

Blessings on you all as we enter Holy Week. The upcoming week that begins with Palm Sunday and ends with Easter Day is the most sacred time within the Christian calendar. It is also the most evocative, rich, and moving, filled as it is with the full range of human emotion and experience: hope and despair, love and betrayal, power and weakness, death and life. The services that exist on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday are parts of a whole. While I recognize the difficulty in attending all these services, I encourage you to attend what you can. Your experience of Easter will be enhanced because of it. And, if we take a cue from those around Jesus that last week, you will most likely be surprised.

Paradox is rich within the Christian tradition, and, perhaps, no other day expresses this feature as much as what we call Palm Sunday. Indeed, we start the service off by remembering Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem as people lay palm branches down to celebrate what they think is his messiahship or kingship. The history of this event coincides with and is juxtaposed to another triumphal entry into Jerusalem on the other side of town. The Roman Governor enters in with full force. The Passover is about to take place (remember that celebrated event where God liberated the people from the oppression of a foreign power!). You can understand why the Roman force is in Jerusalem. You can also understand why the writing is on the wall for Jesus. His entry is an affront to the political force of the day, and it won't be long before his messiahship or kingship is radically reinterpreted. Not power and might, force and empire. Rather suffering love and sacrifice become the lens through which this Messiah is recognized. Thus, the service that begins with Palms ends in Passion. If you were not to attend any other services this week, the Easter event would be put in context.

However, there are other services.

On Tuesday, there will be an Interfaith Seder at Grace Farms. Rabbi Joshua Hammerman will lead participants through an abbreviated Seder, which is the meal in most gospels (save John's gospel) that becomes Jesus' Last Supper. The interfaith conversation that will ensue is timely. The focus: Forgiveness and Remembrance. How do the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim traditions view forgiveness? Are there any actions that are beyond the pale? What are the requirements for forgiveness? As we continue the journey of Holy Week and what we consider God's overwhelming act of forgiveness, this conversation is truly apt.

On Wednesday at 7PM, the pace, literally, slows down as the sanctuary at the Church is turned into a labyrinth. Labyrinths have been used by Christians down through the centuries as a way to prayer, meditate, or reflect peripatetically. They also were used by those unable to make a pilgrimage to some holy site to enact the journey on a micro scale. Debra Slade will lead participants through a meditation that allows further reflection on the mystery of God's love for each of us that Holy Week articulates.

On Thursday at 7PM we gather in the Historic Church to remember Jesus' command or mandatum, "to love others as I have loved you." Thus, Maundy Thursday is a reflection on the transformation of Messiah from lord and king to self-sacrificing servant. Jesus' washing of the disciples feet embodies this reality, and the disciples and we should begin to realize that the conventional wisdom or rules of engagement do not apply to Jesus. His ministry and his actions break open those forms, precisely because love is the very center driving what will follow.

And what follows is the fullest expression of love: the cross. Here Jesus embodies the extent of sacrificial love that God possesses for the whole of humanity and creation. It is an overwhelming to consider. The cross also expresses how not only empire responds to threats, but, ultimately, how human societies and communities often respond to such transcendent love: they kill the messenger. Thus, we observe Good Friday a little differently this year. We gather at 3PM (the purported time of Jesus' death) at the Church for a traditional Good Friday service. We gather with the people of Union Baptist Church at 7PM for a service with them. On the one hand, we seek to develop fuller relationships with various communities of faith in Stamford. On the other hand, one cannot miss the connection of the cross and the lynching tree (eloquently articulated by Professor James Cone in his book by the same name) and we are called to such awareness and remembrance.

On Saturday, at 7:30 PM we gather with the Episcopal Churches in Stamford at St. John's Episcopal Church for the Easter Vigil. This is the epic worship experience in Christianity. Darkness and light, fire and water, music and text are used to move us through the archetypal stories of the Bible and sacred history. Creation. Exodus. Dry Bones. Redemption. Baptismal Remembrance. These stories and rituals move us to the brink of Easter and the promise of new and renewed life in God. As has been noted, the apostle Paul is the first to write about Resurrection. He never speaks about an empty tomb. He does, however, speak about the presence of Christ to and for the early believers.

Thus, the Easter Vigil moves us into that reality of Easter. We do not linger at the empty tomb. Seeking the dead among the dead. We gather to reflect on the presence of Christ that continues to manifest itself in our midst. We do so at 7AM at the Historic Church and 9AM and 11AM at the Church. Those moments of forgiveness, grace, life, and love that help us to see our worth and value in the eyes of God, our path in life's journey from grace to grace, and our calling to embody more fully the resurrected reality of Jesus in our midst. This happens in profound ways for some. However, for many the experience of resurrection is akin to the early disciples. They didn't know what to make of it. They were surprised. They knew something had happened, but it wasn't absolutely clear in the moment. With time, they began to understand what God was up to. And, perhaps, that is our practice as well. Present in the moment to see and hear the promise, but also unsure exactly what it all means. The great thing is that Easter is not just one day, but

the season lasts for 50. You have plenty of time to begin to understand what God is up to in your life.

Blessings on you Holy Week!