

I'm a Christian because...

I care about people

I am not very good at caring for people. It is so easy to get wrapped up in my tiny and isolated little cosmos and ignore what is not directly in front of my eyes. But the truth of the matter is that the world is full of suffering, of the body and of the soul.

I am privileged to have had opportunities to travel to some of the places where suffering is very deep and visceral. But it doesn't take actually going to places like Haiti, Congo and Rwanda to see pain. Everybody carries wounds. Even here in the ever-pleasant atmosphere of the orange bubble, smiling faces often mask wounds. Our society doesn't like discomfort. It doesn't like to see it up close or deal with pain out in the open. We are engaging and happy in precept and at parties but so often we hurt and heal alone. It's hard, for me at least, to admit that I can't go it alone. We are really not so different from Acholi Ugandans in refugee camps or Rwandese genocide survivors. Suffering is universal.

So what does this have to do with Christianity? And why has it given me a reason to care? Christianity is the only religion in which the God and Creator of the universe, in all of his power, became human. He became a man who suffered and who is there in our suffering. I've met him and he comforts me where I am.

But why is there suffering in the first place?

I have heard people say that a benevolent God could never have created a world with the capacity for such evil. I don't presume to be able answer this deep question, let alone in these few lines. Genocide, senseless killing, oppression and injustice rip societies apart and shock our conscience with their brutality. Equally unsettling are our own reactions of indifference to this sick and desperate world.

What amazes me is that Christ would die for it, and for me.

Regardless of your interpretation of the creation story in Genesis, one thing it tells us for certain is that the world was created good. There is beauty here amidst the anguish. The way I see it, this is all one great romance between the Creator of the universe and the creation he endowed with freedom: to love as well as to turn away.

To follow Christ means to love those he loves enough to die for. I can think of no image more powerful than that of Christ dying on the cross for the murderer and the thief as well as for mother Theresa.

I have no mathematical proof of the existence of God or of the real power of Christ's redemption apart from my own experiences, and I doubt there is one. But the reality of this life is an intense human need for powerful healing. The world, its nations, communities and we ourselves need to be made whole. We need food, peace, safety and love, but sometimes it seems as though that is simply not enough. There is a restlessness that remains even at the height of opportunity and privilege. It has been argued that every natural desire indicates the existence of a real object that can satisfy it. C.S. Lewis summarizes the famous argument from desire in his book *Mere Christianity*:

“Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for these desires exists. A baby feels hunger; well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim; well, there is such a thing as water. Men feel sexual desire; well, there is such a thing as sex. If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.”

Although we have never experienced a world, or even a day, without war, disease or hunger, we continue to search for solutions to these problems in the hope that they do exist. We can imagine this ideal state even though we have never experienced anything close. Our efforts towards it come from our need and desire for such a world and hope that this ideal state exists. This is not intended to be a proof that Christ's sacrifice is the ultimate solution to humanity's brokenness, but it lends itself to an optimistic worldview and is a powerful motivation to hope and to care. I believe that healing is possible and that Christ's pain can make us, and the world, whole.

Christ's sacrifice is more than just an image on the wall or a statue in a church; it has real power. I have never seen this illustrated so poignantly than while spending Christmas in a displaced persons camp in Northern Uganda. This society has suffered twenty years of terrorism, attacks and raids from a rebel group called the LRA. The LRA uses unspeakably brutal tactics to physically and psychologically destroy the people of the region. Perhaps the most terrible part of it is that the rebel forces that attack them are their own children. The LRA sustains itself by abducting children to be their soldiers, forcing them to kill their own families and then convincing them that they are now killers who will never be accepted back by their villages. Even if the LRA laid down its arms tomorrow, Northern Uganda must still find a way to accept their children and their killers back into society. It is an impossible and terrible dilemma. On Christmas Eve our car broke down in one of the most dangerous and remote places in the country. As the stars came out over the dusty road where we had been stranded, I began to realize what the message of Christianity means in a place like that. In that moment I remembered the words to O holy night;

O holy night, the stars are brightly shining.
It is the night of our dear savior's birth.
Long lay the world in sin and error pining
Till he appeared and the soul felt its worth.
A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoicing
While yonder breaks a new and glorious morn...

Truly he taught us to love one another.
His law is love and his gospel is peace.
Chains shall he break for the slave is our brother
And in his name all oppression shall cease.

This hope is the same in Princeton as it is in Pader, N. Uganda.

For me, it was not a show of might or a glorious vision that won me over to Christ, but his weakness and vulnerability. Because my God became weak and vulnerable. Because he felt agony and rejection, loneliness and separation beyond what I can fathom. Because he reaches out to the desperate and to the proud. Because he has sought me out and reaches to me where I am and loves me when I find it hard to love myself. Because I know of no higher expression of love. That is why I am a Christian.

For me it's a bit more like, I care about people because I know Christ.

~Rebecca Harper '10