March Weekly Reflections

Palm Sunday – John 12:12-16

[Five days before the Passover] 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.

Many Lutheran congregations open the Palm Sunday service with a call and response of, “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! **Hosanna in the highest!”** Then we parade around the church, waving our palm branches high, crying “Hosanna!” Palm Sunday is a day of joy and celebration. But underneath this celebration is something dangerous, something that will lead to Jesus being executed on the cross for claiming to be a king.

Jesus spoke about a kingdom that was greater than Rome, greater than any earthly kingdom in history. He spoke of a kingdom where the lowly would be lifted up, where everyone would have enough food to eat. To regular people this kingdom sounded wonderful. To the people in power what Jesus spoke about sounded scary. Some of them were afraid that if everyone had enough food to eat, like Jesus wanted, then they would not have as much. And some of them were scared because if Jesus started a revolution against Rome and it failed then everyone would get in trouble and none of Jesus’s people would have enough food to eat.

Reflection questions:

* Jesus’s message about the kingdom of God, where everyone would have enough food to eat and be treated with respect made some people very excited and some people very scared. Why do you think some people were excited and others scared?
* Some of the people with power liked what Jesus said but they were afraid that if he failed then everyone would be in trouble with Rome. They knew that what Jesus said and did was the right thing to do but they were afraid. Have you ever been afraid to do the right thing? How can God help you to have the courage to do was is right?

Maundy Thursday – John 13:1-14

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." After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord--and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.

This reading from John sets the stage for Jesus’ long farewell discourse in which he instructs and encourages the disciples during the Last Supper shortly before he is betrayed by Judas and arrested. Knowing what is about to come, he takes the time to prepare the disciples for what the night and following days will hold. He begins this preparation with an act of service, washing the disciples feet, a dirty job usually been done by the servants of the house, not the honored guest.

As he finishes his instructions are clear: do as I have done, wash one another’s feet. A calling to be servants to one another. This calling is at the center of Maundy Thursday, a reminder that living in Christian community involves mutual care for one another, sometimes being the servant, sometimes being served. Both serving and being served are humbling acts that remind us of our need for community. They also remind us of a God who loves us enough to bow down at our dirty feet so that they might be made clean. They remind us of a God who embraces all of our dirty, broken selves so that we might experience the power of the resurrection.

Reflection Questions:

* This about a time someone served you in a significant way. How did you feel?
* Reflect on a time you saw an opportunity to act as a servant but turned away. Why did you turn away? What would you do differently if you could do it again?
* How does having a savior who is also a servant change your relationship with Christ?

Good Friday – John 19:30

When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished." Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Good Friday is one of the most important days of the year and it is perhaps my favorite day of Holy Week. Now as someone who is an eternal optimist it might seem odd that I would choose the grief of Good Friday over the celebration and joy of Easter Sunday. But I think that what God does on Good Friday is extraordinary.

On Good Friday God dies. It is absolutely extraordinary that the most powerful being in the universe would choose to die in one of the most humiliating and painful ways possible. And while Jesus’s death on the cross means many different things to many different people one of the things it means is that God knows what it is to die.

God knows what it feels like physically and emotionally to die. God knows what it feels like to say goodbye to your friends and family. God knows what it feels like to give up your spirit and breath your last breath. God knows what dying feels like.

Death can be a scary thing for us. It is difficult to say goodbye to the people we love. It is scary to think about what our bodies go through when we die. And it is scary to think about breathing our very last breath. For most people death is scary. On Good Friday, God tells us that it is okay to be scared and that God understands our fear because God went through it.

God also tells us that we don’t go through death alone. God chose to die so that when we die, God is with us and God understands exactly what we are going through. Death is still scary but knowing that God is with us when we die and that God understands what we are feeling makes me a lot less afraid.

Reflection Questions:

* When was a time that you were scared? How can knowing that God is with you help you feel less scared?
* Has someone that you knew died? What did it feel like to say goodbye to them? Who helped you to feel better when you were sad?

Easter Vigil – John 20:1

“Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb.”

The Easter Vigil service takes place the night before Easter begins. Usually, the service begins in the dark, with all the lights shut off, but eventually, we light the Christ Candle, turn on the lights, and celebrate the resurrection late into the night.

That first Easter, the Bible tells us that it was very early in the morning, so early that it was still dark outside, when Mary Magdalene and the others discovered that Jesus’ tomb was empty. But they did not immediately begin to celebrate Easter when they saw the empty tomb. They did not know what it meant that the tomb was empty. They thought someone had stolen Jesus’ body or moved it somewhere else. They could not believe that he had actually risen from the dead. It took a long time (and several appearances of Jesus to the disciples) for the reality to sink in and for them to be full of the joy that we usually associate with Easter.

The Easter Vigil is my favorite church service of Holy Week because I think it is closer to how that first Easter might have been. We gather together in the dark, unsure, after Good Friday, that the tomb is really empty and Jesus is really risen. But as we see God’s light in the Christ Candle and hear the stories in the Bible of everything that God has done for us, the truth sinks in and we are filled with Easter joy.

Reflection Questions:

* Have you ever experienced something or been told good news that seemed too good to be true? Was it hard to believe it right away? How did you feel when you finally realized the good news really was true?
* Have you ever doubted the Good News in the Bible—that Jesus rose from the dead, or that Jesus loves you? Everyone has doubts about their faith sometimes. What can help us to believe when we are feeling unsure?