

**LENTEN SERIES 2019**  
**SEVEN DAYS TO GLORY: Holy Week**  
**First Presbyterian Church**

**Week 3—“Thursday: A Day Called *Holy*”**

**INTRODUCTION**

In this Lenten Series, we will explore the particulars of each day during what we know as “Holy Week”—the seven days to Easter following Jesus’ Palm Sunday entry into Jerusalem. The writer follows the chronology as recorded in Mark’s gospel.

This week we will explore Thursday ...

Scripture:

Mark 14:12-72

John 13—17

**RE-CAP OF “MONDAY” AND “TUESDAY”**

So far, in the first two weeks of Lent, we have explored how Jesus’ own Holy Week journey began with what we call *Palm Sunday*—with his triumphal entry into the city of Jerusalem—about how Jesus rode into Jerusalem that day as the talk of the town, with people waving their palm branches and singing their alleluias. They shouted their hosannas and they called him their king. The people believed Jesus was none other than the prophesied seed of Kings David and Solomon, the one destined to be Israel’s king and ruler (see Psalm 118:19-27).

And, we have explored *Monday’s “temple-tantrum” drama*—of how Jesus’ journey took a very unexpected turn in the temple—a turn that involved the over-turning of tables and chairs, and screaming who knows what at the moneychangers and merchants and other people caught in the wrong place at the wrong time. It’s difficult to imagine such a seemingly humble, mild mannered rabbi like Jesus acting out like that—challenging the religious authorities of his day with some very troubling words about God’s original intention for the temple’s use and purpose, and how they’d done nothing except make it a “den of robbers” (Mark 11:15-18). Because Jesus knew that God intended for the temple to be a place that was open and inviting to all the peoples of the world, and thanks to the religious leaders of his time, it had become nothing close to God’s original intent.

Then, last week we explored the events of a *busy Tuesday*, particularly about how the religious authorities challenged both Jesus’ religious and political authority. And, Jesus just shined with his answers and his handling of the situations, which did nothing but make the so-called authorities even angrier. I mean, they had the nerve to ask him point blank, “By what authority are you doing these things?” ... to basically ask Jesus the Christ, just who do you think you are?

Well, Jesus is Emmanuel, “God with us,” the one, true God who we believe became flesh and dwelt among us—who went from place to place and from person to person showing

the world what God's love and mercy and forgiveness look like and sound like. Jesus made God's love and grace real through all he said and did throughout his ministry—divinely inspired things that are recorded from the beginning to the end of the gospels: teaching, healing, purging evil spirits, eating with sinners, associating with outcasts, forgiving sins, calming storms, walking on water, feeding thousands of people with hardly nothing—basically doing everything that a self-appointed, earthly leader couldn't do! But, Jesus was no self-appointed ruler—instead, Jesus is God's anointed Son, appointed by God to speak for God, as God, in every place he ever visited and with every person he ever encountered—in that lay his authority.

### **THIS WEEK: "THURSDAY: A DAY CALLED HOLY"**

I must confess that, for me, it seems awfully premature to be talking about *Maundy Thursday* when we're still a month away from actual "Holy Week." Then again, the more I prepared, the more I realized, that the events of *Holy Thursday* do have a place outside the regular Holy Week schedule because they have everything to do with Lent—with our preparation for Easter—for it is in Thursday's events that we truly get to the idea of "remembering" as part of our Lenten journey.

But, what happened to Wednesday?

Interestingly, scripture is strangely silent about Wednesday—whatever Jesus and the disciples did that day was apparently not worth recording. Scripture just doesn't really cover it.

But, the Holy Week drama powerfully unfolds again on Thursday when some of the most significant events of our faith tradition occurred.

- ✦ Mark's gospel devotes most of its longest chapter to the events of Thursday—a long account that includes
  - the Last Supper,
  - Jesus praying in Gethsemane,
  - his arrest,
  - his interrogation before the high priest,
  - and Peter's denials
- ✦ a series of events that set the stage for the crucifixion the following day.
- ✦ And, that doesn't even include the details provided in John's gospel about what went on in that upper room, where the author devotes five whole chapters to the occasion,
  - capturing the foot washing
  - and Jesus' lengthier farewell speech,
    - which includes the love commandment.

And, the love commandment is why we commonly refer to *Holy Thursday* as *Maundy Thursday*. The term "Maundy" comes from the Latin word "mandatum," which means "**mandate**"—referring to the mandate, the command, in John's gospel that Jesus gave his disciples at the table following the foot washing to, "Love one another, as I have loved you."

## **THE LAST SUPPER**

Let us *remember* that night long ago ... let us especially remember two particular parts of that night—the Last Supper and then Gethsemane.

First, the twelve gather with their Lord in an upper room for a meal.

- ✦ It's worth realizing that practically everyone in Jerusalem that night was also doing the same thing—possibly celebrating the Passover, but definitely sharing a meal—going about their regular routines.
- ✦ But, in one particular upper room nothing was routine—“God in the flesh” was spending his final “holy” evening with his closest friends and followers.
- ✦ Now, scholars debate whether or not they were actually celebrating the Passover meal, but regardless, they are having a common meal together.
- ✦ And, in biblical times the common meal was not merely a social event—it was a communal acting out of holy events—of bringing sacred memories into the present.

Speaking of the present, on that particular night things were kind of different in that particular room.

- ✦ They were probably a little more focused on Jesus than usual.
- ✦ He probably had a different edge about him that night.
- ✦ After all the incidents that had occurred since his Sunday entry into the city, things were definitely different.
  - Jesus knew that he was about to die.
  - He knew that he would not be able to celebrate Passover ever again.
  - But, the disciples didn't.
  - Yet, they could tell there was something different going on—
    - Jesus commanded their attention in a different kind of way through both his words and his actions—
      - the tone of his farewell speech,
      - the insistence of the foot washing,
      - and the intentionality of the Last Supper.
    - And, in that supper, Jesus shared much more than just a meal—
      - he shared himself in bread and cup and asked his followers to remember.
      - *At the Table, we remember.*
      - And, we have continued remembering for two thousand years.

## **GETHSEMANE**

And, then scripture tells us that after singing a hymn, everyone but Judas went out to the Mount of Olives—to a place called Gethsemane.

- ✦ At the time of Jesus, there was an olive grove and farmstead on the slopes of the Mount of Olives, and on this farmstead was an oil press for crushing the olives.
- ✦ The farmstead was named Gethsemane, which in Hebrew means, “oil press.”

- ✦ And, nearby to this farmstead was a large natural cave that would have offered Jesus and his disciples a covered place to rest.

But, a distressed and agitated Jesus goes off to pray. And, what do the disciples do—they fall asleep. Three times, while Jesus agonizes in deep loneliness and prayer, his followers are found napping.

- ✦ How could they have fallen asleep at a time like that?
- ✦ Were they not aware of the danger of the moment, the impending arrest?
- ✦ Maybe they still didn't understand what was going on.
- ✦ *Maybe we don't either.*

Back on Transfiguration Sunday, during worship we considered the events on top of the mountain and how the disciples were overcome with sleep that night as well. And, in my sermon that day I talked about how “drowsiness” is a way of talking about how people allow concern for ordinary things to distract them from seeing Jesus. And, on this fateful Thursday night, the disciples are once again oppressed and burdened by sleep—they are weighed down with drowsiness. Somehow, they were not able to see Jesus—literally they could not see him because Jesus went away a slight distance to pray, and figuratively they could not see him perhaps because they had allowed concern for other things to distract them.

### **OUT OF SIGHT, OUT OF MIND**

So I'm deeply struck by the contrast in these two parts of the same lengthy story—by how the disciples can be so seemingly focused in the upper room, and yet so detached and distracted in Gethsemane.

- ✦ And, it occurs to me that perhaps the lesson for us in all of the Maundy Thursday drama relates to the idea of *remembering*.
- ✦ Because if I had to sum up these two parts of the larger Thursday story, I'd say it all comes down to the age-old proverb, “out of sight, out of mind”—
  - how we too soon forget people or things that are no longer visible or present.
  - On that *Holy Thursday* evening long ago, the disciples were hyper-focused on Jesus when they were face to face in that upper room—when they could hear his voice and see his actual expressions and sense his sense of anxiety.
  - But, as soon as they were in Gethsemane, Jesus left them to keep watch—he quite literally stepped out of their sight for a short time—and out of sight means ... out of mind.

And, so they failed to remember that Jesus was Emmanuel, “God with us.” They failed to remember that Jesus was truly God in the flesh living among them. They failed to remember that Jesus had just shared bread and cup with them and had asked them to do what ... *remember*.

- ✦ But, instead of remembering, they forgot.
- ✦ How often do we forget? How often do we forget who Jesus was and who Jesus is? How often do we forget that just because we can't see Jesus doesn't mean he isn't with us every single moment? How often do we forget that Jesus commanded us to love one another?

On that Thursday night long ago, the rest of Jerusalem went about their routine, ho-hum evening—while Jesus kept on changing the world in an upper room.

- ✦ We do well to remember that night each month when we share Communion.
- ✦ And, we do well to remember that night each year during Holy Week when we gather for *Maundy Thursday* worship.
- ✦ But, we would do well to remember that Jesus demands much more of us than routines.

As our Lenten study and journey continues this year,

- ✦ let us remember to not let the sharing of bread and cup become routine.
- ✦ Let us remember to not let our efforts to serve each other, and this community, become routine.
- ✦ Let us remember to never let loving one another become routine.
- ✦ Finally, let us remember that by the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus is always with us—
  - maybe out of sight,
  - but hopefully never, ever out of mind.