

Good Friday is always hard. It's hard to spend time at the foot of the cross, as witnesses, as lovers of Jesus, and to hold just a fraction of the pain, and the horror, in our own bodies, just the smallest fraction of it. We know Easter's coming, for those folks who actually stood with Jesus, for Mary, and Jesus' mother, and the beloved disciple, their agony came with no promise of swift resolution, with the assurance that everything really would turn out alright.

It takes strength, to witness, to be with. It takes strength to see – and not look away – to see first-hand and with absolute clarity, what it is that humans are capable of doing to one another, the pain we are capable of inflicting on one another, the suffering we're all too quick to cause one another, given the opportunity, given the power, especially if our lives are infused with fear and with stress.

And imagine, in the midst of all that, also: the life-changing impact of being witness to the love, the love that still poured from Jesus' very being, despite the world's best efforts to stop its healing and transforming flow out into the world.

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We know it all turns out alright, we know Easter is coming, so why do we come back here to the cross, every year? Why is this day still so important if we know now how the story ends?

One idea is that we've just got to have the terrible grief of Good Friday in order to have the great joy of Easter, that somehow we have to earn the right to rejoice, or deserve it in some way. If we don't suffer through the hard bits, how will we appreciate the good bits, and do we really deserve the good if we've not experienced the pain?

I'm not buying that.

I believe that inherently all of Creation is good and we were created to delight in its goodness and to rejoice, without ceasing, and delight in our relationship with God and with Creation and with one another, no suffering *required* for that.

That our world is stuffed to the gills with human-created and human-imposed suffering is, I think, why we've got to keep cycling back to the cross.

Because the cross reveals the truth about what humans are capable of, still, today.

The journey to the cross reveals just how quickly stress and fear can turn a friend, a supporter, into a stranger. How quickly stress and fear, can turn a cheering, supportive crowd into a blood-thirsty, condemning mob. As it was then, so it is, still, today.

Violence, injustice, stress and fear are all too present in this world, just as they were 2,000 years ago, and so we come back to the cross again, and again. The stuff of the world that made Jesus' suffering and brutal execution possible then, it's all still discernable in the world around us now.

The cross also reveals that this unjust and violent world depends on us for its continued existence; it depends on our fear, it's fueled by our stress. The violences and injustices of this world depend on our fear to squeeze this abundant, God-given, incredible life into the narrow, limited confines of the stressful existence we're given by the world we live in.

The cross asks us, how complicit are we in it all, because of the role fear and stress plays in our lives, and the cross asks, what role are we playing in the pain and suffering of others because of our fear and our stress?

The cross reveals to us, truths, not only of God, but also of us, and that's a really important reason to come back, year after year, to "see" just a little bit more, to heal just a little bit more, to get just a little bit more free.

And as we see ourselves through the cross, we also see Jesus – who in the midst of unimaginable suffering takes the agony, the stress, the fear into himself and turns back out into the world only self-giving love.

On the cross, Jesus is changing the world!

God's love is the irrepressible truth of all life, more powerful than any regime, more powerful than any violence, more powerful than death, and this is also what the cross reveals: that this is an unchangeable, confident truth, carried to us, today, through the millennia – and until we're all ready to believe that, and live as ones who believe that, we come back to the cross, back to this day, again and again, year after year.

Jesus calls us to follow him into true freedom, a freedom and fullness of life made possible for all by and through the life-giving power of God's self-giving love; but Jesus' call into freedom and fullness of life will be resisted by this world because it needs us afraid, and stressed, and it relies on death and violence to keep us that way ... the cross leaves us in no doubt, Jesus' call to follow him is not for the faint-hearted.

And yet ... Jesus leads us where he knows we can follow, if we believe in God, if we believe also in him.

We've gotta set down our fears, we've gotta refuse to let stress and fear rule our lives, and instead bind ourselves to God and one another and love, love, love ... the cross is our call to refuse to settle for anything short of freedom and fullness of life for ourselves and *for all people*, confident this is possible by the mighty power of Christ's love;

... and, the cross is our call to remember just what's at stake, what will continue to be in the world, the suffering and the pain that will continue to be in the world, if we look away, if we do nothing, if we remain unchanged by what we're called to be witness to today.