

## Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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Grace to you and peace from God, our Creator, and our Risen Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. Earlier this week, I decided to watch one of my old favorite movies as kid, *War of the Worlds* directed by Steven Spielberg. You may have seen this movie or you may be familiar with the classic science fiction novel of the same name written by H.G. Wells in 1897.

The story has become fairly derivative given the nature of this subgenre inspiring work but it proceeds that a form of advanced extraterrestrial life invades and seeks to subjugate the human population. These invaders have far superior technology and leave humans in despair as it seems there is no way to stop the ensuing assault. The lives they had once known were being completely ripped away and a bleak new reality was beginning to take shape. In the end, the alien invasion is undone by an unlikely source and the humans who have survived are left pondering the limits of their own capabilities and a new level of precariousness they had not been familiar with before.

Wells wrote this novel in an attempt, through fiction, to confront those living in his home, the United Kingdom, with the reality of their militaristically enforced empire. That these lands they pillaged and people they oppressed were in fact, almost no different than themselves. Wells hoped to capture within his writing what truly

horrific impact empire and domination has on not some far off, unknown entity, but an impact on real people with families, hopes, cares, and worth.

In our own country, we too are confronted with the realities of empire and domination for the sake of continued power and wealth of a small few. Cruelty, exported out as punishment to those who have already been pushed to the margins. As this consolidation of power continues, more and more people are confronted with this cruelty of profit over people and desires of a few over the rights, agency, and humanity of millions.

What Wells captured in his novel is something confronting us almost every day as we can both see those loved ones around us oppressed by empire and also recognize how we have and continue to benefit from this oppression as well. It seems every week there is a new disaster that shakes the foundations of what we know in this world and lives being torn apart by forces of domination and control.

It can make us feel hopeless. It is hard to accept the changed reality and feelings of grief that swirl when the precarity we face looms large. Where is hope?

In our Gospel, we see Jesus confronted at the temple. His actions and ministry had been judged by all in the temple area and people were trying to discern truly what his tradition defying nature could mean. Some believed that he could be the Messiah while others were convinced, he was from the devil or that he was crazy. The ambiguity about who Jesus really is at the time is not something that sits well with some at the temple complex so they ask Jesus to be clear about who he really is.

It is common for people to focus on and try to turn this passage into one that is exclusionary. “My sheep hear my voice,” is not an endorsement for only one kind of spiritual experience, one sort of dogma or doctrine, only one “kind” of Christian. This response Jesus gives can actually be a means for us to celebrate even more the authentic diversity and breadth of humanity especially in Christian life. No matter how we express ourselves, the way we decide in moments of ambiguity, the sins we commit, or the mistakes that seem unshakeable, we *still* hear the voice of our Good Shepherd.

Those that trusted in Jesus during this time and followed his ministry also did not have a special knowledge or secret ingredient that gave them inside access to Jesus. They chose to have faith and to be courageous even under threat of embarrassment, ostracization, or even violence. God is present and calling to us even amidst the despair that we may feel and brings hope into a world that can often feel hopeless.

Our support comes from the shepherd who guides and protects, no exceptions. Jesus’ voice is one of liberation and love amidst the voices that would call out oppression, hate, or fear. There is courage, courage to keep listening and trusting in God even amongst our doubt. Even after Jesus’ ascension, we witness the power of God that works through Peter and can work through us as well.

This act of listening for God’s call amidst a cacophony of voices and sounds that distract us can be especially hard when we try to do it alone. Whispers of despair and apathy can be tempting and push us into accepting this broken reality as the one that God intended or that broken systems are just the way that it always will be.

There are places though, where our courage can be steeled and where that sweet voice of love and care rings loud and clear to us. For so many of us, this began with the voice of love and responsibility that our parents spoke to us. Yes, it is fitting that on this Mother's Day, we remember the spaces in our life where Jesus' love reflects so strongly towards us through those around us.

We give thanks for the so many mothers who bring into the world God's beloved children and show that love through all of the work it takes to be a parent.

The founder of our contemporary Mother's Day, Anna Jarvis, had used this experience of motherhood to bring women together to help teach effective parenting and form strong communities of mutuality where polarization had eroded the communities previously. She petitioned strongly for a day recognizing the many contributions mother's make and an intentional time where people of all ages would spend quality time together either with their family or with their church.

Her dedication was to the achievement and support of all women in a society that she felt highly preferenced male achievement. Jarvis actually never had children of her own but believed in the powerful nature of community. Even further, after Jarvis secured the national recognition of the holiday, she would end up spending most of her money trying to get rid of Mother's Day. She felt that the commercialization of the day took away from the initial intentions... celebrating women and the community of family that is so vital important.

So as we celebrate this mother's day and continue to listen for the voice of our loving Mother, the Good Shepherd, let us give thanks for all those, especially

women, who welcome us into community in whatever form that looks like for us. For the women who give birth, for the women who adopt, for the women who choose to not or cannot have children, for the chosen mothers, and all the women who reflect God's love and hope.

The gift of community that brings us closer to Jesus and the promise of eternal protection and grace. Let that gift of community support us in the days ahead and that assurance of everlasting protection be what gives us the courage to go forth and do brave things where we see sin rule and people pushed to the margins. Let us stand boldly in the face of hopelessness, proclaim with actions the hope that God inspires, and listen when we are in doubt or unsure, for that sweet call from our Savior Jesus, the Good Shepherd that gathers us all in his love. Amen.