

Wicker Park Lutheran Church  
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Well, friends...here we are. Good Friday. A day that we commemorate every year and, yet this year feels...heavier. The realities of fear and grief surround us. The power of disease and death is at the forefront of our minds. The physical distancing may be leaving us feeling isolated. And on a day where I find comfort in a community gathered around the cross...I am here...and you are there...we are apart and yet...connected.

Connected around this familiar story that we hear each Good Friday. But to be honest, *this* Good Friday, the Passion Narrative According to John kind of frustrates me. I wish we could have Matthew's version we heard on Sunday...where Jesus threw himself to the ground in the garden...full of grief, begging God to "remove this cup from him." ...a crucial and oddly comforting part of the narrative....I wish we had the Jesus here who was so weak that he needed others to help carry his Cross. And, I feel a little guilty saying this, but I wish we had the Jesus whose dying words were those we heard on Sunday, and echoed again last night as we stripped the altar..."My God, my God, why have you forsaken me..." instead of the Jesus we get here...calm, cool, and collected throughout his arrest, interrogation, walk to Golgotha, and even in his dying words..."it is finished."

Because...friends...in this time where Good Friday feels perhaps even more real than ever...I feel like I need a more human Jesus. I want a "deeply grieved" Jesus because I feel as though it would resonate more fully with the situation in which we find ourselves. A situation in which God may feel a little absent. A situation where we can't physically be together in the comfort of our sanctuary... around the Cross to offer our prayers, to feel the wood of the Cross beneath our fingers and to light a candle.

I feel as though the Johannine Jesus that we encounter today is far too calm and far too in control for the situation we find ourselves...where disease, death, job-loss, and fear seem to be winning.

But...perhaps this is actually the Jesus we need. Because there is one part of *this* narrative that is absent from the other narratives we hear..."When

Jesus saw his mother and the disciple he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home and cared for her. After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he asked for a drink, said "it is finished," bowed his head and gave up his spirit." (John 19:26-30, my translation).

Because, you see, even if Jesus is this cool, calm, and collected Savior...he recognizes the real grief, pain, and fear of uncertainty that his mother and all those whom he loves would be feeling. And so, as his final pre-resurrection miracle, he builds community. Without this command, his mother very well could have become destitute following his death. But Jesus, following through with that love that he has talked about and enacted throughout all of his ministry that found its climax in the foot washing and new commandment we heard last night...made his final act one of building up community.

Just picture it with me...Jesus' mother, full of grief, falling into the arms of the beloved disciple as Jesus breathed his last breath...the beloved disciple sitting with her at the cross as long as she needs...then holding her up or carrying her as they return home to a new normal where nothing makes sense any more and grief comes and goes. Picture the beloved disciple faithfully caring for her in her old age and making sure she, one day, dies knowing she is loved...

And so perhaps this Johannine Jesus is in fact who we need today. One who is in control and also recognizes the impact his death will have on others...who is in control even when we cannot see it...who shows that out of death, bonds of love cannot and will not ever be broken.

Yes, this Good Friday may feel extra difficult as we surrounded by "deaths" big and small...it may feel extra difficult as we cannot gather around a shared cross...it may feel extra difficult because we don't need the reminder of fear when it is our lived reality...and, yet, *this* Good Friday, as all others, shows us that God's love is most fully revealed on the Cross of Christ. So, rest at this Cross, knowing that in it God gathers all into those outstretched arms, forming a community forever changed, forever loved, and forever together. Even and especially when death and grief seem to have the last word...But, for now, it is Good Friday...and so we rest in this place, inviting silence and pondering the death of our Savior.