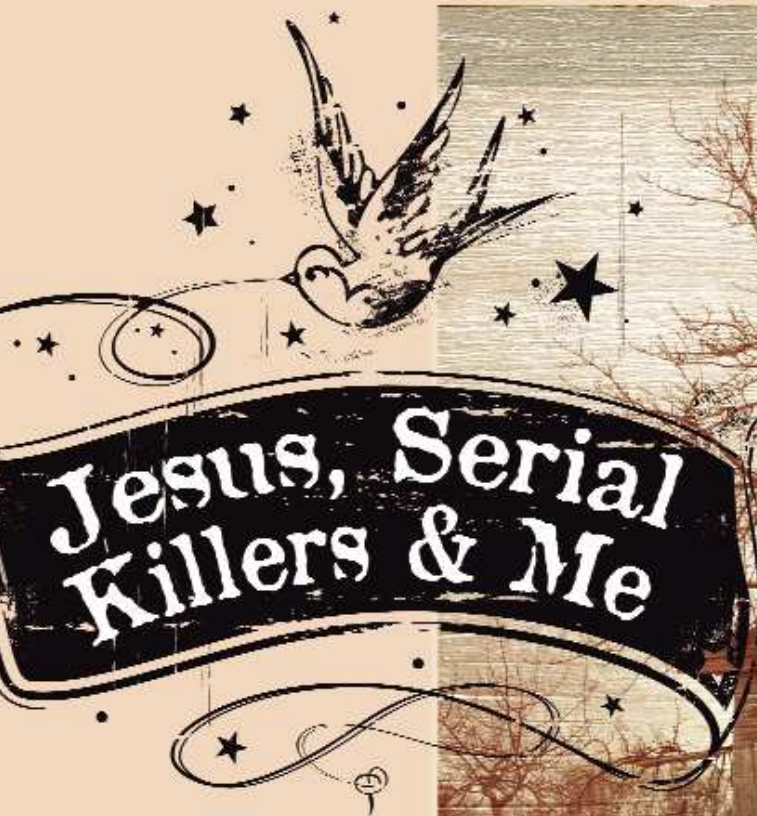


[Robert Pickton is a former pig farmer from British Columbia, Canada, who became a serial killer. During the last two decades of the 20th century he preyed on many women who were drug-addicts and prostitutes in Vancouver, B.C. In 2002 he was arrested and charged with murder in the deaths of two women, and the investigation that followed led to discoveries of other deaths. In January 2007, during the initial stages of his trial, he confessed to 49 murders. Brutal and savage details of his heinous acts revealed that he mutilated the corpses of some of his victims and fed some of their remains to his pigs. In December 2007 he was sentenced to life in prison. In British Columbia, the name "Pickton" remains synonymous with unspeakable, horrendous evil.]—the Editors

*Author's note: Reading the following years after I first wrote it, I feel like the world has changed. Robert Pickton is tried, convicted and sentenced for a portion of the evidence found on the Pickton farm. He can no longer hurt anyone. He will become an old man and likely die in jail. Left are many unknowns. The jury convicted him of six counts of second degree murder because (I understand) they believe he did not act alone. The evidence, however, included DNA from 27 missing women. I wrote of Pickton but it is, in some ways, a shorthand for all who kill the poor, vulnerable and afflicted.*

*I asked the editor if people today would resonate with my feelings from a moment in time? I do not know. So I offer the following thoughts and reflections during a time when DNA was being found in ground meat, over 60 women were missing, and there was a witness who saw on a meat hook what I cannot write. It was a time when it was impossible to imagine what the women had endured or how their families could be hearing of it. I was overwhelmed. I offer the following to all those today who are overwhelmed.*



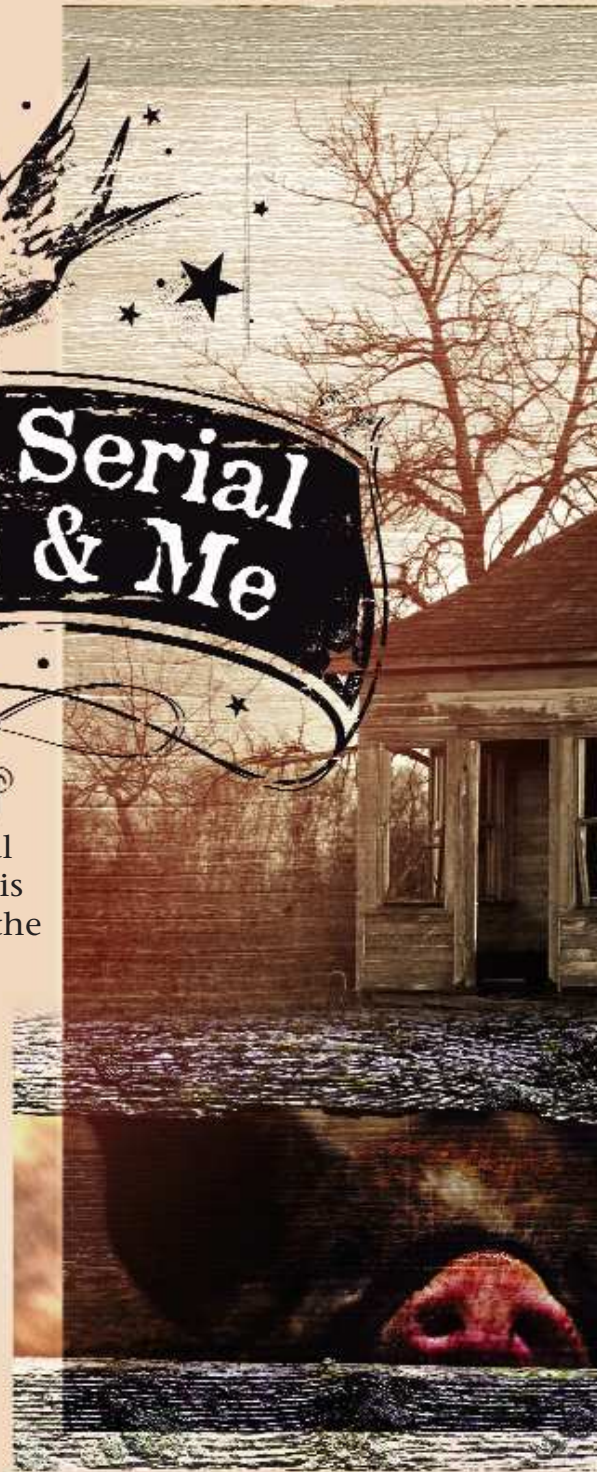
**T**he poorest postal code in Canada is in Vancouver—the Downtown Eastside. When I worked there, women were going missing. The conventional wisdom said the women were somewhere—in a hospital, a jail, rehab—and they would eventually return. However, on the streets, people were worried.

Poverty (having no shelter, no income, no resources) makes safety unaffordable. Poverty and sickness create vulnerability and exposure. Prostitution exacerbates the risks. In industrial areas, the women stood alone in the dark; they climbed into strange SUVs and trucks; they were driven away in darkness.

Sometimes in the night I would wake up because a woman was screaming below on the street after

a trick gone bad. Through the window, I would hear the rage and the pain.

Economically, there is no harder place to survive in our nation. Every day, however, I saw a community surviving. They lived on. People shared quarters and smokes and kindness. People accepted their neighbors—even if their neighbor was labelled by others as







dual-diagnosis or a wine drinker or violent. There was no hierarchy. But not everyone survived.

Not the ones who overdosed because of unpredictable changes in drug purity. Not the ones who got knifed in the park or on the street. And not the ones whose DNA was found on the Pickton farm, the DNA identified as belonging to

**T**hey were the particularly vulnerable. They were the poor, desperate and afflicted. They were God's... And when I read theology, I don't know how I can make sense of it.

women the Downtown Eastside lost. They were the particularly vulnerable. They were the poor, desperate and afflicted. They were God's.

Robert Pickton is accused of killing the forsaken and abandoned. He fills me with pain and anger. And when I read theology, I don't know how I can make sense of it.



**A**ll are invited to the banquet table. All are asked to eat, to drink. All are welcome," I read. I don't even want it to be true. It feels like a betrayal. It feels like someone will get hurt again ...it is difficult for me to hear God's invitation offered to Robert Pickton.



"All are invited to the banquet table. All are asked to eat, to drink. All are welcome," I read. I don't even want it to be true. It feels like a betrayal. It feels like someone will get hurt again.

#### **God's Invitation to Robert Pickton?**

Of course, I can say that Christ died for Robert Pickton. I can say that Christ's death atoned for Robert Pickton's sins. I can even agree that redemption is accomplished and applied to Robert Pickton on the cross. Even while saying that, I am not saying he is going to heaven. He has not received the forgiveness he is offered.

But what do I see?

He is stabbing the woman. He is

**...As I am carrying my cross what was I to expect? Did I think the good news would not hurt? ...Did I think that being crucified with Christ would be anything but the worst thing I could imagine? Loving and forgiving will kill us. Loving and forgiving equals dying.**

stabbing Jesus, for Jesus is incarnate in every moment. Jesus is present in the least. They are both dying—Christ and the woman. Into this moment, Jesus speaks, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

My friend Brad Jersak once

wrote, "...the Father answered his Son's prayer, 'Father, forgive them' with a big, 'For you, Son? Of course!' and opened wide the doors of heaven to everyone. He declares, 'All is forgiven! Come, all who are thirsty! Come! Come to the table freely prepared for you! [And here's where repentance comes in:] You've looked for life at so many other tables and I see you are still hungry and emaciated. Come to my table and taste to see that I'm good.'"

But it is difficult for me to hear God's invitation offered to Robert Pickton.

The "God forgive him."

The "Come to my table."

In fact, I cannot believe I am hearing this invitation.

But Pickton has yet to eat.

Pickton has not tasted.

*Oh, God, I do not want him to.*

Christ says, "All is forgiven! Come to my table and taste to see that I'm good."

#### **Being Crucified With Christ**

I am filled with rage. I can hold together that all (the whole world) have been reconciled; all (the

whole world) have been forgiven. But I cannot bring myself to believe that all will be in heaven.

The invitation is given to all to taste God, though. If Pickton does taste, if Pickton does eat, if Pickton does see God is good...then I might not survive.

But as I am carrying my cross





**F**orgiving is the thing I am most unwilling to do. I say to God, “Don’t forgive people like Pickton. If you do, my anger will be upon you...”

what was I to expect? Did I think the good news would not hurt? Did I think the good news would not harm me? Did I think that being crucified with Christ would be anything but the worst thing I could imagine? Loving and forgiving will kill us. Loving and forgiving equals dying.

We know loving and forgiving is the way. But to walk through what it means in this world—Pickton, me, and worst of all, the Father “opened wide the doors of heaven” to Pickton—is something else entirely.

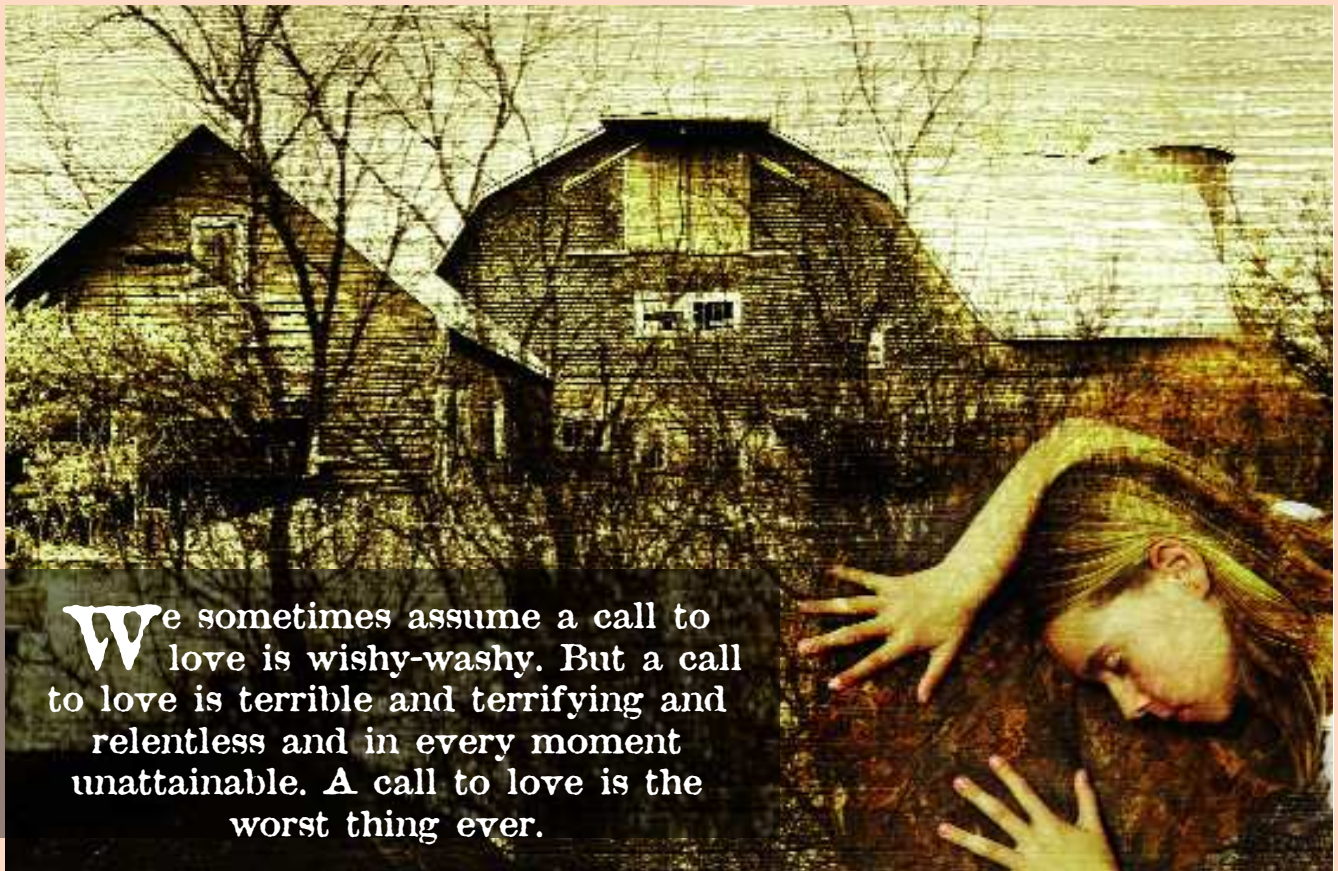
I feel damned both ways. If the

Father “opened wide the doors of heaven” to Pickton, what of the women who lived and died? How can Pickton be welcomed without betraying them? And what are the implications for the families of the women? Am I not in solidarity with their grief? If I embrace God’s grace, part of me dies. The

part of me that loved the women dies. Maybe the part of me that loved the Father dies. This is not what I wanted being a Christian to mean.

Forgiving is the thing I am most unwilling to do. I say to God, “Don’t forgive people like Pickton. If you do, my anger will be upon you. If you do, the fury I feel toward Pickton will fall on you. If you forgive him, then you become culpable in the destruction of the vulnerable. Don’t you see that if you do that, you become like him?

**T**he road is harder than I thought. It’s so hard in fact, I don’t know if I’m ready to do it. It’s easier to follow the rules than to love. It’s easier to believe the right things than to love.



**W**e sometimes assume a call to love is wishy-washy. But a call to love is terrible and terrifying and relentless and in every moment unattainable. A call to love is the worst thing ever.





**O**n Good Friday, Christ grafted himself to Pickton. He voluntarily submitted to being nailed to Pickton and all his sin. Flesh to flesh. Christ's blood washing Pickton. Cleansing Pickton. Drawing out the guilt and poison. Finishing it...way back then. And then, nailed there together, Christ whispers to Pickton and to you and to me: "Die with me."

You are only giving us a reason to kill you. What we would release upon him, we will instead release upon you."

### **Easier to Follow Rules Than to Love**

And then I see it. What is inside Pickton is inside me. I could kill even God because of what is inside me. I need God to be like me.

However, God's forgiveness leaves me only two options: I either satiate my need for justice by killing God, or I forgive Pickton with God and die myself. I become like Pickton or I become like God.

I have trouble following Jesus because of the expectation that I will have to love and forgive. I want forgiveness for me and not for Pickton.

The road is harder than I thought. It's so hard in fact, I don't

know if I'm ready to do it. It's easier to follow the rules than to love. It's easier to believe the right things than to love. Could this be what Jesus meant when he talked

**T**he things we measure ourselves by are the things we succeed at daily. However, I truly lack the ability to love, again and again.... By looking at the doctrines and the rules, instead of love, I feel better about myself. If I make faith about the doctrine and the rules, instead of love, I feel fine.

of a righteousness that exceeds that of the Pharisees (Matthew 5:20)?

We sometimes assume a call to love is wishy-washy. But a call to love is terrible and terrifying and

relentless and in every moment unattainable. A call to love is the worst thing ever.

I can go through an entire day obeying the standard whole program of evangelical morality—I can get up the next day and follow it again. I didn't get drunk on absinthe. I didn't create, pass or smoke a hookah pipe. I did not become a meth cook. The things we measure ourselves by are the things we succeed at daily.

However, I truly lack the ability to love, again and again. Today I failed at love. But there is redemption. Even my small daughter forgives me. Even my baby forgives me. So I do keep trying. I am just a failure at it.

By looking at the doctrines and the rules, instead of love, I feel better about myself. If I make faith about the doctrine and the rules, instead of love, I feel fine.

Suddenly I am face-to-face with the tenuousness of my faith. The slightest shift in Christianity's requirements could exclude me. If it's about love and forgiveness, I have been failing, even while keeping "the letter of the law." Have I been blind to the way of Christ? And if this is the way, can I follow him in it? Even the thought of naming the name of Pickton in

a context of forgiveness makes me scared—and nauseated.

### **"Die With Me"**

On Good Friday, Christ grafted himself to Pickton. He voluntarily

**I**do not want this cup. I do not want blood. I like Christianity-lite. I want rules and doctrine, the old-school way. I want safety. I want a nice cup of coffee, double cream, double sugar, please, Jesus.

submitted to being nailed to Pickton and all his sin. Flesh to flesh. Christ's blood washing Pickton. Cleansing Pickton. Drawing out the guilt and poison. Finishing it... way back then. And then, nailed there together, Christ whispers to Pickton and to you and to me: "Die with me." Not, "You don't need to die because I died" but, "If you die with me, you will rise with me."

He holds out the new covenant to you and me, "This cup is my blood, my new covenant with you" (1 Corinthians 11:25, The Message). The new covenant is blood. Did I know it was blood—real blood? This is the cup he drank from.

He too pleaded, "Take this cup from me." It was hard for him to walk down this road, but he did it. It is hard for me, too. I do not want this cup. I do not want blood. I like Christianity-lite. I want rules and doctrine, the old-school way. I want safety. I want a

fruit we will bear if we remain in him.

### **The Covenant In His Blood**

Jesus tells us, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom" (Matthew 26:28-29).

Which, in some ways, brings us full circle. We are back in the Father's kingdom, with the invitation to all to come to the table and taste and see that God is good. The invitation that I did not want Pickton to receive. But I did not know it held blood.

We are under the blood. The blood of each of those beautiful,

**S**uddenly I am face-to-face with the tenuousness of my faith. The slightest shift in Christianity's requirements could exclude me. If it's about love and forgiveness, I have been failing, even while keeping "the letter of the law."

nice cup of coffee, double cream, double sugar, please, Jesus.

I remember the fruit of the vine in an earlier call he gave to us, "Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me" (John 15:4). Bearing fruit just might be a blood business. The drink of the fruit of the vine is blood. And this is the

desperate women that were loved. It is on our hands, it covers us. It is on Jesus' hands, it covers Jesus, too. Loving and forgiving does feel shameful to me. I feel like I will deserve the world's anger if I forgive Pickton.

We are under the blood. The blood of Christ, who says, "Look, I make all things new." It is on our hands. It covers us. It is on Pickton's hands, it covers him, too.



And I say, "Take this cup from me, please—if there is any other way; if there is any other road...."

But the lived reality is where we must know the life of Christ and receive it and be in it. It cannot be magical words for another world. It must be the way through this world—a world where DNA is found in freezers and we swallow our fury and inability to understand.

"For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink" Christ told us. "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them...the one who feeds on me will live because of me" (John 6:55-57).

So we reach for the cup, knowing that it contains blood—loving and forgiving, death and resurrection. It will be our salvation and the only way through. □

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*Brita Miko was a woman's community worker in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside in the late 1990s.*