

Do you remember when Easter meant a special new outfit, particularly for children? For years I kept the Easter hat my mother bought when I was three years old. We also got white patent leather Mary Janes. I hope families still buy new clothes and we can have Easter “parades” where we can show off our finery (especially the hats!).

But before we get to Sunday, we must go through Friday, ironically referred to as Good Friday. Many Protestants neglect this day, preferring not to deal with what Jesus endured that day. Before the cross became a symbol of our faith, it was an instrument of torture and death.

This story from North Carolina reminds us of that. In 1989 a film crew was on the campus of Duke University, a United Methodist school, filming *The Handmaid’s Tale*. As part of the film, they built a gallows outside Duke Chapel, the worship center of the community and a popular site for weddings. Couples planning on getting married were not pleased that the first sight upon leaving the church would be an instrument of execution.

The Dean of the Chapel, who at the time was Rev. Will Willimon, objected to the local newspaper, saying, “As a Methodist minister, I find all forms of capital punishment repugnant. Duke Chapel is a sacred place to many of us, and the scene going on seems to be kind of a violation of that sacredness.”

A reader of that quote wrote a letter to the editor in reply: “I don’t understand what all the fuss is about. Maybe people who are upset have not noticed the cross at the center of Duke University Chapel.”

He’s right – at the center of our Christian faith is a form of capital punishment. But what happened through Christ on the cross is that God acted to redeem what was meant as death to become life. As Paul writes to the church in Corinth, the cross is a stumbling block and foolishness to those who do not believe. It is an instrument of torture and death that we elevate in our sanctuaries. But to us who believe, who claim Christ as our savior, it is wisdom and power. God is able to take what is meant to be death and transform it into life.