

Monday Musing: October 19th, 2026.
Evil…

Over the last few years, Karen and I increasingly saw dog strangling vine in the forests. This vine is aggressive. It is not native to North America, coming from Europe in the mid-1800s as an ornamental garden plant. It grows densely and destroys ecosystems by choking out native plants. It climbs around trees, shrubs and wildflowers so tightly that sunlight is blocked and the thick mat that is formed prevents young trees and vegetation from growing. Sadly, we have seen large areas burned to the ground in controlled fires by park authorities. We might just say it is truly an evil plant, totally self-serving. We wonder: Does the destroyed ecosystem suffer? Are pain and suffering felt by the forest?

Once when walking along a path, we just about went through a spider web. Now, I really do not like spiders. This web was huge, and caught tightly in it was an insect about to be devoured by the spider. Was the insect afraid? Would the insect feel pain and suffering? I don't imagine the spider had any more ability to think beyond "must eat" than the dog strangling vine wrapping itself around trees thinks, "must live." Some folk call this natural evil. It is just part of nature. Hurricanes cause destruction and pain and suffering to all sorts of living things, but a hurricane does not have a purpose! Animals do what they need to do to stay alive too. Though some creatures have an ability to care for their young and mourn the death of others.

What about people? People know what can cause pain and suffering and, at times, people choose their words, actions and decisions to protect themselves, to cause harm, or even to intentionally cause pain, suffering and death. Are the reasons behind human behaviour the same as the dog strangling vine or the spider? Is human evil not caused by a lust for power, greed, and such? People can choose though, can't we?

Back in 1983, M. Scott Peck wrote a book that addressed human evil. It is titled "People of the Lie: The Hope for Healing Human Evil." In this book, he described one model for understanding human evil behaviour in that humanity is locked in a titanic struggle between the forces of good and evil, that is, God and the devil, and the battleground is the human soul. He also described how science offers explanations such as mental illnesses, traumatized childhood, etc. Where do you believe human evil comes from? Or, where do you believe pain and suffering come from whether natural or human?

You may have heard the phrase "God will only give you what you can handle." What is that saying about God? God is the source of pain and suffering? Would we say that to someone in Ukraine or Gaza today? Or to a victim of sexual assault? Or what of the saying, "But for the grace of God, go I"? What about the other guy!? Why would a

gracious creator God favour some over others especially when it comes to living well or living with pain and suffering?

Theodicy is a theological examination or attempt to defend the goodness and omnipotence of God in the world of evil, pain and suffering. How can we say, God is good, all the time, if we also believe God is essentially the source of pain and suffering? Or is there another god-like power that is evil's source? On December 26, 2004, an earthquake and tsunami caused huge devastation along the coasts of the Indian Ocean. One belief of the cause was the rupture along a fault line in the earth's plates. Another belief, told to me, was that God made it happen to kill those who didn't believe in God and live the 'right' way, like the flood story. Or was it some other evil power? Why?

Our scriptures contain stories of conflicts, murder, battles, and more. The people who passed on these stories lived 2 to 3000 years ago. Their understanding of God came out of their context and knowledge at that time in the world. We must be careful how we read these ancient stories and interpret their meaning. We must also attend to our own words today for the meaning we might not realize lies behind them. I don't believe God is the source of evil, pain and suffering. Do you? So how do we account for it then?

Prayer

Holy One, our world is ruptured today, our world is in pain, our world suffers,
People are living a hell on earth because of the words, actions and decisions of others.
Guide our own hearts God, guide our minds, as we struggle to make sense of it all.
Ensure us, God, of your goodness as creator, that goodness does not include evil.
Amen.

Scripture this Week

Deut 34:1-12	Moses dies and is buried in Moab.
Psalm 90	O God, our help in ages past.
I Thess 2:1-8	We care for you like a nurse tenderly cares
Matt 22:34-46	Love God, love your neighbour as yourself.

TR Question (theological reflection)

Our Creed says, "God who created and is still creating." How do we understand God, pain and suffering in a world God is still creating? Have you heard of panentheism?

May your nights and days be filled with love,
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