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Do We Need Saving?

I was recently able to help a friend in need. My friend was quick to respond with appreciation, addressing his note to “Tim, our brother and saviour...” Saviour? The word “saviour” caught my attention and has given me pause for thought ever since. It is certainly not a title my family or colleagues have ever used to address me. But more importantly, I wonder why “saviour” has not been a more regular part of my thoughts and conversations, or of the songs and sermons in church.

Could it be that I am not in need of saving? Perhaps there is no danger lethal or imminent enough to cause me concern at this time. Or perhaps there is nothing in our history that we look to or reference as a point of rescue, liberation, redemption or salvation which we can point to as having been saved. Maybe we can save ourselves and we have in our own skills, possessions, plans or connections sufficient resources and security to weather crises that come our way. Or maybe we are so inclined to view everything as a process with shades of grey that a concept like salvation attempts to draw a line where there shouldn't be one.

Reflecting on recent and current events it would appear that we as persons *are* in need of saving. And our need for salvation takes various forms and motivates us to do many wonderful things.

We are moved to pray and to care: In the last 2 months I have lost 2 friends prematurely to cancer. During their brief illness, many prayers were offered that they and their families would be saved from the aggression, pain, and lethal results of the disease. Their bodies were not saved, but significant care and love was shown to the families during the time of suffering and grief.

We are moved to action, solidarity and generosity: As I write, “Hagupit,” another typhoon is approaching the Philippines. Not only are people praying to be saved from further destruction, but we will likely see many persons and finances mobilized to save persons, communities, housing and their way of life.

We are moved to thankfulness: I recently visited the dentist for the first time in a very long time. Dentist offices make me apprehensive at the best of times, but a prolonged (and willful) absence made me even more

uncomfortable about what a checkup would reveal. Although I was not saved a mild scolding, I was saved from any dental work by the mere fact that I was born with teeth like my father's. I cannot take credit for something which only God could determine, but I am very thankful!

Is salvation needed only in times of physical crisis, or are we generally in need of being saved? While we may be cautious about practices and words that condemn or judge others, or suggest that our particular interpretation of a way to salvation is the only way, we would do well to reflect again on our personal and collective need for salvation.

One of our tasks is to come to terms with our own need for security, for being saved. Ironically, our financial “savings” and our western society's middle class desire for material security remind us of our innate need to be saved, and the ways in which our habits and priorities reveal our misplaced trust. And our own sins – and those of others and of our society – reveal that our own devices are woefully inadequate. This is part of our confession, part of our responsibility to be truth tellers.

A second task as we confess our faithfulness is for us to reflect on the words of Scripture and the coming of Christ. If Jesus only came to help us with our process, or help us to get along with one another, or teach, or make disciples, or to heal the sick, or give hope to the marginalized, or to correct those in authority, would the cross have been necessary? Grace, hope, mercy, forgiveness, gentleness, love – and many more actions – are part of the salvation we have received and continue to receive.

A third task is to share our confession with God and others. We need to allow salvation to move us to unabashed worship, to deep thankfulness, and to courageous witness. Scripture is full of the stories of salvation, whether exodus, return from exile, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, or the work of the Spirit in uniting and gifting all parts of the church. We need to receive and share our own place in this shared salvation story, in our communities, across the country, & around the world.