

**“It Doesn’t Have to End This Way”**  
**Rev. Mieke Vandersall**  
**Lafayette Avenue Presbyterian Church**  
**Mark 14:32-15:47**  
**March 21, 2008 – Good Friday**

It didn't have to end this way. After 27 years of marriage, 2 children, gravesites in the back yard for all the family pets, dreams of being with each other in our last dying days, it didn't have to end this way. After it was all over we didn't know how it got to this point with dishes flying across the kitchen, the meanest words possible thrown like daggers at each other's hearts, accusations charged while holding our breath not wanting to know the answers. What made us get to this point? It didn't have to end like this. It didn't have to happen.

It didn't have to end this way. Our father lies in a hospital waiting to die, unable to care for himself for the first time in his life. We hadn't spoken in years because of shame, because we were convinced that he was the absolute worst father that the world had seen. We hadn't spoken in years because of our stubbornness, and his. He had missed the magical movements and mysteries of his life with us because the pain was just too much, it took our breath away. We were robbed of having a father. In the end we sit by his bed and wonder what made us get to this point. It doesn't have to end like this. It doesn't have to happen.

It doesn't have to be this way. Five years later the war persists, despite announcements that it was declared over and won. Over 341 million dollars a day is being spent on this war when our own financial solvency is in the toilet.<sup>[1]</sup> Five years later war persists with countryside devastated, ancient relics destroyed, cultures and families infected with the trauma that comes from war and torture, nearly 4,000 US soldiers dead and another 30,000 wounded, up to one million Iraqis<sup>[2]</sup> killed. We wonder what made us get to this point. It doesn't have to persist like this. It doesn't have to happen.

It didn't have to end this way, thousands of years ago, on a cross. Jesus our Christ, he rode into the city almost a week ago on a small colt. He rode in protest to the Roman Empire, to the domination system, to the destruction of the poor and uplifting of the very wealthy. He rode in protest to the violent revolution that had persisted its way into the culture of the day. He rode in protest to salvation through weapons and armies and cavalries. Jesus, our Christ, he taught us nonviolence, he taught us gentle and powerful subversion of the world order, he taught us radical, earthy, countercultural ways of living and being and organizing ourselves. He rode in on a colt with no machine gun or machete. He rode in to the governmental center with no bodyguards. He rode in only with his body and the crowd around him who took the chance not to attend the Empire parade that celebrated war and torture and world order that was taking place that day.<sup>[3]</sup>

It didn't have to end this way, Jesus our Christ beaten and a torture victim, thorns pressed into his head, beating him till exhaustion, group humiliation and mocking. It didn't have to end this way, Jesus our Christ who was tortured and harassed for so long that he was too tired to carry his own cross so that a passerby had to be compelled to carry it for him. It didn't have to end this way, Jesus, our Christ tortured to death and executed like he was a runaway slave or rebel insurgent, a disturber of the "peace."<sup>[4]</sup> It doesn't have to end like this.

Jesus our Christ didn't have to die like this to save us. Despite popular belief, I believe he didn't. Jesus' death didn't have to be one of excruciating pain for us to believe that he indeed was King of the Jews, that it was Jesus we were to follow, not Pontius Pilate, not the Emperor of

Rome. Jesus' death didn't have to be like this to teach us how to live and how to die and for us to know that God saves us from the world and ourselves.

Jesus our Christ, his torture, his time on a cross, his body degenerating in front of our very eyes, it wasn't in vain, but it didn't have to be like this and it has not kept us from reproducing it over and over again. It hasn't kept us from being mean and ugly, it hasn't kept us from waging war, it hasn't kept us from holding grudges, it hasn't kept us from abusing those we profess to love the most, it hasn't kept us from doing all we can to reinforce systems of power that reflect more of an Empire than the Kingdom of God. No, Beloved, it hasn't kept us from this, has it?

It was a crime of passion, Christ's death. He was tortured and mocked and humiliated because of his passion for the world, his passion for the underdog, his passion and his heart breaking for the people of God who he was both a part of and separated from. Jesus our Christ with his passion. It was this passion that sought to transform the world into the Kingdom of God on Earth, the Kingdom of God where the Emperor wasn't the King but Christ the nonviolent transformer is King. It was this passion that sat him with the smelliest and the poorest and the most outcast in the Jewish world and told them that it was among them that we find the Kingdom of God. It was this passion that the Empire found so very threatening to the point of treating him as a runaway slave or rebel insurgent and pinned him to a cross.

Jesus our Christ didn't have to die like this to save us. Yes, it was *for* the world that he died, his breaking heart, his heaving body, his voice steady and yet weakening. It was *because* of the world that he died how he did. It was *because* of the brokenness of the world, the sin of the world, the fear of the world that he died as he did.

Did he die for us this day thousands of years ago? Most definitely. He knew us and he loved us and he would die for us again today and indeed he dies with our hearts and our souls as he lives, risen, alive with us.

Did he have to die this way? Most definitely not.

You stand in the kitchen with the last plate in your hands. You sit by his bedside and wonder what you can say to give you back the years. You watch the television and see bodies falling, completely unable to know what it feels like to be an Iraqi in 2008. You stand. You sit. You watch. A tear comes down your face and you wonder if this is really how it all has to be. Is this it? Is this how it has to end? Most definitely not.

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[1] [http://www.nationalpriorities.org/costofwar\\_home](http://www.nationalpriorities.org/costofwar_home)

[2] [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-03/21/content\\_7829922.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-03/21/content_7829922.htm)

[3] This sermon was greatly influenced by *The Last Week: What the Gospels Really Teach About Jesus's Final Days in Jerusalem* by Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan, 2006, HarperSanFrancisco.

[4] Borg and Crossan 146