

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

Vicar Jason Fugate

April 15, 2022

Why would we gather on a day like today? As we listen to John's Gospel, what is the purpose for hearing this story year after year. The betrayal, the suffering, the shame, and the death of our Lord, Jesus Christ, in full, clear detail.

It is easy to be filled with anger at the betrayal of Jesus. To be frustrated with Peter and his denial, to be filled with rage at Judas, the betrayer, to be angry with the priests and pilot who ushered Jesus towards Golgotha. Soldiers who cast lots for our Lord's clothes, nailed him to the cross, and broke his bones upon his death. Are we here to cast our judgment on them and their sin?

This event, with its ferocity and violence, can also bring strong emotions of grief and sadness in us. Are we here to weep? To cry at the pain that Jesus suffered and to sympathize with the man who performed miracles and loved the marginalized as he is crucified by the empire while many of his closest friends and followers scattered? It certainly could be the appropriate emotional response, especially when we continue to gather, bound together by the love that Jesus extended to us. Then, are we here to shed some tears for the ways of this world?

No, we don't gather only for sadness, rage, or merely for our own sake of being together. We join together this evening to remember the passion of Jesus Christ and to contemplate our own sin and falling short of God's command. Jesus, fully man, was crucified and with it took each of our sins to the cross. Each thorn in his

crown, one fashioned from our sin. Each nail, driven deeper by our nature and turning away from God's vision for us.

We are reminded in our contemplating of Jesus' suffering, what the wages of sin looks like on full display; a death like Jesus suffered. That when ultimate love entered into the world to share God's full love with all people, all of humankind, the structure of this world moved to snuff that love out, to reinforce the worldly order, and to reject God's revelation.

This is not to cast judgement on one over another but to be reminded that we all exist within this order. The order that seeks to have us contemplate these sins, realize the judgement that we deserve, and succumb to the paralyzing fear of sin. The order that would have us compare our sins with one another and be comfortable with putting ourselves over someone else.

In our contemplation of Jesus' time on the cross, we are reminded that our sin was banished on that day. That God's love, mercy, and grace is all-encompassing and fuller than anything we can comprehend. That God's Son, on the cross, washed away our sins and brought us into deep covenant with God. No, we do not contemplate our sins to condemn ourselves, but also to be reminded that God let's go of those sins. That the ledger is empty with Christ and that we can live into our relationship with God and with one another.

We contemplate our own nature so that we can be reminded of God's immense love and friendly heart that continues to be with us throughout our time here on

Earth and gives us the gift of eternal life. God's power cannot be contained by sin, by death, or by anything that would separate us from God's love. God is fully present in our lives and this death is but a seal that NOTHING would keep us away from God's love.

In Christ's strength, we find our own strength. To go out into the same world that condemned God's ultimate love and spread love further. To challenge where God's love is kept back and show God's love to those who are afflicted by the ways of the world. No, we gather this evening not to be condemned by our sinful nature, not to cast judgment on someone else, or to merely weep at the suffering of our Savior, Jesus. We gather today to be reminded of our humanity and need for God, to consider God's act of selfless love, and to be steeled together as we continue to be vessels for God's love wherever we go and in whatever we do. Amen.