

The story we hear today contains horrors a-plenty.  
How do we begin to parse the brutality Jesus endured?  
He was stripped of his freedom, his dignity, his well-being, as well as his clothes.  
But what gets to me the most is his being pinned to that cross like a bug,  
unable to move, unable to scratch his nose,  
wipe the blood and sweat and tears running down his face... utterly powerless.

How could the Son of God, the Lord of Heaven and Earth have so little power?  
The leaders and soldiers mocked him, *"He saved others; let him save himself  
if he is the Messiah, God's chosen one!"*  
His mother, watched it all unfold, unable to protect her firstborn.  
The thief crucified with him demanded he save himself and them.  
His followers were no doubt crying, "Why doesn't he just do something, for God's  
sake? We saw him walk on water, heal thousands, raise a man four days dead.  
Why is he just taking this all? Why doesn't he do something?!"  
How betrayed they must have felt, amidst the horror and grief.  
And how utterly powerless they must have known themselves to be.

Yet Jesus had never used a weapon deadlier than his often sharp tongue.  
He had sent his followers out on mission without even sandals or money,  
let alone any way of defending themselves.  
Just last night, in the Garden of Gethsemane,  
he had told his disciples to put away their swords.  
Violence was not and never has been the way of God.

What the world displays as power – military might, financial supremacy,  
suppressing and oppressing people who are different,  
is not ever the way God's victories are won.  
The Hebrew bible is full of stories of battles that are won only when the people  
of Israel follow the Lord's instructions, which often make no sense militarily.  
When they go their own, their human way, they fail.  
When they do what God says – go with half the number of troops, circle a city  
seven times, lead with the praise singers instead of cavalry – they prevail.  
The battle belongs to the Lord.

Throughout his ministry Jesus refused to engage his enemies with force. He engaged them with words, with healing actions, with power that looked to humans like miracles, but are simply the way God's love works. When attacked, he walked away. When arrested, he withstood. Even to the point of torture and a brutal death.

Did Jesus have to die?

There are as many theories on that as there are theologians. What we know that humans killed him – scared, stupid humans using their own distorted logic of how to get ahead, how to stay secure. A better question might be: did he have to die this way? No. But this is the way he died. This was the natural result of human ways of being and thinking. But my ways are not your ways, nor my thoughts your thoughts, says the Lord.

Even if Jesus did not have to die in this way, in order to overcome death, he did have to die. There is no resurrection without death, and in order for us to be raised with him he had to die with us. Jesus was – and is – in the business of transformation. And that meant he also had to transform death. And so the most powerful person the world had ever seen was humiliated, tortured and died.

Why would the church of Jesus Christ tell such a story, and hold to it stubbornly for over 2000 years? First, because it must have happened, in ways pretty close to this. And because those original followers of Christ learned there was power they couldn't see with their eyes, or experience in their gut – There was power they had to accept by faith and let God play out God's story. And boy, does God have a story for us.

In the story God tells love is more powerful than force. It is love that converts, not force that compels. It is love that heals, love that forgives, love that releases, love that transforms. Jesus came to invite us into God's story – to tell us God's story again, for humankind has a way of forgetting the ways of God. That's a downside of the free will God gave us – we start to think we're in charge. We start to think the power is ours.

Power is a tricky thing. As soon as we think we have it, we start to lose it. Because all power really belongs to God. God is the source of it. And God's power is not the same as human power.

God's way is not the way of condemning others, shutting borders, building walls, enriching the wealthy, holding privilege to a few. God's way, the way of Jesus, the way of Love, means opening our hearts to people who are different from us, even those who might hurt us. It is the way of transcending conflict and listening to those with grievances, of promoting forgiveness and embracing the Other. It calls us to lay down our power and prerogatives.

The way of Jesus was not intimidation, but invitation; not harming but healing; not dominating but transforming. All those followers he gathered were people who found their lives transformed by the power of God they experienced in Jesus.

If you're here today, chances are you've experienced transformation in Christ. Or you're hungry for it. Because we all have circumstances we want transformed. We all have patterns and habits and ways of thinking and being that do not reflect the fullness of God's purpose for us. Often we think we have to bulldoze our way through our challenges, controlling ourselves or other people to get what we want. Jesus invites us to another way: the power in powerlessness. St. Paul discovered, through his great challenges in his amazing ministry in which thousands of lives and communities were transformed – that when he was at his weakest, he felt God's power kick in. Any recovering addict will tell you the same. As long as we think we can do it, God lets us – we have free will. But the moment we remember, "I got nothin' ...," God's power is right there.

What do you feel powerless about in your life?  
In this community of La Plata? Charles County? Our nation?  
Remember that God is in the business of transformation – as we allow God to work through us. It's not our work. It's God's work. On that cross, Jesus allowed God to work through him in utter powerlessness. What looked like the greatest defeat in history was in fact the greatest triumph. A cosmic victory for all time and all places and all people and all creation.

That sacrifice need never be repeated. But the work of transformation goes on.  
Just think what God can do through us as we embrace our powerlessness,  
And allow the almighty power of God to flow through us?  
Amen.

**The Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ According to Luke, Part 2:  
Jesus is Taken to Golgotha and Crucified (Luke 23:26-43)**

As they led him away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming from the country, and they laid the cross on him, and made him carry it behind Jesus. A great number of the people followed him, and among them were women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him. But Jesus turned to them and said, 'Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For the days are surely coming when they will say, "Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed." Then they will begin to say to the mountains, "Fall on us"; and to the hills, "Cover us." For if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?'

Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus<sup>\*</sup> there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. Then Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.' And they cast lots to divide his clothing. And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, 'He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!' The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, and saying, 'If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!' There was also an inscription over him, 'This is the King of the Jews.'

One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, 'Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!' But the other rebuked him, saying, 'Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.' Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' He replied, 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.'