

A Reflection on Holy Week

by Jennifer Lee

April 2017

Holidays are bittersweet for me because of my mom being sick and not really being here to celebrate with us. But God is always gracious and has used this particular holiday season, once again, to shepherd my heart back into a place of hope. This was my first experience with Holy Week and Easter following the church's liturgical calendar. I found myself relating so well to the stories, the people, the sorrow and the joy.

Palm Sunday was one of hope and joy, as we celebrated the arrival of the Son of David entering Jerusalem and the anticipation of salvation. Our King had come!

Such celebration was welcome after the Lenten season, and yet as we moved into Monday and Tuesday, where celebration continued at the house of Lazarus, as Mary anointed Jesus' feet, there was a sense of foreboding. I pictured myself in Mary's place, offering Jesus my perfume and my hair, kissing his feet in adoration and reverence. Hearing his rebuke of those who had rebuked her, but also the unsettling announcement that this was an anointing for death to come.

Wednesday's candlelight Tenebrae service was even more foreboding. The verses of despair mixed with hope, the growing darkness as candle after candle was snuffed out, and then the quietness of leaving in silence by only the light of the one unhidden candle.

The Maundy Thursday service spoke of great love, and with it, great sorrow. I felt Peter's insistence that Jesus not wash his feet, as my priest washed and kissed my feet. I felt the humility that it brought, going to war with my pride, that would have me proclaim with the disciples that surely I wouldn't deny, desert or betray Jesus!

And as I found myself engulfed by Jesus' love displayed in the Last Supper, I also found the sorrow of failing to stay awake to watch with Jesus. I wrestled alongside Jesus as He begged His Father to let the cup pass from Him, and I watched Him let go and rise to the occasion, obediently following His Father's will, even unto death.

I found myself with Peter, full of fear, denying any knowledge or acquaintance with the man under question. I even walked in Judas' shoes. What 30 pieces of silver have I exchanged for my Master? I met the despair Judas felt when he realized an innocent man was going to die because of him, and the great sorrow Peter felt as he too was convicted. And when the altar was stripped and the lights turned out, and we left in silence as Jesus had been arrested, I felt death and darkness closing in.

And then, Good Friday. Death came. As I came and knelt, putting my nail at the foot of the cross, placing my hand on the rugged wood, I felt with the disciples the sense of finality and great sorrow they must have been feeling. They didn't have the whole story. There was a cleansing heaviness as person after person knelt before the cross, acknowledging the depth to which God's love had gone. Suffering and death seemed so resolute in that moment though.

But Saturday after sundown. Easter Vigil! A great fiery light out of darkness, and as we proceeded in, lighting a candle as we went, hope began to grow. Using our candles to read from the very beginning, hearing and singing that God was ever faithful to His people throughout the ages until the death of His Son, the lights were thrown on, and we no longer had to depend on the light of our own little candle, which was close to burning out, in order to see our world and sing.

The Light of the World had risen, and we were no longer in the darkness! The music swelled, the altar had been put back in order and decorated even more so with flowers, and we sang Gloria once again! We partook in the Eucharist in great joy, no longer just a reminder of the Last Supper, but of new beginnings, new life and great redemption! This body and blood of Christ that we share in is alive, and is the essence of our life in God!

And Easter morning! The singing and the flowers and the children in the midst of the happy procession, waving their jubilation streamers! He is risen! Alleluia! The Love of God made new life spring from an impossibility – Death! Thus proving that indeed nothing can separate us from the love of our God. Suffering and ultimately death had their way with Christ Jesus and certainly left their marks, but His resurrection is our victory and their defeat. I have said it before, and I will say it again, death and suffering do not get the final word. And that is where hope and joy can be found in the middle of sorrow.

He is risen! Alleluia! Alleluia!