

A Pastor's Reflections on The Lake Burien Presbyterian Exhibit  
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By Rev. Dani Forbess, Northminster PC

I had been following the journey on social media, so I knew that I wanted to make time to see the exhibit. But I was not prepared for the gravity of the exhibit.

The backdrop of the story stretches back - way back. Images from West and Central Africa fill the walls. We begin by celebrating a culture that endured the most brutal forced migration in history. The invitation is to see where the savage story of the slave trade began, and the hallmarks of the culture that it brought with it. The breath taking, human lens through which we begin this journey was enough to cleanse my spirit, open my eyes, and prepare me for the rest of the story.

And the rest of the story is heart wrenching, sickening, with spells of gut seizing nausea. Excerpts from 19th century newspapers, selling human bodies. Descriptions of human beings that sound even less like machinery and more like farm animals. An ongoing story beyond the abolition movement that moved toward prison labor, lynching, and then to mass incarceration and police brutality. Photos that one must breathe deeply through, because our instincts are to look away.

Then an invitation into the sanctuary - a place of worship. This movement from history into our current story pulses with vigor. The sanctuary is laced with human figures in the position of power. It is full of phrases that invite action. It is a place where the momentum of the historical narrative can be stopped in its tracks, and then begin to be transformed.

There are many reasons to make this pilgrimage down to Lake Burien. This was funded in part by the Seattle Presbytery and a local grant through SPU and the Lily Foundation. This was dreamed up and brought to pass by young students in the Lake B community. This is a wonderful example of how the church can serve the local community while lobbying for change.

But the most important reason to make this pilgrimage is that we cannot change our history unless we let it live. It will not be undone by pretending that it is not there. It is a story that must be told over and over again. Through hearing it and experiencing it, we will find the road to transformation together, or not at all.