

**Devotions – April 5-11, 2020**

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**Sunday of the Passion/Palm Sunday  
April 5, 2020**

Text: Matthew 21:1-11

*<sup>8</sup>A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. <sup>9</sup>The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting,*

*“Hosanna to the Son of David!*

*Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!*

*Hosanna in the highest heaven!”*

*<sup>10</sup>When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil ....*

The people in the large crowd joyfully shout “Hosanna” as Jesus makes his way into Jerusalem. In contrast, the high priest Caiaphas and his cohorts have been discussing the “Jesus problem.” In the rock musical, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, their imagined conversations are set to music. Caiaphas and the other Jewish leaders have come to believe that Jesus is a serious threat to their authority and fragile relationship with the ruling Roman government. Their conclusion? Their solution? This Jesus must die.

As if speaking directly to Jesus as he passes by in the midst of the adoring throng, Caiaphas sings in a haunting, bass voice:

“Tell the rabble to be quiet, we anticipate a riot.

This common crowd, is much too loud.

Tell the mob who sing your song that they are fools and they are wrong.

They are a curse. They should disperse.”

-- Webber, Andrew Lloyd and Rice, Tim. “Hosanna,” *Jesus Christ Superstar*,  
Olympic Studios, 1970

This Sunday, many congregations traditionally wave palm branches for Jesus at the beginning of worship and cry out for his crucifixion by the end. We are beginning the final week of our journey towards the cross. We prepare to walk through the trials and sorrows of Holy Week until we celebrate the first “alleluia” of Easter.

Let us pray: *God of joy and celebration, we raise our voices high to sing praise and adoration to Jesus. Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Amen.*



**Monday, April 6, 2020**

Text: Micah 6:8

***He has told you, O mortal, what is good;  
and what does the LORD require of you  
but to do justice, and to love kindness,  
and to walk humbly with your God?***

Holy Week can be overwhelming, emotional, and challenging. So much happens within just a few days, from the uplifting to the agonizing. Perhaps that's why I'm drawn to Micah 6:8--a verse of few words with a strong, simply-stated message: "Do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God."

A prophet and human rights advocate in 8th century BCE, Micah, like Jesus, served the poor and spoke out against injustice, greed, oppression, and the mistreatment of women and children.

This Holy Week, how do you understand God's call to "do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly" in the context of your community and the world at large? At this very point in time, what good is God calling us to do?

*Let us pray: God of compassion, lead us to seek justice and show kindness for all of creation. Help us to walk humbly in your name as we do your work with our hands. Amen.*



**Tuesday, April 7, 2020**

Text: Matthew 22:34-40

***<sup>34</sup> When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, <sup>35</sup> and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. <sup>36</sup> "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" <sup>37</sup> He said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' <sup>38</sup> This is the greatest and first commandment. <sup>39</sup> And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."***

This is one of several times that Jesus proclaims that "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." He also tells us to love our enemies. In Luke, he uses the Parable of the Good Samaritan to define who a neighbor is. Does the Samaritan also define what it means to be a Christian? Yes, I think so! As the body of Christ, we see the needs of others and we respond, equipped by God to share our gifts.

Notably, the Samaritan gives abundantly, arranging for whatever the injured man needs. Jesus shows us that being a neighbor is an action, not a state of being.

Today, how might we answer the question “Who is my neighbor?” Who are the outcasts, the unclean, the demoniacs, the tax collectors, the Samaritans, and the woman at the well in our times? Who are-- and where are--the neighbors and enemies, Jesus calls us to love today?

*Let us pray: God of grace, lead us to love our neighbors as you love us. Amen.*



**Wednesday, April 8, 2020**

Text: John 3:16

***“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”***

Over the years, I’ve heard authors, pastors, and teachers emphasize that when it says, “*For God so loved the world*” in the opening of John 3:16, it really does mean “*For God so loved the WORLD.*” The verse doesn’t say “for God so loved human beings....”

The first chapter of Genesis captures God’s great delight in creation--both in the process itself and the majestic results. As it says in Genesis, each day “God saw that it was good” as the world is spoken into being.

Many of us in the Northern Great Lakes Synod can look out the windows of our homes, or travel just a short distance, to see “that it is good.” The logo of our synod reflects the abundant water and wilderness in our corner of the world. I like to watch the slide show of photographs on the home page of the synod web site and often link to “Seasons of the Synod” just to enjoy the images that capture the beauty of our region. Our partnerships include Fortune Lake, the Great Lakes Water Stewards, UP Wild Church, and other affiliations celebrating the beauty of creation. We are blessed with a multitude of opportunities to commune with God and the world, right here on our doorstep.

*Let us pray: God of creation, we give you thanks and praise for the beauty of the earth. Help us to be good stewards of the world you love.*



**Maundy Thursday**  
**Thursday, April 9, 2020**

Text: John 13:34

***“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.”***

What images come to your mind when you think of Maundy Thursday? The Last Supper? Foot washing? Stripping the altar? Leaving the worship service in silence and dim lights?

The word Maundy comes from the Latin “mandatum” which means “to give” or “to order.” Indeed, Jesus did issue an order. After the meal is finished, feet are washed, and Judas has abruptly departed the gathering, Jesus says: “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another” (John 13:34). In so many ways, Maundy Thursday opens our hearts to where our journey with Jesus will take us next.

Let us Pray: *God of abundant love, give us servant hearts to joyfully love others as you first loved us. Amen.*



**Good Friday**  
**Friday, April 10, 2020**

Text: Colossians 1:15, 20

***[Christ Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.... and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.***

One summer day, my granddaughter Addy, almost five, was with her babysitter in the preschool nursery/classroom at the church where her father is a pastor. My son-in-law Eric stopped by to say hello. He saw that Addy had set up rows of chairs, with toys seated on them--stuffed animals, baby dolls, and even toy trucks, all facing forward. She was in the midst of addressing the assembly, speaking from colored sticky notes tacked to a music stand.

"Are you the teacher?" Eric asked.

"I'm preaching," she responded. "Don't you see the cross?"

Indeed, Addy had placed a tall, wooden, free-standing cross to her right.

"What are you preaching?" her dad asked.

“How Jesus calmed the storm,” she replied.

Children raised in the church surprise us and make us smile on a regular basis. We could take this little story in a lot of different directions, but the ultimate point is: *Don't you see the cross?* In baptism, we are all marked with the cross of Christ forever. On this day, Addy reminded the adults in her life that the cross is always in our midst. The cross is central to our faith, our church, and our lives.

Let us pray: *God grace, help us to keep our eyes on the cross and to share its glory and good news with others. Amen.*



**Saturday, April 11**  
**Easter Vigil**

Text: Genesis 1:1-4

***“In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, <sup>2</sup> the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. <sup>3</sup> Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. <sup>4</sup> And God saw that the light was good...”***

The Vigil of Easter is a dramatic worship experience which includes up to 12 Old Testament readings. Some of the readings may be omitted but using at least four is strongly recommended. They are the creation, the deliverance at the Red Sea, salvation freely offered in Isaiah 55, and Daniel’s deliverance from the fiery furnace.

The worship and the readings take us deep into our roots as children of God.

Think about how we celebrate Christmas Eve. For some of us, that’s the big night. We worship, feast, and open gifts that evening as we celebrate the birth of Jesus.

For some, the Saturday night of Holy Week is kind of like Easter Eve. The lights and colors are about to return with the vestments, flowers, and banners in the sanctuary. The “alleluias” are back. We have much to celebrate. Ours is a God who has loved us through the ages, all the way to the cross, and will never let us go.

Let Us Pray: *God of Salvation, renew and redeem your church, guiding us, your children, to shine as a light for the world. Amen*

