

# Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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While we shout Alleluia and throw confetti right away on Easter morning, it wasn't so straight forward on that first Easter.

In Luke's account of Jesus' resurrection, first the disciples see that his body is gone from where it was laid. And they didn't get it. Then, on the road to Emmaus one of them realizes Jesus was there with him. And they were a little closer, but still not quite getting it. And now, they are all gathered together in one place. Perhaps going over again and again all that happened and trying to remember new details that might explain the empty grave.

They've had lots of chances to jump for joy- but the violence and the trauma of their teacher and friend being labeled a criminal and killed violently by agents of the state while the masses stood by and while **they** stood by has gotten in the way. All that fear, the pain, the GUILT, has made it hard for that potential joy of Jesus being truly alive to sink in.

In the text today, the disciples are trying to figure out what happened, is the resurrection real, and if it is, what does Jesus' resurrection mean for them?

I don't know about you, but I really relate to the disciples. Even though we are in the Season of Easter and we can see and feel spring each day a little bit more- this week, the joy of the resurrection of Jesus has felt far and hard to grasp.

The news of yet more Black and brown innocent young men being killed by the state heaved my heart this week. Daunte Wright was killed at a traffic stop in Minneapolis and Adam Toledo, who was just thirteen years old, was killed here on the streets of Chicago. Not to mention, we are also nearing the one year anniversary of George Floyd's death, murdered by an ex-police officer on the streets of Minneapolis.

The pain of these families and the pain that they will never see their loved ones again- touch, eat, speak with them- is overwhelming. The pain that this country's legacy of white supremacy (when whiteness is seen as normative or superior) that seems to never end- is infuriating.

Katie Wright, Daunte Wright's mother, said that for her justice just isn't possible- she said "justice isn't even a word to me" because, she says: "Would justice "bring our son home to us, knocking on the door with his big smile coming in the house, sitting down eating dinner with us..." No. She says. It's impossible to bring her son back. "Justice isn't even a word to me."<sup>1</sup>

Unlike the disciples, she will never see her beloved walk through the door, smiling, eating, chatting. So too, Adam Toledo's family will never see their son grow up, go to high school even. That's just NOT RIGHT!

And those of us less affected by police violence, who usually DON'T have to worry about getting killed at a traffic stop, or jogging, or bird watching, or sleeping in our homes, or who live in neighborhoods where gun violence does not affect our

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/2021/04/15/us/daunte-wright-minnesota-shooting-thursday/index.html>

daily lives- we historically have stood by or done very little while our human siblings suffer.

If you're like me, the events of this past week make me question if anything has changed from 2000 years ago...state officials are still violently killing innocent people without a fair trial. The masses, in large part, still stand by and do nothing.

Just like for the disciples, that joy of the resurrection of the new life we have in Jesus is really hard to see right now. And hard to feel, in the midst of so much pain and so much injustice....

In the case of the disciples, it really takes some convincing on Jesus's part. But finally, he says something that will drive home what the resurrection means in the midst of all their pain, their anger, their grief, their guilt. He reminds them of something that has been repeated throughout scripture: that his resurrection was intimately connected with repentance and forgiveness.

Repentance wasn't just a spoken confession or feeling sorry for a moment, but a change of life and behavior, a complete turning from wrongdoing.

We hear Peter echoing this in the Acts passage we read today. Peter says we are ALL guilty when it comes to the violent killing of Jesus, an innocent man. There were crowds of people present that day and many others who were not present but knew what was going on- who were silent. Who let state violence run its course over innocent bodies. "You acted in ignorance as did your rulers" he said. So "Repent!" he says, "and return to God so that your sins may be wiped out."

Resurrection is intimately connected with the disciples and the early church, when AS witnesses of Jesus' resurrection, they repent. When they change lives and behaviors and they are witnesses to the transformation that's possible. One scholar says: resurrection will become real to us not with scientific scrutiny or historical research...but involvement in the message of repentance and forgiveness.<sup>2</sup>

We come from a painful legacy of Christ's death, and a painful legacy of racial inequity in this country- both fueled by hate and perhaps much more by apathy on the part of many. But today, we are reminded that we are also in a line of witnesses to the resurrection- to transformation through repentance and forgiveness... And that we are invited to be witnesses as well.

Poet Joseph Michael Davis in a poem entitled "Embodied Prayer for George Floyd" reminds us of this legacy in our faith and our country. He says that while the energy of white supremacy is trapped in so many of our bodies..... "And yet," he writes,

*"... I remember there is another more abundant, more generative, more life-giving and life-affirming energy.*

*This energy lives in our bodies too.*

*This is the same energy in the bodies of a community crying together, healing together, eating together.*

*May we remember....*

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<sup>2</sup> Walter Brueggemann. *Texts for Preaching, Year B* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 2014) Kindle Location 1664.

*This is the same energy in the bodies of the Black Panthers feeding schoolchildren through the free breakfast program.*

*May we remember.*

*This is the same energy in the bodies of those sharing lunch counters, bread baskets, soup kitchens, family cookouts, home meals, gardens.*

*May we remember.*

*This is the same energy in the body of a man eating dinner with his best friends.*

*May we remember. ...*

*Do this in remembrance:*

*we re-member*

*a body*

*dismembered by violence*

*becoming whole again....”<sup>3</sup>*

We too, here at WPLC we have several opportunities to remember and to mobilize that resurrection energy- as Joseph Michael Davis puts it- which we **all have** through Christ. This week where I sensed Jesus is at hand, the power of resurrection near, was at the Antiracism Committee for Transformation zoom meeting.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/thesaltcollective/posts/3547867295319604>

You see, at this meeting as at every meeting, this group gathers to do the hard work of repentance from white supremacy. They don't turn away from the pain of racial inequity, rather they take time to sit in it, to channel the pain and confusion. And To examine racism in their own lives, in this church, and in our society.

And this week we re-membered Christ (or made Christ's body whole again) as all week, we brainstormed and planned for the Bible Study today on Race & Ethnicity in the Bible right after worship (which you all are invited to!).

What has been dis-membered by violence by racial inequity, this group is re-membering and resurrecting.

Dear friends, I hope that you hear today that Christ invites us to make whole (to re-member) that which violent powers and white supremacy has dis-membered. May we not stay paralyzed in inaction like the disciples in their fearful gathering. Or stay among the silent, apathetic masses.

Rather, may join Christ in leaving behind whatever has kept us from going out before, from speaking up before, from protesting before, from repenting from systems of white supremacy before and working towards just and equitable systems before. May we join Christ, sent into the world, to be embodied living witnesses of Christ's resurrection through repentance and forgiveness.

AMEN.