciples more than two thousand years later. He alone is immortalised and everlasting. Let's heed Jn 16:33.

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