

Good Friday

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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For three years, Jesus spent his ministry challenging authority. He spent time with the outcast and the marginalized – ate with them, healed them, walked with them, loved them. He faced those who were in power – criticized corruption, subverted oppressive structures, advocated for religious reforms, and challenged the Roman Empire itself. He inspired many and threatened many. His was a message of love and a vision of justice for all people. But this message threatened those in power so much that they decided to execute him. They took this man of hope and killed him as an enemy of the state and threat to the peace of Rome. On this night we remember how God came to us bringing love and justice for all people and it was so offensive to this world that we literally wanted to kill God With Us by nailing Jesus to a cross. It's enough to leave us feeling hopeless – feeble – alone.

During the past year, I have talked to so many people who have felt powerless to change the realities of this world. War, hunger, discrimination and violence seem to remind us daily that there are evils in this world that we cannot easily change. Systems of oppression, racism, sexism, and queerphoba

tell us that there is still so much work to do. The loss of innocent lives: Trans lives, black lives, Syrian and Afghani and refugee lives condemn us and show us that we are still crucifying innocent Christs all around us. And yet, we see again today what happens when we challenge these systems, these injustices. More violence. More death.

So why on earth would we call this day Good Friday? Why is it good to be reminded that Jesus died for challenging the system? Why is it good to see an innocent man executed by the state? Why is it good that the Empire won?

In a few minutes, the cross will enter this space: the cross of Jesus, the crosses of this world.

We will behold this cross – this symbol of death. This reminder that the world seeks violence instead of peace and hatred instead of love. We will gaze on what the Empires that surround us now have set up to scare us into obedience and subservience to fear, but we will *see* something different. We will see the power of our God. We will see this instrument of death transformed into a tree of life. We will see the tree that lifted up our Lord Jesus Christ who uses its power to draw the whole world to himself. We will see Jesus use the same cross that is meant to kill him as his own kingly throne of glory.

And through this transformation from death into glory, we will glimpse the power of God that remains active in this world and here in this assembly.

We too are drawn into the life that springs forth from its rugged beams – the new life that flows from its base. We are reminded of our power in Christ to transform the destructive symbols and systems of this world from death into life – to bring hope where there is despair and love where there is hate following the example of our crucified Messiah.

On this cross, we will behold our God made manifest. Our God who was born and lived among us, who knew us and brought God’s message of love for us, and who died for that love at the hands of the Empire. It’s on this cross where we see God most clearly. It’s on this cross where we see God’s love for us made plain. And it’s the same cross that reminds us that this death is not the end of the story. It reminds us that no matter how hard they tried, the Empire could not stop Jesus’ message from enduring and death itself could not hold back God’s love.

And because we can see God’s transformational love, we can boldly proclaim, “Behold the life-giving cross, on which was hung the savior of the world.”