

**Pastor Troy E. Medlin
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Exaltation of the Forsaken One

Over the years I've sat with folks as we shared with one another moments that have reshaped our lives. Experiences that came to us out of nowhere and changed us forever. Days that have left us shaken. Like the ground beneath us had shifted. Faith that like a house of cards comes tumbling down or a death comes too soon. Your innocence is gone. The world is not as tidy, idyllic or ideal as you thought.

You may even say "it feels like my world is ending."

Alone, deserted, forsaken.

"Travis couldn't afford college, writes the Atlantic, but he wanted a good job with a solid paycheck, so he decided to become a welder like his grandmother. But after taking a 13-week course to get a welding certificate, Travis hasn't been able to find a full-time job in Chicago. He's currently piecing together two part-time jobs that both pay minimum wage. Part of the problem, he told me, is that kids that grow up in neighborhoods like his often don't know how to apply to jobs or where to seek out help. "I think there's not as many resources as there are in other neighborhoods?" he said.

Why are large swaths of Chicago unable to get ahead? One obvious reason is the legacy of segregation that has made it difficult for poor black families to gain access to the economic activity in other parts of the city. He said, "the walls around the ghetto are reinforced."

Some people live where you might call "the ends of the world." Geographically, socially, spiritually. Those boundaries are closer than we might care to admit. Austin. North Ave. Other intersections: real and imagined. All powerful.

"Cursed is the one who is hung on a tree."

"Though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. He humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death-- even death on a cross."

He was led outside of the gates of the city to Golgotha: the place of the skull. Between two bandits.

Where has the end invaded your present? A diagnosis. Chronic pain. Loneliness that seems to envelope you. A sense of powerlessness. A decision made by someone you love? A relational fracture that seems like it could never be put back together. A situation

where the rug was pulled out from under you. A present that looks unrecognizable from what you imagined or hoped to create?

“From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

The God of all creation has gone to the forsaken places of your life and mine. And to the forsaken places all over this wounded earth. The places where others look away in horror and fear. Christ draws near. You know what they look, feel, and sound like.

The place where forgiveness seems impossible. The nightmare of gun violence shows no signs of ending.

Like Lazarus last week we encounter others trapped in tombs. Like we are. Not able to see life beyond their narrow chambers. No beginning from this end.

“When he breathed his last the curtain of the temple was torn in two. The earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised.”

In the mystery of the cross see how its branches reach out and welcome you. Touch you. Carry you. In his embrace, life himself is interrupting all our dead ends and entering places left for dead even in yourself. The forsaken people and places are never forgotten but re-membered, always in God's economy. At the beginning of Holy Week tombs are opened. The ones you are trapped in are not your final destination. You are forgiven and never alone. In his death you have died and are reborn. This God of the cross is also the God of the empty tomb. The forsaken and exalted one is working the miracle of resurrection- life after all our striving- especially at the ends of the world.

