



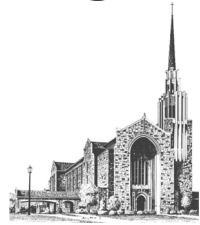
Journey
to the

Cross

2024 Holy Week Devotional

Wesley Memorial Methodist Church
High Point, North Carolina

Holy Week & Easter Schedule



Wesley Memorial Methodist Church
High Point, North Carolina

As we journey through Holy Week, we are called to pause and reflect on the profound significance of the events that unfolded in the final days of Jesus' earthly ministry. From the triumphant entry into Jerusalem to the solemn observances of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and the anticipation of Holy Saturday, we are invited to immerse ourselves in the narrative of Christ's sacrifice and resurrection.

Holy Week is not merely a historical recounting of past events; it is a sacred time for us to engage with the transformative power of Christ's story in our lives today. It is a time to meditate on His teachings, to contemplate the depth of His love, and to renew our commitment to follow Him as His disciples in the world.

To aid us in this spiritual journey, our Adult Spiritual Formation Team is pleased to present this Holy Week devotional. Within its pages, you will find reflections, prayers, and scripture passages designed to guide you through each day of this sacred week. Whether you participate in solitary reflection or join in community worship, may this devotional deepen your understanding of Christ's journey and draw you closer to His presence.

Adorn our crosses for Easter Sunday

Help our crosses bloom with new life on Easter Sunday. Crosses covered with chicken wire and palm branches will be placed outside in front of the Sanctuary and near the Bridge Cafe entrance. Members and friends of Wesley Memorial Church are invited to bring flowers (purchased or from your garden) to adorn the crosses starting Saturday, March 30, 2024. On Easter Sunday, these crosses will serve as the background for family photographs taken by a professional photographer.

Easter Pictures and Refreshments

As a gift to you, on Easter Sunday there will be a photo station set up to provide you with a free digital image and a free 4x6 photo print. The photo will be taken of you by the flower crosses, following the 9:45 a.m. service outside the Bridge Café and following the 11 a.m. on the front lawn. We will also have Kona Ice, lemonade, and cookies as a special Easter treat for you and your family.

JOURNEY TOGETHER



Palm Sunday

March 24, 2024

7:30 a.m. TV Service on WGHP FOX8
8:30 a.m. Traditional Worship in the Chapel
9:45 a.m. Contemporary Worship in the Fellowship Hall
11:00 a.m. Traditional Worship in the Sanctuary
3:00 p.m. Children's Ministry Easter Story Walk & Egg Hunt

Wednesday

March 27, 2024

6:00 p.m. Holy Week Vespers
Holy Communion and anointing of oil



Maundy Thursday

March 28, 2024

7:30 p.m. Maundy Thursday in the Sanctuary
Holy Communion to commemorate the Last Supper



Good Friday

March 29, 2024

7:30 p.m. Good Friday Service in the Sanctuary



Holy Saturday

March 30, 2024

7:30 p.m. Holy Saturday Service in the Sanctuary
Candlelight service of baptismal reaffirmation



Easter Sunday

March 30, 2024

7:00 a.m. Sunrise Service at the Columbarium
7:30 a.m. TV Service on WGHP FOX8
8:30 a.m. Traditional Worship in the Chapel
9:45 a.m. Contemporary Worship in the Fellowship Hall
11:00 a.m. Traditional Worship in the Sanctuary

DEVOTIONS



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Palm
Sunday

Philippians 2:5-11

"Walking the Path
with Jesus" by Les
Hurrelbrink

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Monday of
Holy Week

Matthew 21:12-13

"Echoes Across
Time" by Tucker
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Holy Week

Matthew 28:1-20

"Following in Jesus'
Footsteps" by Judy
Needham

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Wednesday
of Holy Week

Jeremiah 29:11
Acts 2:39-40

"Embracing the
Journey" by JoAnn
Clifton

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MARCH

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**Maundy
Thursday**

Matthew 22:36-40

“A Reflection of the Cross” by Melody Emerson, Director of Communication

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**Good
Friday**

Mark 10

“Union with Christ: A Journey of Love & Devotion” by Elli Yu, Pastoral Intern

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**Holy
Saturday**

Psalms 46:10

“In Reverent Silence” by Wray Hodgkin, Adult Spiritual Formation Team

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**Easter
Sunday**

John 20:1-18

“Never the Same Again” by Dr. Jeff Patterson, Senior Pastor

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March 24, 2024

Philippians 2:5-11

Les Hurrelbrink

Adult Spiritual Formation Team

Walking the Path with Jesus

This year during Lent, we are considering Jesus's journey to the cross. As we contemplate that journey, we are asked to think about our own journey to be at his side and be a member of his church. But every journey has a start. Jesus' journey started before time began. The first three verses of the Gospel of John tell us that he not only is a part of God, but was with God from the beginning. In fact, he was the part of God that was used to create the universe. So we start with Jesus being in complete relationship with His Father, the almighty God, in the most wonderful of environments, heaven. His journey started from a place of perfect happiness, perfect peace, and perfect love. That he was willing to leave that incredible place to become human is completely unfathomable. We have to add to that the fact that he knew that his transformation into human form would ultimately lead to immense pain, unimaginable torture, and a human death. Was that journey worth it? Are we worth it? We have to ask ourselves that when we contemplate the gift that we have been given by Jesus' death and resurrection.

Jesus came to earth to show mankind how to live in love, peace, and harmony. He died because he was the perfect and only sacrifice that was able to atone for all of our sins. He did it knowing that most people would not accept his gift. They would not acknowledge his Kingship, his authority, or his sacrifice. Most of the people who saw his miracles, heard his teaching, and shouted "Hosanna to the son of David! He who comes in the name of the Lord is the blessed one! Hosanna in the highest

heaven!" did not become his followers. Yet he was willing to continue his ministry to its inevitable end to give us a chance of salvation. There have certainly been people who have sacrificed their life for family members or others they have known. Early Christians were willing to be tortured and killed for their faith. But no one has ever left a perfect existence of their own accord to die for people who frequently don't care about his sacrifice or even believe he was real.

Jesus' journey to the cross was not in vain. He galvanized eleven ordinary men into a driving force that helped establish His church. He gives each of us a chance to turn to a better life and one day be with him in Heaven. While most people never accept the offer, many do. Those of us that believe that He is the Son of God, are willing to ask forgiveness for our sins, and turn to a better life receive great blessings. His church has thrived and produced great happiness in the lives of many of the marginalized in societies all over the world. When Jesus looks down from Heaven and sees the good his life is doing I think he believes it was worth it.

Jesus has asked each of us to make a journey to a better more loving life. If we are willing to make that journey He will help us along the way. He has given us guidance through the scriptures. He has also given us Christian leaders who have helped us understand the Gospel and how to use it to remake our life into something that is better than we had before. He has given us the Holy Spirit who gives us courage,

understanding, and peace. Society with the help of Satan will try to stop us. We will be given plenty of chances to change our path, to make our journey something different than He wants. Every day we have a chance to make Jesus happy or sad. Every day we make choices that can help affirm that his journey was worthwhile or give Satan evidence that his death was in vain. We need to rely on our Christian brothers and sisters to give us strength and wisdom to make the right choices. Every day we need to strive to be more loving, caring, giving, and forgiving. When we do that we are the recipients of the blessings of the Christian life and all that brings.

My own journey has been anything but straight. I have often been tempted, successfully I might add, to follow the crowd. To think primarily of myself and not pay much attention to those people in need. To find excuses for why I wasn't a very good person that day. Why I hurt someone's feelings or just didn't care about someone in need. Society tells us that's OK, it's normal, it's the appropriate thing to do. Jesus tells us that we need to turn that completely around. A Christian life holds the worship of God and the love of our fellow man, particularly "the least of these", as more important than wealth, status, pleasure, or any other worldly goal.

The things that have helped me to walk down a Christian path have been the Bible and other Christians. I never really read or studied the Bible until Dr.



Mickey Efrid came to Wesley Memorial and started teaching. It was like I was on the road to Emmaus with Jesus. The scriptures came alive and I began to understand what being a Christian was all about. I have been blessed with a loving wife who has passionately pursued Christ and helped me on my journey. We have been blessed with great pastoral leadership over the years. The Walk to Emmaus retreat was a wonderful boost to my feeling of closeness with the Holy Spirit. There are also great Christian writers that have helped me continue to walk a better path. Hopefully when I take two steps forward I only take one step back, although I am sure that is not always the case.

PRAYER:

Lord Jesus, thank you for Your willing sacrifice on my behalf that allows God to forgive me for my sins and allows me to have a personal relationship with You and the Father. I know that I am not, and will never be, worthy of your love. Yet in spite of that You constantly reach out in love to me. Help me to be more receptive to Your Word, Your commands, and Your Holy Spirit so I can live a life that is closer to what You want for each of us. It is in Your name that I pray. Amen.

March 25, 2024

Matthew 21:12-14
Jeremiah 7:1-26

Tucker Mitchell
Adult Spiritual Formation Team

Echoes Across Time

Embark on a trip through time on the way to Holy Week in 2024. It is an arduous, possibly confounding journey, but worthwhile nonetheless. Three stops along the way.

Our first is in the later part of the seventh century B.C.E., where we encounter the prophet Jeremiah, fresh from his latest revelatory encounter with God. We watch as Jeremiah makes his way to the front gate of the Jerusalem temple and begins to preach.

It's what he's supposed to do. God said so.

Jeremiah was famous for his searing sermons, Jeremiads we call them today, but this one has more heat than most. The people of Judah, God's chosen people, are perverting worship on a regular basis, says Jeremiah, and in a most hypocritical way. They are living callous, immoral lives (nothing new there) and then using the temple's time-worn rituals to cover it all up. Regular attendance and rote participation — mumbling the right words, burning the right bird on the altar fire — can make everything all right. And best of all it can be repeated week after week. Which means, of course, the immoral can, too.

More sin, more sacrifice, but no more consequences because there are no actions that ritual words — “this is the temple of the Lord, this is the temple of the Lord, this is the temple of the Lord,” repeated both for emphasis and magical effect — cannot fix.

It seems the perfect crime and it has turned the temple, in Jeremiah's stinging phrase, into a “den of robbers.” A den. Not the place where the actual robberies take place, but the refuge for the crooks, before and after. A hideout. A safe house, a hopeful place where they could consort with the fellow robbers, count the loot, and maybe pass the peace. ...

Jeremiah is outraged. This seems like an appropriate attitude.

Stop number two. A different scene, a different temple but in more or less the same spot, some 600 years later. The Galilean prophet Jesus is in Jerusalem for Passover and He, too, has a temple sermon to deliver, albeit in a different form. His will be, in



Jesus took care of

So everything v

large part, performance art.

Jesus strides into the outer court of the now, massive temple complex, rebuilt by Herod just a few decades before, and begins scattering the furniture and other apparatus of the sacrificial system, left and right. Tables are overturned and chairs smashed. Coins fly, scrolls are scattered. An assortment of doves and goats, we



all of that for us.

will be all right.

might imagine, are set loose to run amok.

Chaos reigns. Jesus reigns, too.

“It is written,” he says, “my house will be called a house of prayer, but you are making it ‘a den of robbers.’”

The words have a familiar ring and many in the largely Jewish audience recognize

them.

Isn't that what Jeremiah said?

The words fell on deaf ears back when the prophet first spoke them, and for hundreds of years that followed. Hence, the need for repetition.

This time they make people angry, which is what Jesus had in mind, although the direction that anger likely is not.

This is an outrage, they say. How dare He attack our system. Doesn't He know how important this temple is, how much money it brings in, how it props up our economy?

The old words, and Jesus' new temple sermon, demands action. Jesus would agree with that, but, again, not the specific actions the people have in mind, namely:

We'll kill Jesus. That's what some of them say.

And, before long, some of them will.

Another temporal leap, this time 2,000 years forward. We are in the present, and not necessarily in Jerusalem. Not necessarily anywhere in particular, but, just for the sake of argument, let's say we are right here in High Point, North Carolina.

No temple sermons are ready to be preached (so far as we know), but they really aren't needed in this time and place. We already know what they will say. After all, we have the book, and we

know its stories. We know this story, know how it all turns out.

We read with interest and perhaps some curiosity. Oh, those ancient Judeans. Mistreating their neighbors, ignoring the poor, worshipping other gods ... and then running into the temple every week to pray and set some animals on fire, as if that would make everything all right.

What were they thinking? Didn't they know God desires mercy and not sacrifice?

That's also in the book. An interesting turn of phrase. So mercy is more important. Hmmm.

Lucky for us we don't make animal sacrifices in church anymore. Jesus took care of all that for us. So everything will be all right.

All we have to do is worship.

Things are different now.

Some things are.

Some are not.

The world remains a harsh place. Billions of our fellow humans (the magnitude of the need is new) grind through a daily struggle just to survive. Some of those struggling are quite close by. If we looked we might see them.

Not our fault exactly but ... still our responsibility.

Lord have mercy.

And Lord, let us have it, too.

Tuesday of Holy Week

Following in Jesus' Footsteps

March 26, 2024

Matthew 28:1-20

Judy Needham

Adult Spiritual Formation Team

God is good. God is full of Grace. God is all knowing and all loving. Praise God.

Even before God put His son, Jesus, on this earth as a tiny baby, He had made His plans. Jesus would live a perfect, sinless life facing many highs and lows.

These variables were brought into focus during Holy Week.

I would guess few of us have led a city-wide parade in our honor. Jesus did. The people of Jerusalem celebrated him with palm branches and shouts of Hosannas. We might have highs of marriages, births, accomplishments or achievements.

During this Week, Jesus took time to stay with friends who would welcome him and his disciples. Don't we love our time with friends? They are a blessing to us. Friends were important to Jesus and they should be important for us to nurture and love.

Jesus also had "work" to be done. God's Temple was being used as a marketplace, not only for selling but for cheating people who had come to worship. He took care of them! He drove those money changers out of the temple. We have to do "cleaning up" also, of our surroundings and of our hearts.

Wherever he went, Jesus taught and modeled his teachings. We can do that too. Recently, a little girl in Sunday School told us about how her family saw some homeless people and decided to bring blankets to them. They delivered some of the blankets they had brought but had a couple left over. They took those blankets to the Open Door Shelter to give away. While they were there, a man said "what I really need are gloves." The little girl said,

"My daddy took off his favorite gloves and gave them to the man." What a Jesus-like act, being TAUGHT to his children through actions to the father.

Wednesday is known as the day Judas agrees to betray Jesus. Although He knew of the betrayal, Jesus went on about the things he needed to do. From time to time we have to work through days of adversity.

How often we spend time dreading upcoming events. Sometimes our anxiety before the event is worse than the actual happening, but not with Jesus. Thursday, Jesus had the Last Supper with his disciples.

Afterward he went to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. More than anything else, he needed the comfort and reassurance of God, his father. We also can and should turn to God for comfort when we face awful, scary things.

Friday brought the trial and crucifixion of Jesus. None of us face what Jesus faced, but we can also have God there to help us through our hard times. This was the very lowest point of Jesus' life on this earth. For a brief time he had to face God's rejection.

Because of what Jesus did, we never have to face that rejection.

Saturday was a day of sorrow for all who loved and followed Jesus. We have those days of our lives where we just feel deep sorrow. We know what Jesus would do because of his example. He turned to God for comfort and peace.

But then there is Easter Sunday morning! It is the ultimate SUCCESS of Jesus' life on earth. He was no longer dead. He was alive by the power of God.

Because of this power, we can be sure that we will be comforted and loved by God. Jesus made the sacrifice so we can look forward to a life in eternity with no highs and lows, but only joy and happiness.

After taking an overview of Holy Week it would be good to look at ways those who worship at Wesley Memorial can follow in Jesus' footsteps. Life takes us through highs and lows. Maybe few or none of us experience them to the extreme Jesus did. There are many ways our church can help us.

Isn't it fun to see the new babies shown to be born in a given year, even as we remember the people who died that same year? It makes our All Saints Day service so special. Even our weekly prayer list can include reasons we celebrate as well as prayer needs. Our church services sometimes ask us to join as our fellow worshippers share their special joys. Few things are more joyful than being part of a congregation singing hymns of praise to God.

Jesus was strong against the evil in this world. We may not create whips to drive evil away, but through the many opportunities for Bible study and worship services, we can learn how to strengthen our resolve to stand up for the GOOD in the world. Being together with like minded Christians helps us build our moral strength.

Jesus taught. There are so many ways to teach at Wesley Memorial. The youngest children are taught by kind voices and loving touches. School age children learn by hearing and reading the Bible, singing about Jesus, and being guided by people who model Jesus the best they are able. It is exciting to hear a second grader say, "I know that story!" We want them to hear the Bible stories over and over, with new things to learn from them each repetition.

Older children require patient, loving people who are ready and willing to answer all the questions these children and young adults have about FAITH. Adults need teachers also, as they continue to learn and strengthen their Faith in God. We love to see people of all ages who bring friends to church to experience God with us.

When physical and emotional pain strikes us, as it will sometimes in our lives, it is wonderful that Wesley Memorial has pastors who can listen and advise, Stephen Ministers who are trained to help and support us, and professional counseling on our campus to give us the insights we need. Just as Jesus offered compassion and forgiveness, so should we. Jesus

turned to God for comfort, and so should we.

In his ministry as well as during Holy Week, Jesus ministered to the needs of others. We are blessed at Wesley Memorial to have so many ways to serve.

There are too many ways to name, but people of all ages can find a way, or several ways to join with their fellow church members to fill backpacks, distribute food, collect clothing, or to provide gifts for children or adults who might not get any.

Sometimes we can serve by remembering and caring for those people who are not able to join us in person at the church. At Wesley we want to be sure no one feels forgotten, even if they are not able to attend services. Cards are mailed to shut-ins, but also to remind all of our members that we care about them and they are a part of God's church at Wesley Memorial.

Jesus taught us by the way he lived, and Holy Week reminds us that just as HE was raised from the dead and went to be with God, he will be welcoming us to be there with him too.

God is good! Praise God!

PRAYER:

Dear Father God,
Touch our hearts as we
think about Jesus
during this Holy Week.
May we bring our lives
to you and find ways to
be more like Jesus each
day. Amen.



“

WHAT IS GETTING IN THE WAY
OF PERFECTLY ACCEPTING GOD'S
PLAN AND PURPOSE?

”

Embracing the Journey

Wednesday, March 27, 2024

Jeremiah 29:11
Acts 2:39-40

JoAnn Clifton
Adult Spiritual Formation Team

I was so very reluctant to take on this assignment of writing this devotion. When asked to take this on, my first thought was, "How could I impart such words of faith and wisdom with no formal training in theology?" In our home I have several reminders of scripture and our faith. My eyes settled on a small, framed picture that says, "My Grace is all you need." Well right then and there I knew that the Lord God was speaking to me and telling me to trust the Holy Spirit to provide these words from me to you.

A few years ago, I wrote a devotional piece for our Advent season booklet. Now, I don't know about you, but I find the season of Advent so full of light and goodness. The story of the birth of our beautiful savior, Jesus, is such a joy to embrace. It was rather effortless to write that devotion. Lent, however, is different. Lent is dark and reflective and somber. As a child growing up in the Catholic tradition, Lent meant denying ourselves of something we enjoyed, extra prayer and attending church, and not eating

meat on Fridays. Self-denial was imparted to help us reflect on the suffering of Jesus. As a child reading the Passion of our Lord during Holy Week and again on Easter was so difficult. Particularly the part when the congregation response of "Crucify Him!". I just couldn't do that. Dark. We are in a season, particularly this Holy Week, where our Lord, Jesus, goes from being so loved and praised to tortured, ridiculed, and killed. How does this happen? What were the people at that time thinking? How could they betray him so? We all know the story. And as Easter people we know the story does not end there.

Reflect on the verse from Jeremiah

PRAYER:

Lord Jesus, thank you for Your will and allows me to have a personal relationship with You. I will never be, worthy of your love. Yet I am more receptive to Your Word, Your love, and what You want for each of us. It is in

29:11; For I know well the plans I have in mind for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for woe, so as to give you a future of hope. There it is. A future of hope. Jesus has given us this future of hope. Our future of hope for those that believe in Christ as our Savior, is an everlasting life of Glory that we can only imagine its beauty and goodness. We know that this Earthly life is full of sadness and trials and joys and upheavals. We cannot get around it, we can only get through it by the Grace of God through His son, Jesus. This is what to me, Holy Week is all about. Remember the Glory of Palm Sunday, the last supper, Peter denying Jesus, the weeping in the garden, Jesus giving the criminal hanging next to him hope that he will be in paradise with Him. The life-giving blood that Jesus shed on that cross was for you, for me, and for people we don't agree with or even like. Oswald Chambers said, "When Jesus Christ shed his blood, it was not the blood of one man for another; it was the life of God poured out to redeem the world." And to all who believe and are called, we are redeemed. Acts 2:39-40 tells us about this promise and to all those the Lord our God has called. He asks that we save ourselves from the corruption of our generation. That we let go of what has hold of us and accept the life that Jesus' death and resurrection assures us if we follow Him. I marvel at the fact that these words that we read from centuries ago, ring so relevant and pointed to today. Let go of what is corrupting us. In other words, what has a hold of you? What is getting in the way of perfectly accepting God's plan and purpose? For me, at times, it is my anger and my hurt, my misunderstanding, and my pride. For others it may be addiction to food, alcohol, social media, gossip, selfishness. I think this is what the Apostle Luke is telling us in Acts. We know we need to reform ourselves. We can only do this through prayer and reflection on what and who we are called to be. For me, I have tools that I use to remind myself to center on God and the Holy Spirit that has been gifted to me. These tools are the Christian music I listen to, my daily bible verse on my phone app, my church family friendships from our small group community, attendance in Bible study, and prayer.

Our life here on Earth is just a spec on the timeline of eternity. Yet, there are times when we feel so troubled and exhausted. It is in these moments; I pray that we can remember the promise and reflect on the glory that is to come. Trust in the truth of God's word. Trust in the Holy Spirit. Trust that Jesus came, suffered, and died, to give us hope and a future.

We are Easter people. I love this term. We are called to be God's people with the Holy Spirit in us, to share the Glory of God. This is our Holy time as Christians, to remember and reflect on our sinful nature. To reflect on Jesus' death and resurrection as the only way to everlasting healing, wholeness, and life.



...ing sacrifice on my behalf that allows God to forgive me for my sins
...relationship with You and the Father. I know that I am not, and will
...n spite of that You constantly reach out in love to me. Help me to be
...r commands, and Your Holy Spirit so I can live a life that is closer to
...in Your name that I pray. Amen

Maundy Thursday

A Reflection of the Cross

MATTHEW 22:36-40

Melody Emerson

Director of Communication

March 28, 2024

A faithful friend who has been a counselor and adviser to me first taught me “vertical alignment”. You may have heard me reference this. It is a personal mission of how to keep my emotions and thoughts balanced. It starts at the top with God and flows to the head and heart. It’s not possible to do it in reverse. When things get out of alignment, the highs and lows that life brings tend to be elevated. The emotions, feelings, and thoughts can seem like we are going from one plot to another in a bad drama. Our thoughts, emotions, and feelings are all important to God. That is not to be overlooked. Our Father never scolds us for being too emotional; emotions are a gift and they are not things he advises us to minimize or suppress. They are something we are instructed to discern through and with Him. The process of discernment is often a process that leads to more questions and more clarity at the same time. It’s poetic when you think about it.

Just yesterday a beautiful image popped into my head as I was designing graphics for “The Two Greatest Commandments”. After crafting the words for this, I pulled the verses, ones I have read many times. As I stopped after verse 37 “vertical alignment” flashed through my head. Then as I read the next verses, a thought came to me for the first time: how wide are my arms open to others? I read it all again. The clarity that came to mind is that the love I extend to others should not be a one-armed side hug, it’s not the distance as if you were reaching down to pick up a small child. It’s fully extended, palm to palm. Discerning this, my eyes watered as I remembered Jesus’ arms being willingly nailed into that position. Horizontal. The connection of the two: if I am vertically aligned, my arms should be as open as possible, and the image of the two together is the cross.

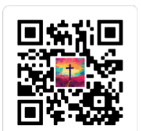
If I am living the two greatest commandments, I am equipped to be a walking, living symbol of the cross. Words are unnecessary. Without being vertically aligned my life is not capable of bearing fruit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. However, through vertical alignment these things shine and I am capable of looking to my enemies, even in what may feel like defeat, and saying “Father, forgive them” while remembering the battle isn’t over and it wasn’t mine to begin with.

Song Recommendations:

Sunday is Coming (Hometown Version)
Phil Wickham

Judas
Joseph Habedank

East to West
Casting Crowns



Scan to listen

I read something recently that stuck with me. In an attempt to summarize, it stated that Jesus was not a nice guy. He was a good man. The word "nice" comes from the Latin word "nescious" which also means ignorant. Being truthful, kind, and patient are all transcendent. Being nice is transient. When Jesus told us to turn the other cheek (Matthew 5:38-40), he did not tell us to ignore it or disregard it. He was not advising us to be nice, timid people. He is giving a creative strategy of how we should not focus on the wrongdoing but on the salvation. How far can we open our arms?

Plenty of people are "nice" and plenty generous. There are many other lovely characteristics and qualities we could label people as possessing, but to truly be a fruit of the spirit, it must be authentic and organic. To bear the fruit the roots must be planted firmly in God. Otherwise, the fruit may just be surface level, which will lead it to rot or be bitter at its core. I want to re-emphasize the fact that no human emotions are negative or "bad"; there are only negative responses or reactions. If you are doing it right, the emotions

many deem as negative will be righteous. The things that anger you are the things that anger God. The things that break your heart are the things that break His. The things you won't tolerate are the things He would never condone in His kingdom. The superficial is traded for authenticity.

I've learned to not be passive with what I will tolerate. I have gotten to the point in life where I will not accommodate, tolerate, or placate demons. The demon of denial. The demon of deception. The demon of dishonesty. The demon of indifference. You inflict abuse onto others or me, you lie to me, or you speak against Truth and you may meet the Jesus in me that turns over tables when my temple is disrespected. I can use any anger, grief, or confusion inside of me as an excuse to try to justify sin, deceiving my own heart, which I have done plenty. Yet discipline and discernment have taught me how I can use those same God-given emotions to fuel the light that Christ brings. In the Bible, darkness often references ignorance (Proverbs 4:19). On the night of His betrayal, the Light of the World was not ignorant of what was

about to be done by those closest to Him, He knew those He loved would turn on Him. Yet he chose to show them love and grace. He broke bread with them. He washed their feet.

Jesus' words in Matthew 5:39 were not telling us to stand by and do nothing when we or others are being hurt. Jesus also didn't mean don't confront it, hide it, or ignore it. He confronted that He would be betrayed by those sitting at His table. Not only does He address it in every account of the Last Supper (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) he speaks truth by stating that he will be betrayed, as well as directly tells Peter he will deny him three times. Look at His words about Judas in Matthew 26:24, "But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born." This isn't a very "nice" statement, is it? But He speaks truth with love. Good men are truthful even when the truth is potentially galvanizing and these men have the capacity to be contentious, sometimes dangerous, when properly called upon. We are called to stand up for what we believe in and to continue to share God's Word, as well as question those



who try to twist it. We are called to respond to suffering without retaliation. We are not called to stand back and do nothing. We are called to share the good news to the ends of the earth. When Jesus says not to repay evil for evil (1 Peter 3:9-14), he doesn't say there is no evil in the world. Some people are evil and some things that people do are evil. In those circumstances (and I can be to be so very guilty of this), we tend to say "Well he/she is a good person, they have a good heart". That needs to stop. They don't have a good heart. Jesus died on that cross to fix their heart. Their sin, my sin, your sin, is so terrible that the Son of God had to die for it. That's what forgiveness acknowledges. Forgiveness is not acceptance of sin, it is remembering someone died because of it. Jesus' life is a model for us that tells us we can't treat people the way they treat us. We must treat people the way Jesus treated people. If we trust that the blood of Jesus will take care of our own personal sins, we must trust that his blood will cover the sins of others.

When I think of "the betrayal of a kiss", those words pierce tender places inside of me. Jesus was betrayed by a kiss. A kiss from a friend. It was this sign of respect that sealed the deal and set everything into motion for Jesus to be hung on the cross. The significance of Judas' act goes beyond mere betrayal for money. George Woodruff once said, "The test of Christianity is not loving Jesus, it's loving Judas." This emphasizes the importance of recognizing that Jesus loved Judas despite his betrayal. Often, we are quick to cut off, slander, or betray those we disagree with, lacking compassion and understanding. However, Jesus' deliberate choice to befriend Judas, knowing he would betray him, challenges us. If you knew a friend was going to betray you before you got to know them, would you take the time to develop a friendship with them? Jesus did, likely remembering something that we too often forget: we all have a God-given purpose. Jesus chose Judas and Jesus was

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THE TEST OF CHRISTIANITY
IS NOT LOVING JESUS,
IT'S LOVING JUDAS.

-George Woodruff

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flawless, his choice was not a mistake. We often neglect to see anything more of Judas than a traitor and focus solely on his deception. Yet, Judas was perfect for what he was chosen to do. Many of us have experienced betrayal from loved ones; how do we speak of them now? How do we feel about them? Jesus' love for Judas serves as a timeless lesson, you love them. You wash their feet. You break bread with them. Judas showed remorse, yet no repentance. What Jesus did on the cross was enough for even Judas' salvation, but he chose not to accept it. It's important to note that despite Jesus washing Judas' feet, God still sent him to hell. The choice belonged to Judas.

We get out of alignment; we make mistakes. But we are not mistakes. God is intentional and purposeful in all he does, we must be as well. We will face obstacles in life. We will face persecution if we are faithful Christians. With these, we have an opportunity to magnify the issue or to magnify Jesus. We are not called to punish the people who wrong us. We are to love them and let God do with them what He wills. We are to stay vertically, resulting in also being horizontally, aligned. This is what allows our lives to be a reflection of the cross.

**PRAYER:**

Lord, help us remember that our journey starts with You at the top, flowing through our minds and hearts. When life's highs and lows throw us off balance, remind us to seek alignment with You. Teach us to bear fruit in accordance with Your Spirit, rooted deeply in Your truth. Help us not to merely tolerate but to confront and address negative forces that oppose truth and goodness, both within ourselves and in the world around us. Grant us the wisdom to discern our emotions, thoughts, and feelings in alignment with Your will. Just as Jesus willingly embraced the cross with open arms, may we extend our love fully to others, mirroring the breadth of Your love for us. Guide us in responding to adversity with love and grace, following Jesus' example even in the face of betrayal and suffering. May we stand firm in our faith, sharing Your truth with courage and compassion, trusting in Your redemptive power to transform hearts and lives. In moments of alignment and misalignment, may our lives reflect the beauty and power of the cross, where vertical and horizontal love intersect. Amen.

The Path to Oneness with Christ

March 29, 2024

Mark 10

Elli Yu
Pastoral Intern

More than anything, Jesus desires union with us. The glory of the cross and the resurrection comes from our oneness in, with, and through Christ. When the crucified Lord extended his hands upon the cross, he beckoned us to come to Him, not just as a compliant servant, but as a radiant Bride. We do not ascend spiritual ranks from a slave to a disciple to a friend; rather, God reconciled us to Christ to be the fullness of Him in all things! As Jesus was one with the Father, so we are made one with Him ourselves. Life's incomprehensible aim and greatest glory is participation in God's divine nature through union between Christ and man.

Today's Scripture passage discusses marriage, God's chosen union between humans, which also reveals His desired union with humanity. In Mark 10, the teachers of the law test Jesus, questioning him on the legality of divorce.

Jesus returned their question with a question: "What did Moses command you?" (Mark 10:3)

The Pharisees replied: "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away" (Mark 10:4).

Jesus responded, saying this: "It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law. But at the beginning of creation God made them male and female. For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. So, they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate" (Mark 10:5-9).

Paul quoted Mark 10:7 in Ephesians, "For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." Referring to this mystery of marriage, he declared, "I am talking about Christ and the church" (Eph 5:32). What an inconceivable reality, to consider marriage with Christ! We got to leave behind our old nature, the flesh; we got to depart from our old lovers, our idols! We left them to become one with our Lord, creating an inextricable bond that cannot be broken!

However, before we are united in heavenly marriage to the Lord, we wait for His return in the wilderness of

this world. In Jeremiah 2:2, "This is what the Lord says: "I remember the devotion of your youth, how as a bride you loved me and followed me through the wilderness, through a land not sown." We are called to follow Jesus, who was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness for forty days of fasting and prayer. Then, at the end of the fast, in his greatest physical and emotional weakness, Jesus was tempted by the Devil when he had no followers, no miracles, and no fruit. How did Jesus remain faithful to His Father when he was hungry, weak, and alone in a land not yet sown?

Jesus prevailed over temptation because he was animated by God's indwelling presence. Before the temptation in the wilderness, Jesus Christ was baptized in the Jordan River with the Holy Spirit and drowned in the unconditional love from the Father. Jesus had the ability to resist sin, flesh, and the devil because Jesus was fully satisfied by His Father! There was no room for sin because Jesus was completely occupied with love for God and positioned to overcome all things, even death. Similarly, the path to our Father leads to wilderness because the Lord's love draws us to death. "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself

and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23). In the same way that the Holy Spirit led Jesus to the wilderness to be tempted and outside the city gates to die on the cross, is the way following Christ always leads to the end of ourselves. If we tarry with the Lord, it will cost us. The Lord asks, “Who will count the cost of following me?”

Like the virgins in the Parable of the Ten Virgins, it will cost us everything to follow Christ, as we wait upon the Lord’s final return. For the “kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom” (Matt. 25:1). Day and night, we long for Christ to come and through the growing expectation of his arrival, our hearts start to burn with oil of pure passion to encounter him. Throughout the process of pursuit, we are purified as the “glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but... holy and without blemish” through our love and devotion to God (Eph 5:27). The Lord is the consuming fire, refining, purifying, and conforming our hearts to be as His.

In addition, fasting is ironically one of the primary means to endure the wilderness. The times of difficulty and preparation for our calling cause us to seek Him in fasting, which is the emptying of our stomachs for infilling of His presence. Luke 5:34 states, “But the time will come when the Bridegroom will be taken from them; in those days they will fast.” The Bridegroom continually woos the Bride out of comfort and convenience into fasting so that there is greater opportunity for His presence. In lack, emptiness, and hunger, we create space for greater measures of union with the Lord through wilderness times.

During the Lenten season, we await the day of the Crucifixion and Resurrection, which is the full measure of God’s love for us in Christ. Why do we endure the wilderness of waiting? 1 John 4:10 is a wellspring to draw from: “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” Our lives lived for God start and finish with God and not we ourselves. Apart from our Christ’s love for us, we are but dust; we have nothing; and we can do nothing. Through faith, we remain in His undeserved love, bearing fruit in everything, accomplishing His will through the power of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, in every way, we are dependent on Christ, striving to do our best because God loves us!

Let us press into the hope of our rich inheritance as the Bride of Christ, which is inextricable union with the Lord! God subsumed the old contract with a New Covenant, declaring us His very own possession because of His undying faithfulness, not our lovelessness. What God brought together, no man can separate, so we press on through temptations, trials, and tribulations because Christ calls us his own, his Beloved Bride.

Reflection Questions:

- In what ways does an earthly marriage resemble our spiritual union to Christ?
- What did you learn about Christ as Bridegroom?
 - How has this impacted or changed your view and relationship with Him?
 - Is God inviting you into a deeper consecration of fasting or prayer to pursue Him?
- Recall a time when you went through a difficult time. How did you experience God during this season?
 - Do you rely on yourself to get through struggles?
 - Do you rely on God’s love to get through the struggle?
- What does it mean to be united with Christ? How can you walk in greater union with Christ going forward?



In Reverent Silence

March 30, 2024

Psalm 37:7

Wray Hodgkin
Chair of the
Adult Spiritual Formation Team

What a week! Our emotions should be drained. We've gone from witnessing a jubilant crowd celebrating the arrival in Jerusalem of their Messiah astride a donkey, to a different kind of mob clamoring for His execution for apostasy and blasphemy. Following a sham proceeding before the Sanhedrin, Jesus was crucified, dead and buried.

On Maundy Thursday, we celebrated that Last Supper Christ had with his disciples. They adjourned to the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus was betrayed, arrested and dragged before the Tribunal. We commemorate Good Friday as that day on which our Lord suffered death by the most horrific means - crucifixion. His body was transported to a tomb donated by Joseph of Arimethea (a wealthy follower) as witnessed by Mary Magdalene and the other Mary. The women, as was the custom in Jewish burials, planned on returning to the tomb to bathe and anoint the body of their Lord. They spent their time before sundown gathering sweet herbs and oils for the tomb. Their task was interrupted by the setting of the sun, signaling the beginning of the Hebrew Sabbath and, being good Jews, they were proscribed



from work in any fashion until the following sundown signifying the end of their day of rest. Their return, on what we now celebrate as Easter morning, to complete their mission led to the discovery of an empty tomb, fulfilling the prophecy of the Resurrection. Holy Week begins with Palm Sunday and ends with Easter Sunday.

What, then, of Holy Saturday, that time in which

Christ's body lay in the tomb? How do we commemorate it? What do we believe happened while Jesus' body lay in the Tomb? Surely, the Apostles spent the day trying to make some sense out of what happened; feeling dejected beyond hope. They hid themselves to avoid the rabid mob, knowing they were recognizable characters in the drama surrounding Jesus' trial and punishment.

Meanwhile, what did Christ do in the period between his death and resurrection? The Catechism of the Catholic Church tells us that, as recited in differing forms of the Apostles' Creed, following death, Christ descended into Hell to reclaim for GOD the souls of the righteous who were there because of the original sin of Adam and Eve. This fulfills all prophecy. Our new hymnals have returned the missing language to the Apostle's Creed, describing Christ's descent prior to His rising.

Even though mentioned in each of the Gospels, very few Protestants even know of Holy Saturday, except as an end to the Lenten fast they've imposed upon themselves. His-



panic-American residents in California celebrate this day with a feast and colorful ceremony called "the Blessing of the Animals". We can observe Holy Saturday with a day of reflection and prayer of thanksgiving to GOD for the miracle of the Resurrection, which coupled with His death, swung open the gates of Heaven for us, shriven of sin, and ushered us into the presence of God. We believe Christ paid our penance with his crucifixion and death in human form. Most Roman Catholics observe a 40-hour vigil. Many Catholics of Polish descent spend the day preparing for the Pascal feast celebration with the dyeing of eggs, placing them in a basket with ham, sweet breads, horse-radish, and lamb cakes to have blessed in church.

We can spend this day in contemplation of what is about to transpire compared with what it cost the LORD. As it is written in Exodus, "Be still and

await upon the LORD." Meditation is difficult in Western culture. We are not a patient people by nature. Holy Saturday instructs us in what GOD sacrificed for us through the crucifixion of his Son. As we anticipate the wonder of Easter yet to come, let us spend Holy Saturday in rest and contemplation of what Christ accomplishes while "resting" in the Tomb.

PRAYER:

Lord GOD, We recognize the significance of Holy Saturday as not merely a time period between Good Friday and Easter Sunday, but a day to observe in consecration of Your sacrifice for us. We leave our own agendas, desires and pleas at the door and crave today to be still and rest in Your presence. We are filled with gratitude for the ability to quiet our hearts and stand in Your company. In thy name, Amen.



March 31, 2024

John 20:1-18

Dr. Jeff Patterson
Senior Pastor

Never the Same Again

Life has come was never going to be the same again in more ways than those early disciples of Jesus could ever imagine. Life often takes us places that we never expected to go.

Life is usually what happens to mess up our plans. The disciples of Jesus had spent about three years following their rabbi and learning amazing, life-changing truths about the Kingdom of God. Life had never been more exciting for these Galileans and the one among them from Judah, Judas Iscariot. Living in close fellowship with Jesus was exhilarating. Then, it happened.

While in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover along with thousands of other faithful Jews, Jesus was arrested, tortured, brought to several trials, declared innocent at first by Pontius Pilate, but he eventually gave into pressure from the Jewish religious leaders and condemned Jesus to death. Jesus was then executed by the Roman authorities. In just a few short days, less than a week, the disciples of Jesus went from a joyful entrance into Jerusalem to the most devastating event of their lives. Life can often change suddenly and traumatically.

Some of Jesus's followers took his body from the cross and wept over the cold, bloody corpse. His mother was among those who grieved the death of Jesus. Grieved is probably not a strong enough word for what Mary felt. A couple of Jesus's influential friends took a risk and asked the authorities for his body so they could give it a proper burial in a garden tomb. Proper burial is important to the Jewish community. Being buried in a common grave with criminals executed by the state would have further horrified Jesus's followers.

His body was laid in a borrowed tomb. Then, the hard work of grief continued and the disciples were trying to imagine what a life without Jesus would look like. They were not

able to think clearly.

Mary of Magdala was a devoted follower of Jesus. She was so close to Jesus that some people made up rumors to explain her devotion to him. Mary stayed as close as she could to Jesus through those painful final days. She returned to the tomb as soon as the Passover Sabbath was over to perform one last act of devotion, anointing the body as it laid in the tomb.

When Mary returned to the tomb, the body was gone. The empty tomb brought only more pain. She assumed that some more indignities were being done to the body of the one she loved so much. She stood outside the empty tomb and wept. It was a very visible display of mourning as the pain of recent events came rushing back to Mary. She tried to have a conversation with the supposed gardener. "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away" (Jn. 20:15). I do not know how she thought she would transport the body, but love can make us attempt superhuman feats. Then she heard her name called, "Mary" (Jn. 20:16). Perhaps it was the way he said it. She had heard him call her name many times before. Suddenly, she knew it was Jesus. The tears stopped. Her breathing momentarily stopped.

Life was never going to be the same again. A dead man returned to life and walked among his friends in Jerusalem. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is good news for a weeping world. As followers of Christ, we know that the worst, most painful news of this world, is never the last word. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the answer to our weeping. May the resurrection of Jesus Christ redefine all your reality. Believe this great news and life will never be the same again.

