

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

Vicar Jason Fugate

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Grace to you and peace from God, our Creator and our Risen Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. To begin, I'd like to read the poem, "Fire and Ice," written by Robert Frost.

"Some say the world will end in fire
Some say in ice.
From what I've tasted of desire
I hold with those who favour fire.
But if it had to perish twice,
I think I know enough of hate
To say that for destruction ice
Is also great
And would suffice."

When arriving at the end, it is natural to consider just how it is that we have arrived. In his poem, Frost contemplates how destruction can manifest either through active fury or through passive indifference.

Our reading from Revelation reminds us that early Christians were also concerned with this in-between time and anticipation of endings. The Roman Empire, after the dissolution of the Republic, had been extremely turbulent. Octavian, with his

authoritarian measures, brought peace through military force and allowing regional rulers to shape their own laws.

This further eroded protections for those in the margins of society and as emperors continued to rule entirely at their own discretion, these religious movements were persecuted based on the disposition and personal feelings of the emperor. Nero, a cruel ruler, would go on to have the Second Temple destroyed, burn Christ followers, and is commonly known as the reason for the execution of several apostles.

Revelation is a mysterious book of the Bible due to its poetic and symbolic language. Many scholars believe the book of revelation is written as a response to the persecution of Christian by Roman emperors and a text of hope in a time that felt like the Roman Empire would rule forever and continue the violence inflicted on the burgeoning church.

“I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.” A reminder that Jesus Christ is present at all times, no matter where on this journey we find ourselves. That no matter how dire the situation, how hopeless the cause may seem, how much destruction has happened, Christ is still present and He brings hope to all of God’s people that through God, this world can be transformed.

As I read about the horrific mass shooting at Top’s Grocery store in Buffalo and then again, less than two weeks later, again sat reading about the shooting at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, I could feel my own optimism crack. The combination of the extreme violence, the manifestation of hate, and the knowledge that these

massacres have been taking place and occurring more frequently throughout the majority of my life has me struggling to find hope. Lord, we ask for your mercy.

We know that we witness these moments and mourn the end of these lives cut short by violence but our experience is only a glimpse of the pain felt by the families and communities directly affected by this violence. The anger manifested draws the headlines and makes us question our hope but, as we know too well, gun violence is an everyday occurrence in our city as well. No life, no life in our world, should come to an end due to violence. And yet, we are confronted each day with this horrible reality. We respond to it in much the same Robert Frost writes his poem. We become angry and are moved to action or we cope by retreating into the numbness that this grief causes.

We see the senseless end of these precious lives, the end of these families once whole, and we are confronted with our own precarity, our own realization that we become aware of the beginnings and ends in our lives after the fact, rarely following the plans and calendars we create.

That loss of control in our lives, the lack of agency and helplessness we can face, is enough to become enraged or completely check out as we sit in and wrestle with the grief that we feel.

In our Gospel, Jesus is praying to God, the Father before he will go to where he is betrayed, called the 'farewell discourse.'" In this prayer, Jesus outlines his relationship and connection to God as of one substance but separate. As Jesus

prays, he prays for the future of all people that they be gathered into one. Gathered into one community so that the love of God can be shared fully between one another and comfort them as they continue in this world and join Him in life eternal.

Even as Christ faces a violent, state sanctioned death, he prays for all people to be made one in love. His disposition, His prayer to God the creator, is a prayer of hope for the future people of God and the acceptance of the full breadth of humanity. Even as life as Jesus knows it is coming to an end, he remains calm and courageous, resolved in His love for God's creation and the call to discipleship in Him.

In our current moment, where we are confronted with this violence and precarity, this is a reminder that Jesus is still near. That in this community of faith and in the many communities we inhabit, the love of Christ Jesus binds us together as one creation. At the end, at the beginning, the alpha and omega, Jesus is always present for us and hears the laments we have for this broken and unfair world. We are bound together and we find strength and agency not in our own self but through the relationships we are gathered into.

Each failure in this world, where it seems evil triumphs, is space where God resides and seeks to bring us together. Bring us together in a hope that the love shared between one another leads to actions and change within our communities and beyond. The day we will not beg for peoples' lives and dignity to be put first over profit and special interests but it will become an undeniable demande. The day where domination in this world becomes untenable and God's rule and order brings

all into communities of respect and love, communities that support one another unconditionally and everyone's needs are met.

In this in between time, where we continue in our beginnings and our endings, I want to remind each of you the charge that we make in this community again and again. That charge is simple, no matter where you are right now on your journey of life. Where you are in your time of faith, in your stages of grief or celebration, your frustrations or your anger, your coping or your excitement, remember that you are welcomed with open and loving arms in this place.

Let this community, in these trying times of pain and also, in the celebrations of our everyday lives, be a reflection of the prayer that Jesus made, that the people in this place will continue to care for one another deeply, find new ways to support one another, and share the love of Christ both within these walls and beyond. Don't hesitate, as we grieve these senseless tragedies, as we fight for justice for all people especially those on the margins, and as we continue to exist amongst the brokenness of our own nature, to dive into the loving relationships of healing and peace that are made possible only through the eternal presence, beginning and end, of Christ. Amen.