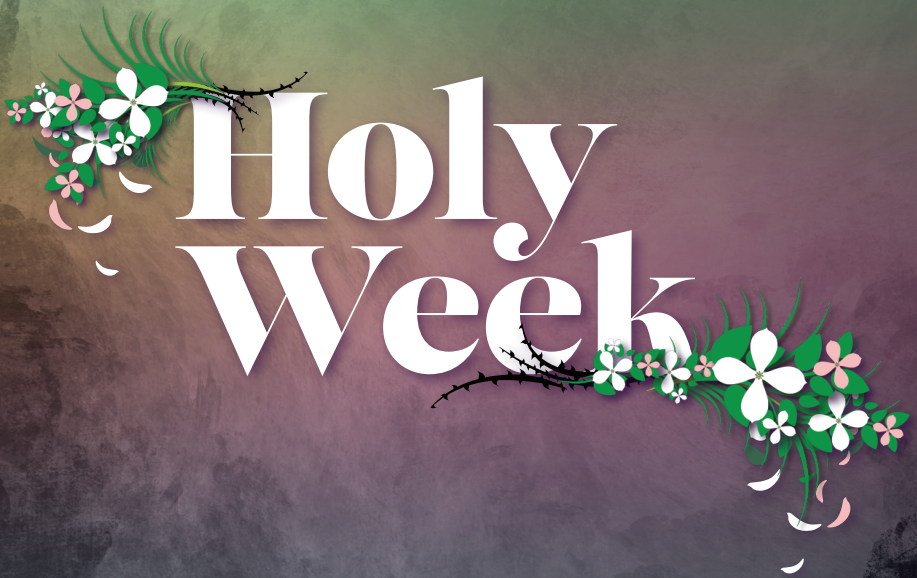


Holy Week

The title 'Holy Week' is written in a large, white, serif font. It is framed by decorative elements: a branch with green leaves and small pink and white flowers on the left, and a similar branch on the right. Small white and pink petals are scattered around the branches.

2024 Devotional
Highland Park United Methodist Church



You're about to embark on a journey—a pilgrimage through the final week in the life of Jesus. For thousands of years, Christians around the world have commemorated the days leading up to Easter through worship and reflection on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In Christian tradition, the days between Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday are known collectively as Holy Week. More than any other time of the year, Holy Week offers the opportunity to slow down and experience the true meaning and significance of the Lenten season—but only if we're intentional. If we want to hear God's voice speaking to us through these momentous days, it will require intentionality on our part to carve time out of our regular rhythm.

This devotional is meant to help you do just that: carve out time in your regular rhythm to experience the true meaning of Easter. We hope your heart is stirred as you participate in these stories, and over the next week, we pray you will experience anew the joy of Easter, knowing that because Jesus has risen, all things can be made new.

Blessings on your journey!

Alex Johnston
Director of Spiritual Formation

Rev. Tripp Gullede
MCLN Resident, Cox Chapel

Elizabeth Hamill
Education Coordinator



Palm Sunday

March 21, 2021

Read: John 12:12-19

The next day the great crowd that had come for the festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting,

“Hosanna!”

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Blessed is the king of Israel!”

Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, as it is written:

“Do not be afraid, Daughter Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey’s colt.”

At first, his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that these things had been done to him.

Now the crowd that was with him when he called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to spread the word. Many people, because they had heard that he had performed this sign, went out to meet him. So the Pharisees said to one another, “See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!”

Reflect

Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem for Passover is often called the "triumphal entry," and it was triumphant! Imagine the scene. Tens of thousands of pilgrims descended on Jerusalem each year to celebrate Passover, so the city would have been chaotic and the air electric. A crowd gathered around Jesus waving palm branches in the air, which symbolized victory and deliverance in their culture, and laid their coats down on the ground in his path. Jesus received a welcome fit for a king because when he rode in on a donkey like King David and Solomon did centuries before him, this crowd recognized that he was the promised king they had been waiting for.

This was just a few days before Passover, the most important holiday of the year celebrating God's act of love and deliverance for His people when He freed them from their slavery in Egypt. No doubt this crowd hoped Jesus was going to usher in God's next great act of Passover deliverance for them by freeing them from their new oppressors, the Romans.

"Hosanna! Save us!" they cried. Yet we know, as Jesus did then, that what he was about to do would not look anything like what they expected. Instead of a mighty conqueror, Jesus was the Passover lamb to be sacrificed, and the only blood that would be shed in this act of salvation was his.

Today, we wave palm branches on Palm Sunday to celebrate King Jesus and the deliverance he brings, with an eye toward Good Friday, when the King answered our cries for salvation by freeing us from the chains of the far greater oppressor of sin and death itself.

Discuss

- Jesus is not just the king of Israel but of all nations, and you and I are called to submit every part of our lives to his rule and reign. Do you recognize him as the King reigning over your life? Are there areas of your life that you need to surrender to his control and his will?
- How has Jesus surprised you with his goodness in your life? When has he shown up in ways that you didn't expect? Take some time today to praise and thank the one who is both the King and the Lamb for his plans and purposes for this world that are even better than what you or I could imagine.



Monday

March 25, 2021

Read: Mark 11:12-19

On the following day, when they came from Bethany, he was hungry. And seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see if he could find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. And he said to it, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard it.

And they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. And he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. And he was teaching them and saying to them, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers." And the chief priests and the scribes heard it and were seeking a way to destroy him, for they feared him, because all the crowd was astonished at his teaching. And when evening came they went out of the city.



Reflect

While there are no traditional liturgies or worship services associated with the Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday of Holy Week, the week as a whole offers us the opportunity to reflect on significant moments in the last week of Jesus' life. In Mark's Gospel, right after

Jesus rides into Jerusalem, he visits the Temple. This was the place that represented God's presence with His people, the place where heaven and earth collide. Only, what Jesus finds there is corruption and greed; a system that preys upon the vulnerable and creates distance between God and the people who come to worship Him. What a tragedy!

Mark cleverly warned us about what Jesus would find at the Temple by introducing the story with a short, seemingly random vignette about a fig tree with no fruit. Israel is often referred to as a fig tree throughout the Old Testament. When Israel is following God, they are said to be like a fig tree weighed down with ripe fruit. But when they stray, as Micah 7:1-2 describes, "There is no cluster to eat, no first-ripe fig that my soul desires. The godly have perished from the earth, and there is no one upright among mankind." Together, these two stories reveal that the Temple system, originally meant to be a blessing for God's people, is failing; there is no ripe fruit to be found.

Today, there is no Temple to mediate God's blessing to the rest of the world. In a surprising turn of events, Jesus created a new kind of temple, not one made of brick or stone, but of people! 1 Corinthians 6:19 says, "Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?" And just like the original Temple, we are called to produce good fruit—namely, the fruit of the Spirit, which is "love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Gal. 5:22-23).

Discuss

- Jesus gets angry when he sees what's become of his Father's house. Usually, what makes us angry shows us what we really love. What are the things that make you mad, and what does that reveal about what you value and love most?
- In John 15:5, Jesus says, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you abide in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." The word abide can also be translated as "to make your home in." What are some things we're tempted to make our home apart from Jesus? What kind of fruit do these things produce in us? What does it mean for you to make your home in Jesus in order to bear good fruit in your life?



Tuesday

March 26, 2021

Read: John 12:23-33

And Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.

"Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But for this purpose, I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven: "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." The crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die.



Reflect

Jesus knew what was coming. He knew he faced immense pain and suffering on the cross. And yet he was willing to go to the cross anyway out of a deep love for you and me. The magnitude of this moment cannot be overstated. It is this moment that makes Jesus' death on the cross and his resurrection possible. Jesus openly admits to wrestling with the idea of suffering, and yet he refuses to give in to his own desires. He doesn't take the easy way out or choose to avoid pain. Instead, he puts his trust in God and submits to what's coming.

In doing so, Jesus reverses all that went wrong in the Garden in the beginning: Where Adam and Eve gave in to the temptation to follow their own desires and do whatever was right in their own eyes, Jesus does the opposite, and so becomes the kind of human we so often fail to be. And yet, Jesus offers us a chance to join him in this endeavor. Jesus invites us to die to ourselves: our way of doing things, our selfish desires, our perceived wisdom—and follow him, trusting God's wisdom and will for our lives.

Jesus entered Jerusalem as a king, but the crowd can't understand what he says now. How can a king come to die? And not just any death, but a brutal, humiliating death. The people wanted a Messiah who would rule forever, overthrowing their oppressors and setting them free. What kind of king could do that from the grave? Little did they know that's not where Jesus would stay.

Discuss

- In what ways are you tempted to define for yourself what is good or not good, rather than trusting God to do that for you?
- How might you need to die to your own desires and way of doing things in order to experience the kind of abundant life God offers?

Wednesday

March 27, 2021



Read: Mark 14:1-9

Now the Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread were only two days away, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were scheming to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him. "But not during the festival," they said, "or the people may riot."

While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head.

Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, "Why this waste of perfume? It could have been sold for more than a year's wages and the money given to the poor." And they rebuked her harshly.

"Leave her alone," said Jesus. "Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."

Reflect

Stretching back to the earliest days of ancient Israel, there is a ritual of taking rich, perfumed oil and pouring it onto special objects and people, marking them as a place where God's heavenly presence has come down to earth. This is called anointing. Throughout the biblical storyline, Israel's priests, kings, and prophets were anointed with oil to set them apart as leaders, but their inevitable personal failures led Israel to hope for a future ultimate Messiah, which is the word for "Anointed One" in Hebrew.

Everything about the scene Mark describes for us of Jesus' anointing feels lavish. Can you imagine holding a jar of perfumed oil worth a whole year's worth of your wages and pouring every last drop out on Jesus? If we're honest, we would probably react like the disciples, who see it as excessive; she could have anointed him with a small amount of the oil, after all. But not Jesus. He recognizes that it is an act of worship. She recognizes that He is the ultimate Anointed One, the Messiah that Israel has been waiting for, and expresses her gratitude and devotion in this unreserved display.

What's more, the Jews anointed bodies to prepare them for burial, and as the tensions of Holy Week built to a crescendo, Jesus also recognized this as an anticipatory burial anointing; this was the scent that would hang on him as he walked towards the cross. What could be a more sacred use of this most precious oil than to anoint the man who was about to willingly submit himself to ridicule, betrayal, and death for the sake of humanity? Even this extravagant gift, which we are tempted to balk at, pales in comparison to the extravagance of Jesus' gift to us when he laid down his life.

Discuss

- How do you think you would have reacted to the woman's act if you were one of the disciples around Jesus?
- How can you emulate the woman's example of sacrificial love and devotion in your relationship with Jesus?

Maundy Thursday

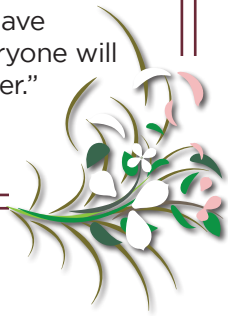
March 28, 2021

Read: John 13:31-35

Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once.

"My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come.

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."



Reflect

You will know them by their love. Every Thursday of Holy Week, we recount the last meal Jesus shared with his disciples. While each of the four Gospel accounts offers a glimpse into this momentous meal, it's from John's account we get the name Maundy Thursday. "Maundy" comes from the Latin word *mandatum*, which means "command," a nod to the command Jesus gives his followers to love one another.

This was no simple command. Jesus himself demonstrated exactly what kind of love he was talking about earlier during the meal when he bent low to wash the feet of his disciples. Foot washing was a menial and demeaning task, the job of servants—the lowest of the low. But Jesus doesn't see it that way. In Jesus' Kingdom, the first shall be last, and the last shall be first. The Son of God lowered himself to the position of a servant and carefully washed the feet of each of his disciples (even Judas!) in an extravagant display of humility and love.

He said to the disciples, "Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet" (John 13:14). The message is clear: there is no hierarchy in God's Kingdom. No power structures. What does it mean to love one another? The love of Jesus is a love that wills the good of the other ahead of ourselves. It's the kind of love that demands we be willing to do the unthinkable, to let go of our pride and, in humility, offer all of ourselves in service of our brothers and sisters. For this reason, many churches include foot washing as part of their Maundy Thursday services.

Discuss

- What does it look like for us to "wash the feet" of others, embracing Jesus' humility and compassion while being willing to go out of our comfort zones?
- Jesus even washes the feet of Judas, his betrayer. Consider a difficult situation you're facing with another person, and ask: "What does love require of me in this moment?" Is it a clear answer? If not, whom could you ask for help discerning what God is asking of you?

Good Friday

March 29, 2021

Read: Matthew 27:45-54

Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" And some of the bystanders, hearing it, said, "This man is calling Elijah." And one of them at once ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink. But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him." And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit.

And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And 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, and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, "Truly this was the Son of God!"

Read: Hebrews 4:14-16

Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Reflect

It was for us that Jesus was nailed to the cross. For us, he endured the agonies of the nails in his hands and feet. This day on our calendar is so sad—how could Friday be good? Hebrews dares to answer just that question. As we journey through the gripping stories of Jesus' passion, it's helpful to also look to other corners of Scripture to see how early Christians interpreted them. Our ancestors spent a lot of time pondering how the humanity and divinity of Jesus are related. The short answer is that, in Jesus, humanity and divinity are perfectly united but never mingled. The humanity of Jesus is perhaps never more important than on Good Friday. Some ancients thought Jesus might have just been a ghost who never really suffered, but the church strongly refuted that idea. The Son of God felt every painful piece of his Passion: mental, emotional, physical, and even spiritual. This is why Hebrews is so adamant in proclaiming that "we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses." Instead, Jesus knows the depths of everything we feel, the good and the bad.

As Jesus yielded his spirit, Matthew tells us that the veil of the Temple was torn in two, signifying that the boundaries between us and God have now disappeared. Because of Good Friday, we have access to God without the need for more sacrifices or other priestly figures; Jesus took care of all of that once and for all. To rescue us from eternal darkness and despair, Jesus gave up his life.

In the early history of worship, a tradition developed of keeping a vigil in memory of Jesus' Passion. The thought was that, since Jesus cared enough to experience human pain for our salvation, we ought to spend time meditating on his Passion so that we might experience it with him. No matter where or how you worship on Good Friday, let the story draw you in. Let your confidence in the fact that Jesus suffers with you inspire you to move with him into the glory of resurrection.

Discuss

- What weakness of mine is Jesus reminding me that he empathizes with? What burden can be lifted when I remember that Jesus walks through my pain with me?
- How can I do my part to experience Jesus' Passion with him?

Holy Saturday

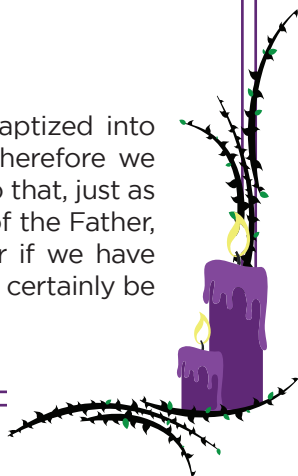
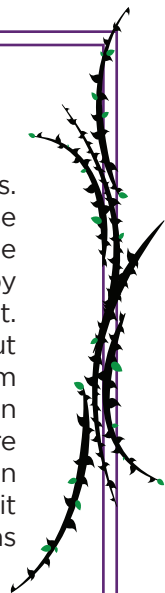
March 30, 2021

Read: John 19:38-42

Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away. He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

Read: Romans 6:3-5

Do you not know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we were buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.



Reflect

Can you imagine how the disciples must have felt on Saturday? Together, they'd laid Jesus' body in a borrowed tomb, likely feeling helpless and unsure of what would come. Today, we have the benefit of knowing that Easter Sunday morning approaches. But don't rush it. Remember this moment: The moment when all hope seemed lost as Jesus' body lay in the tomb. It may have looked like Jesus' death was an ending, but as we gaze on Holy Saturday with resurrection eyes, we know it is only the beginning. And this is still true for us today. While we are waiting, even when we don't sense it, God is working.

It was out of this sense of waiting that the Easter Vigil tradition developed. As the celebration of Easter grew in scale, it spread out over several days to Good Friday, leading to what is now called in the high church traditions the Triduum, or "great three days." In this framework, Saturday is the most climactic celebration of all of Holy Week. It is literally and theologically how we get from Friday to Sunday.

Romans 6 occupies a similar role, reminding us that our journey with Jesus is inclusive of every human experience. Baptism just means dipping or immersion, reminding us that we are immersed in the whole story of God's salvation in history. God's whole story becomes our whole story. God has been saving us all the way from Genesis, to the Passover, to the deliverance at the Red Sea, through the hopeful messages of the prophets, all the way to the lasting hope of the Resurrection. Holy Saturday therefore reminds us that God has always been in the business of salvation and redemption, even on these seemingly forgotten days of waiting.

Discuss

- What are you still waiting on God for? Where are you hoping God will break into your life or the life of someone you love?
- What does it mean to remember that you are united with Christ in both his death and resurrection? How do you see yourself taking part in the grand story of God?

Easter Sunday

March 31, 2021

Read: Matthew 28:1-10

After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you."

So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

Reflect

Three days Jesus stayed in the tomb. Three days where all hope seemed lost. But on the third day, something unexpected happened. Where there once was death, new life sprang forth. For thousands of years, Christians have celebrated the hope and promise of Easter Sunday morning. The Resurrection altered the rhythm of our lives—the earliest Christians began their week with Sundays, often by gathering together for worship, because Jesus rose on a Sunday.

Now, each year, we continue the tradition of worshiping together on Easter Sunday to remind ourselves that because Jesus rose from the dead, so too can we. Where there is death and brokenness, God desires to bring life and renewal. This is the good news of Easter: because Christ conquered the grave, everything that appears dead or hopeless can be reversed thanks to the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Take a moment today to respond to all that we've experienced during Lent and Easter, inviting God to break into your life with the transforming power of the Holy Spirit in the name of Jesus.



***Eternal God, you raised from the dead our Lord Jesus
and by your Holy Spirit brought to life your Church.
Breathe upon us again with your spirit
and give new life to your people,
through the same Jesus Christ our Redeemer. Amen.***



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