

Sermon † April 10, 2022
Palm Sunday ~ Luke 22:14-23:56
Frank H. Maxwell

Don't worry, this won't be a full blown sermon. After hearing the entire re-accounting of the passion of Jesus, there is not much else to say or do . . . but to ponder the words and the events; and to consider the week ahead.

Today, marks the beginning of a week that the Christian church refers to as *Holy*. Between this Sunday and next Sunday, *if you choose to participate*, you will be taken on a journey that will *literally* lead you to hell and back.

Here's what lies ahead . . .

- † At noon on Thursday we will gather in the Canterbury Room for a Seder meal. The same meal that Jesus and his friends shared in the Upper Room. When the meal is ended, we will move to the sanctuary.
- † From the beginning of the Maundy Thursday liturgy, we are met with an intensity unlike that of any other time in the year. We will experience the servanthood and sacrifice of the Lord Jesus and, through him, encounter the fundamental Christian interpretation of all life.
- † During Lent we have undertaken the wilderness path of renewal, a turning toward God: a path of examination, of truthfulness, of contrition, of repentance.
- † On Maundy Thursday, we are declared to be forgiven people. The forgiven life is a life of humble servanthood: a life willing to kneel for people, a life willing to honor the most humble of tasks, a life willing to sacrifice for others. It is a different way of living one's life in our contemporary world; and the motivating force behind such sacrifice is love.
- † The forgiven life is a life of connections, initiated by the bath called baptism, nourished by the meal called communion (from *communio*, a sharing of gifts). By eating together at the Lord's Table, we become what we have consumed: the body of Christ—united with God, with Christ, with the saints, united with each other and with all creation.
- † By drinking the wine, we are nourished by the joy that follows suffering, as the grapes *in being crushed* become together something new. "*As often as we eat of this bread and drink of this cup, we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.*"
- † As the Maundy Thursday liturgy closes, as we move into Good Friday, the Scriptures announce that in Jesus' suffering and death on the cross, creation is shaken to its core: the skies darken, the earth quakes, graves open. And significantly, the veil of the temple is torn in two from top to bottom. That which separated humans from God is entirely, irreparably,

orn. Defeat yields to victory. Sacrifice yields to thanksgiving. And the power of the cross is revealed.

- † This paradox of sacrifice and triumph is beautifully interwoven in Psalm 22, spoken from the cross by the suffering Christ, sung at the close of the Maundy Thursday service. The psalmist understands that in the darkness of this suffering is the spark of God's promise.
- † That spark of promise enters the darkness on the third day at the Vigil of Easter as we gather for the Easter Vigil. The spark enters and flames into the new fire and the paschal candle. Worshipers will come forward to the font and renew their baptism in the life-giving water. It is easily one of the most moving worship experiences of the entire year. All this will happen between today and next Sunday Easter Sunday.

Now . . . you don't have to participate in any of these services. You can simply appear here next Sunday morning . . . and I certainly won't think any less of you.

But, if you choose not to participate in the extra services of Holy Week . . . you will be less. For it is only when we take the time to truly contemplate who we are and what God has done that we become more.

Spending an additional three days at church this week is most assuredly viewed as an intrusion into our hectic and very important lives. We love Jesus . . . just as long as he doesn't ask to much of us.

Theologian Elizabeth Achtemeier truly understands this dilemma. She has written: "*Jesus Christ is an offense whom we crucify daily . . . daily with our disobedience.*"

Participation in the services of Holy Week will not cure all of your ills; it will not make all of your troubles go magically away.

But . . . if you choose to participate, you will experience the love, and forgiveness, and compassion of God in a very real and special way. In a world seemingly devoid of rules, maybe it is time to reconsider obedience to God. Amen