

Fourth Sunday in Lent

CRISIS MANAGEMENT

John 3:14-21

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Analysis by Chris Repp

14And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. 16“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. 17”Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. 18Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. 19And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. 20For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. 21But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.”

DIAGNOSIS: Bad Investments

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Doing Evil*

There's no doubting that there are a lot of evil deeds being done out there. The recent economic crisis has shown light into all sorts of dark crevices, revealing “Ponzi” schemes, predatory lending, negligent oversight, and outright embezzlement—all of

which relied upon a conspiracy of silence, a wink and a nod, to keep the world and the hapless victims of economic collapse in the dark.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *In Love with the Darkness*

But the crisis is deeper than that. And it's not just "out there." The judgment is that we actually love the darkness. When the stock market was rising to new highs, we were all throwing our money at it—or wishing we had some, or more, to throw at it. Some were even talking about turning our Social Security system over to it. But we weren't really interested in shining any light on how it all worked—how all that money was being used. We were happy to be in the dark—loved it!—so long as our portfolios grew. But evil deeds were lurking in that darkness and we were not simply hapless victims. At the very least we became complicit with them by our inattention and our greed—our deeds were evil by association, if for no other reason (and there were/are other reasons...).

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Condemned (for Unbelief)*

Turns out, though, that we don't even know what a crisis is. We think a trillion here and a trillion there is bad. The real crisis is God's judgment (Greek: krisis!) on our lives. Our love of the darkness has led us away from love of God—away from the light and into unbelief and idolatry. We have made the market our god. It is the market that has shaped our lives and our values. It is the market that we have worshiped, that we have trusted and loved—and now fear—above all else. And for that we are already condemned.

PROGNOSIS: A Savings Plan

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Saved (through Faith)*

Comes the light into our darkness, into the world that, for reasons we can't begin to fathom, God so loved. Comes the light not to condemn, but to save. The cure for our unbelief (misbelief?) is God's love for us in Jesus Christ, love that "lifts him up" on the cross to remove our condemnation, and so that we might rightly believe—that we might fear, love and trust God and have life.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Drawn to the Light*

Trusting in the one who saves us, we begin to see the world in a different light. As our eyes adjust, we see more clearly the tangled web of our old loyalties—the complexity and pervasiveness of our sin and the depth and all-consuming nature of the darkness we once loved. Whether we now choose to remain in the market and ride out the storm, or to cut our losses and divest, we no longer pin our hopes and dreams on the market. Freed to be "wise as serpents" (an oblique reference to v. 14, but really Matt. 10:16) about the ways of the world, the deeds we do now are done in the service of God and of the neighbor.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Doing What Is True*

And so we are back out there in the complicated, messy, benighted world—but no longer as aides and abettors of the darkness. Now we walk in the darkness as children of the light (John 12:36), encouraged and strengthened by others who bear the same light, and working with them to lead others into the light of Christ—recognizing all the while that it is not our work, but God working through us. That, after all, is how God's investment strategy works: God, fully invested in the world in Jesus Christ—a savings plan designed to yield a trillionfold, and then some.