

at the Chapel

EASTER



HOLY WEEK

DEVOTIONAL

Holy Week. Passion Week. No matter what you call it, no week has significantly impacted human history more than the last week of Jesus' earthly life.

It was the climax of three years of ministry and hundreds of years of waiting. The rescuer God's people longed for rides triumphantly into Jerusalem. Then, the story takes a sudden turn.

Jesus doesn't overthrow Rome. Instead, He's executed on a Roman cross alongside criminals. The freedom God's people longed for wasn't coming — or was it?

Jesus knew God's kingdom wasn't physical but spiritual. While earthly leaders come and go, His reign would be forever. And while other kingdoms were established on a battlefield, His would be won on a cross.

For the next seven days, revisit the days leading up to Jesus' death and resurrection, and see how every event and conversation fulfilled God's past promises and prepared His people for the future.

Palm/Passion Sunday, April 2

Do not remain silent!

Learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow. — Isaiah 1:17

*“Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!”
Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, order your disciples to stop.” He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.” — Luke 19:38-40*

As Christians, we have a biblical mandate to seek justice by speaking out against systems of oppression that exploit, dehumanize and abuse people. Just as Jesus spoke against corruption in society, so must we. But what does this call look like when it interferes with our understanding of peace? Those who greeted Jesus as he rode into Jerusalem on a humble donkey, not a mighty war horse that Roman soldiers rode on, misunderstood the peace God sought to bring into the world.

Society has taught us that peace is the absence of conflict.

Merriam-Webster's Dictionary defines societal peace as "a state of tranquility or quiet such as freedom from civil disturbance." Unfortunately, this understanding of peace does not consider the inequities of society that call for us to speak up, not to remain silent, so that the proverbial boat will not be rocked. The Pharisees wanted silence from the people. They wanted silence from Jesus. But peace doesn't come from staying silent. Staying silent only perpetuates a system that maintains the tranquility of the privileged. Is that peace?

As we begin Holy Week, we must ponder two questions: Can there be peace in the world with no justice? And will it be our voices crying out, or will the stones have to shout for us?

Lord, guide us this Holy Week on our journey for justice. Please help us understand the true meaning of peace. Strengthen our voices so that we continue speaking up for what is right. In Christ's name, we pray. Amen.

Monday, April 3

Peace is our goal!

If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. — Romans 12:18

When we read this verse within Scripture, we can all agree that our greatest goal is to live peaceably with all. This is something that so many of us strive for, but when we look around us, it sometimes feels like an impossible feat.

We see political parties consistently in conflict with each other. We see movements trying to change systemic problems, but these movements are always greeted by opposition. This whole goal of living peaceably seems impossible when we are at odds with our families and neighbors in ways we may never have been before. Even in His last week of life on Earth, Jesus had a less than peaceable moment: overturning the tables of the money changers in the temple.

The conflicts and injustices of the world do their best to bring us down. In these moments, I turn to the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech. It's a

speech that was spoken when the dream Dr. King had was nowhere near the reality that he was living in. Even though his surroundings seemed grim, his speech was filled with hope for equality, justice, unity, peace, and reconciliation.

Let us remember when things seem to be crumbling around us, as they seemed especially to be for Jesus' followers as His last week of earthly life unfolded, nothing is too great for our God. Let us keep that dream of peace alive even when the darkness seems overpowering.

God of peace, we look around, and it is sometimes hard to find hope. We pray that even when we don't see it, we can be people who call forth hope — hope for peace and reconciliation — in a world that so gravely needs it. In Christ's name, we pray. Amen.

Tuesday, April 4

Let's make it right, Ok?

When he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him as he was teaching, and said, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" Jesus said to them, "I will also ask you one question; if you tell me the answer, then I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?" And they argued with one another, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?' But if we say, 'Of human origin,' we are afraid of the crowd; for all regard John as a prophet." So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And he said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things." — Matthew 21:23–27

So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. — Matthew 5:23–24

It's hard to seek reconciliation when tensions continue to rise and where conflict is around every corner, as Jesus witnessed with the Pharisees early in the week leading to his crucifixion. Yet the Gospel of Matthew clarifies reconciliation's importance within relationships here on Earth. It's so important that before you come to the altar with your gift, you must go and be reconciled if there is any animosity between you and someone else. This is something that I find challenging and impossible to do.

The time we live in has brought family members against each other, broken lifelong friendships, and caused us to greatly dislike people we might not even fully know. I don't want to always try and be reconciled with my brother or sister. Sometimes the most straightforward thing is to hold all the anger, hate, and animosity within us and push it down without doing anything about it.

Reconciliation these days is a radical thing to do. It's radical because it's not easy. Doing something radical might be the very thing that starts the healing process with someone who you've had animosity with. During this week, may we slowly

take steps toward forgiveness and healing, knowing that when we forgive and seek reconciliation, we are also given the gift of letting go of the toxins in our lives. May we allow the Spirit to work in places we can't, to heal, and bring peace in ways we cannot even imagine.

God of heaven, heal our hearts and allow us to start the process of radical reconciliation. Remind us that it can take time and help us endure when it just gets more challenging. In Christ's name, we pray. Amen.

Wednesday, April 5

Stay Humble!

Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not

all of you." For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean." — John 13:1–11

He himself went on ahead of them, bowing himself to the ground seven times, until he came near his brother. But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept. — Genesis 33:3–4

Long before Jesus stunned his friends by stooping down and humbly washing their feet during their last Passover meal together, there is another story of humility to share this Holy Week.

The Old Testament story of Jacob and Esau presents a very raw depiction of revenge, anger, and deception. From the start of their story, we see that the two boys were always very different and most of the time, at odds with each other.

The rivalry of the two brothers comes to a head toward the end of their father Isaac's life. It was then they knew that he would bless Esau, the oldest son. Yet both Rebekah, their mother, and Jacob, the youngest son, tricked Isaac into giving Jacob his blessing. Esau was

devastated from being so deeply deceived. As the story continues, Jacob runs away, so his brother doesn't kill him, resulting in years of distance between them out of fear and hatred.

Through God's promptings, Jacob returns to his brother to start the reconciliation process. On the day Jacob meets with Esau for the first time, he bows down as an act of humility in front of his brother. He came to his brother acknowledging his wrong and that he had deceived him. Humbling himself, admitting his faults, and coming before his brother show the start of the reconciliation process and lead to the embrace of two greatly estranged brothers.

For any relationship needing reconciliation, so much of it has to begin with admitting the faults typically on both sides of the relationship to start the repair. Humility is challenging, but it is something that we can practice in our lives. Let us not forget it took Jacob many years before this happened, and much of his decision came through the promptings of God. Jacob showed humility, and through this, we see two brothers embracing.

Dear God, provide us with the humility we need so that we can find peace within our relationships. Help us to seek forgiveness. Please help us to stoop down and wash another's feet, for it is through our humility and in our being vulnerable that healing can begin. In Christ's name, we pray. Amen.

Maundy Thursday, April 6

Love, no matter what!

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” — John 13:34–35

*Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; steadfast love and faithfulness go before you.
— Psalm 89:14*

As the disciples gathered with Jesus in the upper room for their last meal together, Jesus announced something startling. One of them will betray him. We know it is Judas, who leaves the dinner party to do the unthinkable: turn his friend over to those seeking to take his friend's life. But after we learn what Judas will do and Judas leaves, Jesus gives a new commandment to “love one another” — to love no matter what others might do to you. It seems an impossible commandment to see through, doesn't it? Yet we must. It is not an option, but a mandate. This day in Holy Week is called “Maundy Thursday.” The word maundy is Latin

for “mandate.”

Love is a mandate and that love requires reconciliation. And reconciliation requires inward work in order to seek peace and forgiveness. It also requires an action focused on justice and the restitution of wrongs. When two parties are at odds with one another, typically, there is a side that needs to forgive the wrong that was done and a side that requires justice for the wrongdoer. Of course, every relationship is unique, yet justice can always be found in the hard work of restoring what was once broken.

Let us walk in the Spirit and be led by our God to bring this justice to a world that so greatly needs it. Loving one another as Christ has loved us is the work that we as believers have been called to do. This is the heart of shalom, and we can bring love and reconciliation into our lives and within our communities.

Dear God, as we work on the restoration of our relationships, let us remember Jesus' words about loving one another. In Christ's name, we pray. Amen.

Good Friday, April 7

Relax, It's been settled.

So they took Jesus; and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. — John 19:16b–17

For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. — Romans 5:10

Our Lenten journeys have led us to Golgotha, where the ultimate display of reconciliation is seen through the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. Through Paul's writings, we understand that he considers the work done by Jesus Christ as a work of reconciliation. God is the reconciler, and we are the ones who are reconciled, having our sins wiped clean. Nothing was done on our part to bring about this reconciliation, but rather it is something that we can fully receive. This is a more robust and sacrificial love than we have ever seen.

Right now is a time to ponder and meditate on this reconciliation that we have so lovingly been given.

This can be the reminder of what we have been given, and through knowing that deep love and restoration, that we too can be ones to live in a way that is unlike what we see so often within this world. To repair a broken world, we must be Christ to one another. We must act as ones who know the redemptive power of being reconciled.

God, we come before you filled with gratitude that while we were sinners, your Son died for us, bringing reconciliation to all. We pray that we never forget your sacrifice to save us. In Christ's name, we pray. Amen.

Holy Saturday, April 8

Do the next right thing!

When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb. — Matthew 27:57–61

To do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice. — Proverbs 21:3

Proverbs says, “to do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice.” And Joseph, a man from Arimathea, did just that. He did a righteous, just thing in giving Jesus a proper burial. He didn’t think of what others might say about his selfless act, nor did he worry about what his wealthy friends would say about giving a radical, itinerant rabbi who was mockingly labeled “King of the Jews” a place in a tomb that was to

be for him when he died.

Like Joseph, God wants us to step out of the shadows and stand up for what we believe in. God wants us to do acts of selfless love.

Anyone can stay comfortably in the background and give a sacrifice in silence. Doing the right thing takes true strength, courage, and love. How is God compelling you "to do righteousness and justice" on this Holy Saturday?

Lord, show me how to truly love those around me. Help me to step out of my comfort zone and give me the strength and courage to take action for what is right. In Christ's name, I pray. Amen.

