



The Bell

April, 2021

Monthly Newsletter of the First Presbyterian Church Chippewa Falls. Wisconsin

HOLY WEEK AND JESUS' LAST DAYS ON EARTH

Note: The Gospels differ somewhat in their narration of the last days of Jesus before his crucifixion. The following is one possibility which may not be far from what actually took place.

We talk a lot about Palm Sunday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday but we don't discuss the days in between – Passion or Holy Week. Why did Jesus go to Jerusalem? What happened during the week leading up to the crucifixion? Those days were very important in the life of Jesus and we should know more about them.

Jewish law of that day stipulated that the devout make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem at least once a year. In order to fulfill that requirement, Jesus went to Jerusalem. He also knew that his days before the crucifixion were drawing to a close and for that, he needed to be in Jerusalem. Finally, Holy Week coincided, as it often does, with Passover so that was another compelling reason for him to make the journey.

On the Sunday before his death, Jesus began his trip to Jerusalem. Nearing the village of Bethphage, he sent two of his disciples ahead, to look for a donkey and its unbroken colt. The disciples were instructed to untie the animals and bring them to him. Then Jesus sat on the young donkey and slowly, humbly, made his entry into Jerusalem, fulfilling the ancient prophecy in Zechariah 9:9.

The crowds welcomed him by waving palm branches and shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"

That night Jesus and his disciples stayed in Bethany, a town about two miles east of Jerusalem. This is where Lazarus, whom Jesus had raised from the dead, and his two sisters, Mary and Martha, lived. They were close friends of Jesus, and possibly hosted him and his disciples during their final days in Jerusalem.

The following morning, Jesus returned with his disciples to Jerusalem and to the Temple, where he found the courts full of corrupt money changers. He began overturning their tables and clearing the Temple. On Monday evening Jesus again stayed in Bethany, possibly in the home of his friends, Mary, Martha, and Lazarus.

On Tuesday morning, Jesus and his disciples returned to Jerusalem. At the Temple, religious leaders were upset at Jesus for establishing himself as a spiritual authority. They organized an ambush
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intending to place him under arrest. But Jesus evaded their traps and pronounced harsh judgment on them.

Later that afternoon, Jesus left the city and went with his disciples to the Mount of Olives, where he prophesied about the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the age. Scripture indicates that this was also the day Judas Iscariot negotiated with the Sanhedrin to betray Jesus. After a tiring day of confrontation and warnings about the future, once again, Jesus and the disciples returned to Bethany to stay the night.

The Bible doesn't say what the Lord did on the Wednesday of Passion Week. Scholars speculate that after two exhausting days in Jerusalem, Jesus and his disciples spent this day resting in Bethany in anticipation of Passover.

Holy Week takes a somber turn on Thursday. From Bethany, Jesus sent Peter and John ahead to the Upper Room in Jerusalem to make preparations for the Passover Feast or Seder. That evening after sunset, Jesus washed the feet of his disciples as they prepared to share in the Passover. Then, Jesus shared the feast of Passover with them.

Later, Jesus and the disciples left the Upper Room and went to the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus prayed in agony to God. Late that evening in Gethsemane, Jesus was betrayed with a kiss by Judas Iscariot and arrested by the Sanhedrin. He was taken to the home of Caiaphas, the High Priest, where the whole council had gathered to make their case against Jesus. Meanwhile, in the early morning hours, as Jesus' trial was getting underway, Peter denied knowing his Master three times before the rooster crowed.

Good Friday is the most difficult day of Passion Week.

According to Scripture, Judas Iscariot, the disciple who had betrayed Jesus, was overcome with remorse and hanged himself early Friday morning.

Meanwhile, before the third hour (9 a.m.), Jesus endured false accusations, condemnation, mockery, beatings, and abandonment. After multiple unlawful trials, he was sentenced to death by crucifixion, one of the most horrible and disgraceful methods of capital punishment known at the time.

Before Christ was led away, soldiers spit on him, tormented him, mocked him, and pierced him with a crown of thorns. Then Jesus carried his own cross to Calvary where, again, he was mocked and insulted as Roman soldiers nailed him to the wooden cross. Then, about the ninth hour (3 p.m.), Jesus breathed his last breath and died. By 6 p.m. Friday evening, Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea took Jesus' body down from the cross and lay it in a tomb.

Jesus' body lay in its tomb, where it was guarded by Roman soldiers throughout the day on Saturday, which was the Sabbath. When the Sabbath ended at 6 p.m., Christ's body was ceremonially treated for burial with spices purchased by Nicodemus.

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Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, were members of the Sanhedrin, the court that had condemned Jesus Christ to death. For a time, both men had lived as secret followers of Jesus, afraid to make a public profession of faith because of their prominent positions in the Jewish community. They were both deeply affected by Christ's death and came out of hiding, risking their reputations and their lives because they realized that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah. Together they cared for Jesus' body and prepared it for burial.

On Easter Sunday, we reach the culmination of Holy Week. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the most important event of the Christian faith. The very foundation of all Christian doctrine hinges on the truth of this account.

Early Sunday morning, several women (Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Salome, and Mary the mother of James) went to the tomb and discovered that the large stone covering the entrance had been rolled away.

On the day of his resurrection, Jesus Christ made at least five appearances. Mark's Gospel says the first person to see him was Mary Magdalene. Jesus also appeared to Peter, to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, and later that day to all of the disciples except Thomas, while they were gathered in a house for prayer.

As we move toward Holy Week 2021, it is important that we reflect on all that happened in the life of Christ leading up to the crucifixion and his resurrection.

SERVICE SET FOR BETTY COLEMAN

April 23 is the date selected for Betty Coleman's memorial service. Visitation will be held from 10 to 11 AM with the service beginning at 11 officiated by Rev. Barry Boyer. A luncheon at the Fill-Inn Station will follow the service.

Masks must be worn and social distancing practiced as is the practice during the pandemic.

KEVIN LITTEN JOINS NOMINATING COMMITTEE AS CHAIR

The session has selected Kevin Litten to join the 2021 Nominating Committee. As Session representative, Kevin will serve as chair of the committee. He joins Margi Kohl, Marlys Daniels, Gary Shorrel, Erik Anderson and Moderator Ken Ribe on this committee. Since the sole responsibility of the committee is to present a slate of leaders for the coming year, it is expected their work won't begin until Fall.

FPC OPENS FOR IN-PERSON MEETINGS IN APRIL

The church opening for in-person worship means other groups and committees will be able to meet at FPC as long as they observe the rules of wearing masks, practicing social distancing and cleaning the area following their meeting.

The weekly meetings of Optimists will resume on Wednesday morning, April 7 in Fellowship Hall.

In addition the Red Cross blood drive, which was deferred earlier, will be held in Fellowship Hall on June 30 and again on August 25. Put those dates on your calendar if you wish to donate blood.

Church committees wishing to use the church for meetings should clear the time and location with the office.

CHURCH DIRECTORY TO BE OFFERED ON FPC WEBSITE

Now that the church is publishing the members and friends directory only once a year, we find that changes, many of which are made weekly if not daily, will not be made available until the directory is printed again in January. This causes problems for our members and friends who often need to reach one another only to find the phone number, email address or street address printed in the directory is out of date or incorrect.

In order to correct this problem and make our directory more up-to-date, the directory information will become part of the church website beginning in May.

The directory will appear in a Members Only section accessible only by an invitation which you will be sent by email. **It will be available only by this special invitation not open to the general public.**

All members and friends who are listed in the printed directory will be included in the on-line version and will receive the Members Only invitation. If you do not wish to have your information on our website, please contact the office during April and your information will be removed and you will not have access to the on-line directory. If we don't hear from you, you will be included in the on-line directory.

Having the on-line directory available will give you the ability to access up-to-date information on members and friends and allow the church to up-date the listings as we get new information.

EASTER LILIES STILL AVAILABLE FOR PURCHASE

Many of the Easter Lilies used to decorate the sanctuary on Easter Sunday are still available for purchase. The cost is \$8.00 per plant and the lilies can be taken home following the service on April 4. If you wish to purchase a lily, please contact the office.

FPC MARKS EASTER

The Easter service at FPC will be a very special one. Not only does it celebrate the risen Lord, but it will mark our return to in-person worship. There will be special Easter music, Easter lilies and banners in the sanctuary, the Easter Bonnet Event and a special sweet treat to take home.

It's a service you won't want to miss!

ONE GREAT HOUR OF SHARING

A special offering for One Great Hour of sharing will be taken on Easter Sunday. This ministry supports Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, the Presbyterian Hunger Program, and Self-Development of People which gives support toward the self-development of poor and oppressed communities.

If you would like to participate in this offering, you can make your contribution on Easter morning or by sending your check to the office with "One Great Hour of Sharing" in the memo line.

IRS MAKES CHANGES TO CHURCH DONATION REGULATIONS

by Jay Wilkinson, Treasurer, Presbytery of Northern Waters

Donations to First Presbyterian Church are tax deductible like gifts to many or most non-profit organizations. However, changes to the tax laws a couple of years ago increased the standard deduction amounts (and eliminated the personal exemption amounts) to the point that for many (or perhaps most) taxpayers total itemized deductions are now less than the standard deduction.

Many of us who are retired depend on using a portion of our savings in Individual Retirement Accounts (IRA) to use for living expenses including donations to the church and other non-profits. Those owners of IRAs who are age 72 or greater have a Required Minimum Distribution (RMD) that must be taken from your IRA as taxable income, even if you don't need those funds.

For those who are at least 70½, the tax laws provide a way to make your charitable donations from your IRA without having those funds become taxable income. This is called a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD). A QCD is a direct transfer of funds from your IRA custodian, payable to a qualified charity, such as First Presbyterian Church.

QCDs can be counted toward your RMD for the year, as long as certain rules are met. In addition to the benefits of giving to charity, a QCD excludes the amount donated from taxable income, which is unlike regular withdrawals from an IRA. This can keep your taxable income lower and therefore lower the income tax owed. Also, QCDs don't require that you itemize which means you can still use the higher standard deduction under the current tax law. This is part of the tax code that doesn't seem to get much publicity.

If you would like to take advantage of this or to get more information as to how it might lower your taxes, please contact your IRA custodian. Ask them about how a Qualified Charitable Distribution may help you and help the church too.