



The Cross and the Empty Tomb

March 27, 2024

Lisa Heckman

As we walk through Holy Week, the cross looms before us. For many Christians it is the ultimate symbol of their faith, Christ’s sacrifice on our behalf. For myself, the empty tomb has always held more meaning. Without it, Jesus on the cross is little more than a martyr. The empty tomb as a sign of resurrection is God’s love defeating death, sin, and everything else that stands between us and God. It completes what happened on the cross and gives me far more hope than the cross alone could ever do.

And yet ... and yet. The empty tomb is also meaningless without the cross. We don’t get the joy of Easter Sunday without the horrible death on Good Friday. Which leaves me grappling anew with the whys and the meaning of what Jesus went through in those 3 oh-so-significant days.

I hear it said over and over these days, “Resurrection can't happen without something dying.” There’s no Easter Sunday without Good Friday. We Christians are people of the Resurrection. That doesn’t mean, tho, that we have to like the dying part. For what dies often is what we love most, especially when it comes to the church. We are called to new mission projects or ministries within our congregations, but in order to embrace them, we have to let go of a long-standing mission partnership that is no longer relevant or the notion of filled Sunday School rooms, for example.

Over the years we’ve also latched onto the idea that churches are meant to go on forever. Christ’s Church will never die, but our individual churches just might. Death and dying are a part of life and our churches are not immune. This is not a failure on our part, though; far from it! Instead God may need something to die in order for Christ to bring about a resurrection we can’t imagine. The “death” may actually be a transformation as a building is given up yet the congregation worships in a different space. Or congregations merge in ways that bring about something totally new. There is a whole host of possibilities, many of them already being lived out in this presbytery.

A question to ask ourselves – as individuals as well as churches – is “*Knowing that death is in the near or distant future, how will we live in the meantime?*” May you live this Holy Week walking in faith and hope.

Grace and Peace.

Lisa

~~~~~

Rev. Lisa S. Heckman  
Transitional Executive Presbyter  
Presbytery of Milwaukee  
[lisa@pbymilwaukee.org](mailto:lisa@pbymilwaukee.org)  
work: 414.292.2743  
cell: 607.321.4581