

Jesus hangs in my Honda

## **Crucifixes are decidedly un-victorious objects.**

By [Ryan Dueck](#)

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Jesus hangs from the mirror of my 2002 Honda Accord. He's up on his cross, arms outstretched. He's skinny. His knees are knobby and his ribs are showing. His face is directed downward. He looks sad, lonely, defeated. A few beads up from Jesus on the cross, his mom looks down at her baby boy. I doubt she imagined that her son would ever end up with arms outstretched on a Roman cross, sadly looking down at and forgiving those who didn't know what they were doing.

I picked Jesus up a few years ago in Jerusalem. The very city where the rich, the powerful, and the religious conspired to put him up on that cross. The city Jesus wept over. The city that refused the things that made for peace. I found him at one of those kitschy touristy stalls in the old city where everyone is selling Jesus to people like me wandering around with a few dollars in our pockets eager to capture a bit of the "holy" city. Or at least to have something Instagram-able to prove we were there having an admirable experience. Who knows, if Jesus were there, he might even have turned over the very table that I bought him at...

A rosary is a strange thing for someone like me to hang from the mirror of my 2002 Honda Accord. I'm not Catholic. I'm not part of one of the "high churches" where crucifixes are part of the imagery and piety of everyday life. My faith has taken root in more prosaic soil. The crosses I grew up gazing at were doggedly empty. Jesus wasn't still on the cross, after all! He died, yes, but—hallelujah!—he is risen from the dead, is seated at the right hand of the Father and he will come again in glory. Crucifixes are decidedly un-victorious artifacts, after all. We wouldn't want people to get the wrong idea—that Jesus was still on his cross, that he hadn't defeated the powers that put him there, that he wasn't alive and well thank you very much!

And yet, like many, I have found myself drawn to these physical, tactile objects of the faith, to these links to a tradition and a faith that goes back more than the few hundred years that our preferred collection of saints has been kicking about. A wooden Orthodox rosary hangs around my neck most days—a gift from Syrian friends that have recently come to call our city home. I pray with a prayer rope that a friend made me. My fingers run over the beads and the cross as I recite old words from the Book of Common Prayer and other ancient sources. Sometimes I just hang it off my laptop when I'm struggling to write something decent or life seems overwhelming or whatever. It helps.

It also helps when I look at sickly, defeated Jesus hanging on the cross, ribs showing, face downcast, arms outstretched, swinging from the mirror of my 2002 Honda Accord. I pondered this primary posture of God today as I was driving down the highway. There is something deeply vulnerable about it. When your arms are open, you can't protect yourself. Anything can happen. We open our arms to welcome someone, to express the idea that we have nothing to hide, to express forgiveness, to say that we're not a threat, to move in for a hug, to be willing to take a blow. When our arms are open, our hearts are exposed—literally and figuratively. It could be a prelude to a beating or to the beauty of embrace. Or, in Jesus' case, both.

There he hangs, arms outstretched. Bearing the pain and the sin of the world, embracing, forgiving, reconciling all things to God.

He hangs there with and for those whom the world beats down low—for the lonely old man who has spent decades grieving the loss of children he barely knew; for the weary teenager struggling under the burden of others' expectations and the relentless, tyrannical imperative to be defining and projecting their identity out into the world; for the parent who is convinced they are better at getting it wrong than they are at getting it right; for the lonely, the addicted, the imprisoned, the confused, the bored, and the tired; for those who want to love God better than they do; for those who have tried and failed and failed again; for the betrayers and for those too religious for their own good; for those who are out of ideas; for those who think they are quite a bit more enlightened and competent than they are and who are only a catastrophe or two away from whispering, *Christ have mercy*; for those who find the world to be a sad and scary place; for the rich who are imprisoned by their riches; for the victims and for those who struggle to see themselves as anything but; for those who want to pray but can't; for those afraid to die; for those who take refuge in self-righteous cynicism; for all of us idolaters and infidels; for all

who are prone to wander and for all who feel it. For those for whom life doesn't always feel particularly victorious.

For all of us, in other words.

Jesus hangs un-victoriously from the mirror of my 2002 Honda Accord. Not because Christ is not the victor or because I don't think he came down from that cross or I don't believe in his resurrection. Not by any means. But simply because his victory is not yet fully realized or experienced on this fragile, frustrating planet. His is a victory-in-process. It flares up in glorious little irruptions here and there. It is evident for those with eyes to see and ears to hear. It tends our souls and fires our hope. It is now but not yet. It is an accomplished reality that hasn't been fully realized in our experience. It is a kingdom that has come, is coming and will come in fullness. This we believe. This *I* believe, at any rate.

In the meantime, his outstretched arms speak more loudly and clearly than any sermon I have ever heard or delivered. They say, "Let me take the blame." "I forgive you." "Go, leave your life of sin." "As I have loved you, so you must love each other." "Blessed are those who mourn, those who hunger and thirst, the merciful, the pure in heart... They shall see God." A few raspy breaths rattle through his gaunt frame as he speaks the deepest words of all: "I love you and you are mine."

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