

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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Today's readings don't feel like Advent. During Advent, we typically hear of the pregnant Mary, an angel's visit to Joseph, and maybe a story about John the Baptist. But what is Pilate doing here? Pilate is a Holy Week feature, not Advent! So, what is going on?

Well, as we continue in the historical seven-week long Advent we continue to be open God's revelation and the deepening of our faith. Our extended Advent necessitates that we look at the texts through a different lens. Today's readings ask us to explore the essence of Advent beyond the time before Jesus' birth and ministry. After all, Advent, by definition, is a time of expectant waiting and preparation. Advent is not a pre-Jesus existence; instead, Advent is an everyday reality. Today, we are invited to explore how this common Good Friday reading illuminates the Advent theme of expectant waiting and how it brings hope today.

A few moments ago, we read about Pilate's first interrogation of Jesus. It's important to remember that Pilate was the Roman prefect of Judea. Before he could order an execution, his task was to uncover a charge that broke Roman law. Throughout the trial, Pilate struggled to find a Roman law that fit. He interrogated Jesus again and tried to release him. But the crowd was relentless in their desire to have Jesus killed.

Now, there's another thing you need to know. Pilate's primary role as the prefect of Rome was to keep the peace. He needed to keep the peace to impress the emperor, to keep the peace to maintain the flow of taxes, to keep the peace to retain power. That role as peacekeeper is what puts Pilate in a tough place. From the perspective of morally authority and perhaps, Roman law, Jesus had done nothing wrong. However, structurally Pilate had an obligation, a duty *to* the system, and a vested interest in keeping the façade of peace. Remember, the Roman system was designed to use violence, oppression, and domination to keep peace and control. Genuine peace was not the interest of the Roman empire; rather, the control and submission of others under the guise of peace was its chief pursuit. So, in the end, Pilate did exactly what that the Roman system was designed to do. Pilate kept the appearance of peace through violence.

Jesus understood that Roman system. Jesus knew that facts were useless. Because the only thing that mattered was artificial peace. Morality wasn't on trial. Justice was not sought. The system was designed to keep power and control. And in the end, the ruling fit flawlessly within the designed system.

On Friday, another ruling was made within its system. In the summer of 2020, a young man murdered two people and attempted to murder another during a protest in Kenosha. Many are flabbergasted, shocked, and frustrated at the ruling. Some blamed a biased judge. Some note the racist systems at play. One of the shocking parts of the case is that the facts of the night were never up for debate—Kyle Rittenhouse killed two men and injured a third. It's a truth that all sides acknowledged. Yet, within the designed system of government codified in law, if the jury believed Kyle was acting in self-

defense, then he was free to kill. The system was designed to sanction violence. The system was created to have loopholes for a 17-year-old to take a gun to a protest. The system made acquiring, displaying, and using guns easy. The system taught this young man that killing was acceptable. The system was designed to ignore the surrounding factors of the incident. The system was designed to idolize guns and violence. So, at the end of the trial, the system worked exactly how it was designed to function.

You see, in both Jesus' trial and the trial in Wisconsin the outcomes were the result of the system's design. Created by an overarching system and made to be acceptable and legal, but in the end, not ethical, right, or just in God's system. That is what Jesus exposed in today's reading. Jesus revealed that because the system gives a legal or permissible result, that doesn't mean that the system is moral, ethical, just, or right. What Jesus revealed was that the legality of executing him under a religious law could be unethical. For, God's justice is not fully realized in the Roman legal system nor in the United States' legal system. After all, in John's gospel, God's justice is revealed in self-giving love. God's justice is found in servanthood. God's justice is found in loving non-violence. You see, God's justice is not the world's justice, God's justice is something entirely different.

In this Advent season, that is what we hope for, yearn for, and wait for. We wait for God's true justice to reign. We hope for a time when robbing another from the breath of life is wrong. We yearn for a time when the racial, sexual, economic, and political domination through violent means are erased from

our lives. We wait for a time when God's resolve for peace in human communities is universal.¹ This is the essence of Advent.

But the thing about Advent is that we don't have the illusion of hope. Rather, we have a God that has shown up and will show up again. A God who knows what it's like to be caught in a system run out of control. A God who invites us into the work of bringing God's justice to a world in need of this truth. And the church continues this work and invites us into this work. Since the early 1990s, the ELCA has consistently supported gun control. The ELCA continues to advocate in opposition to the death penalty as it perpetuates violence. The ELCA calls for the restraint of violence in a manner that does not simply repay violence with more violence.² The ELCA invites us into conversations that explore how violence has shaped our history—including our treatment of black, indigenous, and people of color—and how a culture of violence can create systems of injustice.

Friends, this is the experience of Advent. We anticipate with a confident hope that God's reign will bring true justice, genuine peace, and abiding love. As we wait, we have the opportunity to find places to reflect what is to come. We find places to work toward non-violence, we have discussions that lament the idol of violence, and we use our voices to guide leaders to create ethical life-giving systems. We do this work not of fear or obligation, but rather out love for a God that loves us and desires life for all creation. Amen.

¹https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Community_ViolenceSM.pdf?_ga=2.258960650.1802121804.1637071207-303085517.1632357388
²https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Community_ViolenceSM.pdf?_ga=2.258960650.1802121804.1637071207-303085517.1632357388