



WEEKLY STUDY April 1 - 7, 2023

(Use this guide to individually or with a group dive deeper into this week's sermon.)

Our sermon series for Lent is: "Made For a Miracle"

On Ash Wednesday we began our new sermon series: Made for a miracle. As we journeyed to the cross with Jesus this Lent, we have examined the miracles in the book of John. Each one offered us an invitation to conversion: from emptiness to overflow; from holding on to letting go; from fear to courage; from spiritual blindness to depth of sight; from death to life. We have sought to make the season of Lent a meaningful one through practices that enrich our spiritual life and increase our missional outreach to family, church, and community.

Our scripture this week is John 12:12-19

"The next day the great crowd that had come to the festival heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, shouting, 'Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord – the King of Israel!' Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, as it is written: Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion. Look, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!' His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written of him and had been done to him. So the crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to testify. It was also because they heard that he had performed this sign that the crowd went to meet him. The Pharisees then said to one another, You see, you can do nothing. Look the world has gone after him!"

- 1)** Holy Week – we, along with the Christian Church all around the world – observe in this one week: 1) Palm (also called Passion) Sunday where we recall Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. 2) Maundy Thursday (named from the Latin "Mandatum" meaning commandment and recalling Jesus saying, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; just as I have loved you, you are to love one another as I have loved you." We gather to recall the Last Supper and participate in the washing of one another's feet reminding us of Jesus' doing so for the disciples. 3) Good Friday where we recall Jesus' crucifixion by hearing his last words from the cross. We arrive at Easter Sunday filled with remembering – knowing we don't celebrate resurrection without all that has happened prior to Easter Sunday. This year, in light of the shootings at

Covenant School, we begin this year with Passion (more than Palms) dominating our thoughts as we move through Holy Week.

Question: For you, what are the observances of Holy Week that mean the most? Why is this so?

- 2) This Palm Sunday was like no other before – occurring after the school shooting on Monday, March 27, 2023. By 10:30 last Monday, the fabric of Nashville had shifted as we experienced what so many communities have experienced – gun violence in one of our schools that took the lives of three children and three adults. Pastor Sam reflected back on Sunday, March 26 when we heard the miracle of the raising of Lazarus. She reminded us that when Lazarus emerged from the tomb, he was still wrapped in grave clothing. Jesus said to those present, “Untie him and let him go.” She reminded us that God expects us to help untie and unbind people from the grip of death, saying to us: “We were made to be a miracle in the midst of the miserable.”

Question: Perhaps in the happenings of this past week, you have witnessed those who have even a miracle in the midst of the miserable. Who have you noticed that has inspired and helped you grasp more fully God’s expectation for us to aid in the unbinding of people from the grip of death.

- 3) The procession of children coming into the sanctuary on Sunday was a visual reminder of what we tend to remember most about Palm Sunday. There is excitement. There is anticipation. There are children with the adults shouting, “Hosanna!”. But that wasn’t the only procession that day in Jerusalem. Pastor Sam told us there were two processions on that day. One would have been the kingly entry of Pilot with all of the horses, soldiers, armor and weaponry. It was a visual reminder that Rome was in charge. And it was a reminder that for the Romans, their emperor was to be worshipped since they regarded him as the Son of God. With Jesus’ entry, we have a very different Son of God. We have the waving of Palm branches that helped the Jews recall the Maccabean rebellion. We have the fulfillment of scripture with Jesus’ riding on a donkey as a peaceful Son of the one true God. We have children instead of soldiers leading the procession. We have the entry of one who promises nonviolence, peace, humility, righteousness, miracles and change.

Question: What are the contrasts you see or ponder related to the entry of Pilot and the entry of Jesus? In what ways do you see not just our society but the Christian church struggling now with the enticement of violence, dominance and fear instead of the leadership of peace with justice, and righteousness with love?

- 4) Remember – Palm Sunday is both a remembrance of the exaltation of the people as Jesus entered Jerusalem. And at the same time, it’s the start of the passion of Jesus – his arrest, trial, and death. We have to pass through the grief to get to the glory of Easter. And that’s the same for us. Grief is real. But so is appreciation for and joy in life. Sam reminded us that often in the midst of horrific events and deep grief, we don’t give our selves permission to set down our grief and enjoy life. She reminded us that we cannot

replenish our souls if we continue to drink solely from the cup of grief. Grief and joy intermingle. We don't do a disservice to one if we experience the other. She told us to take care of ourselves – go for walks, put the phone (or tablet) down, exercise, eat well, find healthy outlets and use them.

Question: What have you done – or what do you need to do to acknowledge grief and at the same time enjoy life?

Prayer: (Our prayer this week is based on the benediction from Sunday's service.)

Loving God, as we walk once again through this Holy Week, help us acknowledge our grief. At the same time, help us sustain a joy that anticipates the celebration of Jesus' resurrection and the power of your love. May we have the confidence to turn to you in both life and death.

Amen

Weekly Challenge: This week, whether you can attend services for Maundy Thursday in remembrance of Jesus' last supper and or Good Friday in remembrance of Jesus' final words from the cross, find time to read the accounts of both from the gospel of your choice.

(Weekly study guide prepared by Rev. MaryJane Pierce Norton)