

The Truth Hurts (Matthew 26:14-35)

Lucy went to church for her first Holy Week service when she was nine years old. As the child of the pastor, she had only the supervision of her 12-year-old brother during the Tenebrae service. Tenebrae (TEN-uh-bray), by the way, is the name given to a church service during the final part of Holy Week, commemorating the suffering and death of Christ.

Back to Lucy and the Tenebrae service. At the end of each passage of Scripture telling the passion story, a reader extinguished candles and walked away into the congregation, disappearing like the friends who fled after Jesus' arrest. When the last reader spoke the words, "he breathed his last," Lucy's mother carried the last candle, the Christ candle, out of the chancel and into a back hallway. The congregation departed in silence. When the choir came quietly through the same doorway from the chancel, Lucy followed,

The Truth Hurts

page 2 of 8

weeping and found her way in the near darkness to her mother's arms. Choking back sobs, she whispered, "Mommy, there are lots of sad things in the Bible, but this is the saddest."

When we move too readily from the excitement of the palm parade to the joy of Easter morning, we miss that emotion, the comingled grief and regret felt by the disciples as they watched their teacher and friend marched off by the Roman soldiers, to be tried by the religious authorities. We miss the moments of helplessness and fear they experienced hiding in an upper room. We miss the ways **the truth hurts**.

After supper on their last night together, Jesus told the disciples they would desert him, not at some unpredictable time in the future, but that very night. Peter spoke up, and claimed that even if everyone else ran away, he would never desert Jesus. Imagine the rustle of their voices, all of them saying, "Jesus, dear Jesus, not me, I would never."

The Truth Hurts

page 3 of 8

This is part of our faith story. We do what we do not want to do. We deny what matters to us. We behave in ways that do not represent what we believe. And all the time we say with Peter, “Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you.”

This is part of our story. It is true, and **the truth hurts**.

It’s not surprising, then, that we fill our sanctuaries with shouted hosannas and alleluias, but see less of a turnout for the services in between.

When we avoid the pain, we also avoid the intimacy of those final conversations with Jesus, the passionate expressions of love and loyalty and the understated response from the one who knows what will happen. He does not sugarcoat for them. He trusts them with the truth.

If you were to ask Lucy, who is now in her twenties, she would tell you that Tenebrae is her favorite service of the church year. Whether she participates

as a reader or sits in the congregation, the stories of the

The Truth Hurts

page 4 of 8

passion move her and have formed her. We will all make mistakes and fall short, despite our best intentions to do otherwise. Jesus knows it, yet still loves us. This is **the truth** that heals.

The entrance to Jerusalem followed a prophecy that had been announced long ago by Zechariah (9:9). The people would immediately realize what was happening. They would also recognize that this king was not like those of the neighboring or dominant countries. Christ's work was not about subduing subjects, but about transforming lives, changing the world, with people who understood **the truth**. **The truth** that the kingdom of God was coming and that this kingdom was unlike any other earthly kingdom.

When Jesus argues with Pilate and says to him, "My kingdom does not belong to this world" (John 18:36), he isn't only speaking of the origins of his kingdom,

but also about his strategy for bringing the kingdom to earth. The kingdom of God, the kingdom whose

The Truth Hurts

page 5 of 8

essence is love, was already present; it was already showing itself, but it was not yet complete, not full.

Christ's kingdom wouldn't come with overwhelming force that establishes rule through control. Christ's kingdom comes as an invitation to a different way of living; a different way of living with love **and truth**.

Jesus enters Jerusalem to affirm that his kingdom of love, justice, and peace is possible. Jesus enters our hearts as well to tell us that his kingdom is possible in our lives and in our world. He enters simply and humbly because his kingdom is not built on violence, hatred, opposition, or the domination of the strongest. His kingdom becomes a reality wherever love rules. His strategy was to give his life, so that love would triumph—and he succeeded! Christ lives and reigns among us!

What we experience in life can help us see things in the Bible we might otherwise miss. For example, in the age of social divisions we witness today, we can

The Truth Hurts

page 6 of 8

understand how fragile a democracy can be. Pilate gave the crowds a moment to be a democracy by asking them to free, Jesus or Barabbas. The crowds chose Barabbas. The week before, crowds were cheering on Jesus as he entered Jerusalem. Within a week, the crowds saw things differently. Jesus takes our fickleness, our lack of insight, our willingness to follow the crowd with him to the cross. It is part of our brokenness that fails to see the **truth** of Jesus. However, our failures do not stop God's plan—God's will. From the cross, we learn that our foolish ways as individuals and as a society will not conquer God's will.

So, what are the lessons we can learn from this Scripture reading in Matthew?

This Scripture reading from Matthew highlights key lessons on faithfulness, human frailty, and divine

The Truth Hurts
7 of 8

page

sovereignty through the betrayal of Judas, the institution of the Lord's Supper, and Peter's predicted denial. It demonstrates that Jesus is in control of his destiny, warns against the love of money, and shows that relying on self-confidence leads to failure.

Please bow your heads as I pray.

Lord Jesus, as we read of your betrayal for thirty pieces of silver and the weakness of your disciples, we are reminded of our own fragility. Thank you for enduring the weight of human sin and betrayal, providing a covenant of forgiveness through your blood.

In times of temptation or when we face the sting of being let down, help us to remain faithful to you, rather than falter. Strengthen us, Lord, to trust in your providence when our own resolve is weak, and

The Truth Hurts
page 7 of 8

keep us from turning away when the road is difficult. Help us to remember that you know the pain of rejection and to find comfort in your abiding presence. May we live in gratitude for your unconditional love and unconditional sacrifice. We ask this in the name of your Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ. **Amen.**