

Palm Sunday
Rev. Doug Floyd
Mark 15:1-39

Today marks the beginning of Holy Week. The Gospel today is sort of an overture for the whole week. The lectionary gives us the option of reading a shorter reading that includes Mark 15:1-39. If we choose the longer reading, we begin in Mark 14 and continue through vs 47 of 15. This reading takes us from Jesus and the disciples to the betrayal to the trial before the chief priests and eventually to the cross.

It's like a preview of our coming week. Today we combine two services. We started with the Triumphal Entry of Christ into Jerusalem. This is a joyous celebration. Sometimes people want to equate this joyful crowd with the crowd that shouted "Crucify Him!" I'm not convinced it's the same group of people. In the Gospels, Jesus is often embraced by the poor and marginalized. The people who usually challenge Jesus are trying to protect their own authority.

Every week when we gather for worship, we come as the poor and needy, the marginalized. We rejoice because Jesus has welcome us home.

Our second reading today is the passion reading, The powers that be are trying to eliminate the threat of Jesus to their own little kingdoms. Today's Gospel ends with Jesus breathing out His last breath.

Tomorrow is Holy Monday. We remember the anointing of Jesus body for burial, Jesus meets with His friends Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. Mary pours out expensive oil upon the feet of Jesus. Judas instantly rebukes, saying the money for the oil could have been used to help the poor. The Gospel writer points out that Judas did not care for the poor but was used to helping himself to the money in the purse. The Gospel reading ends with a threat to Lazarus.

"The chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death as well, ¹¹ because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus." ¹ The Holy Week readings are filled with threats to the disciples, the people, and Jesus.

There is a tension building from day to day. On Holy Tuesday, we have the option of two different readings. In the first reading, Jesus confronts the moneychangers. In the second reading, Jesus calls out in the midst of crowds gathered to worship.

¹ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Jn 12:10–11.

The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. ³⁶ While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.” ²

While many did not believe, the text indicates that many of even the authorities believed in but were in fear of being kicked out of synagogue.

Some call Holy Wednesday, Spy Wednesday for it tells the story of Judas making a deal to betray Jesus.

On Maundy Thursday, the tension in the air is tangible. Yet, this is also one of the most tender moments in Scripture. We see tender love of Christ for his disciple, and we hear his “new commandment.” He kneels and washes their feet. While the weight of the world bears upon His shoulders, Jesus is pouring His life and love into the lives of the disciples. Jesus tells the disciples, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.”³

Maundy means commandment. The image of the washing of feet and loving one another as He has loved us combine in this event. Jesus reveals the way of discipleship looks like humbling ourselves before one another and sacrificially loving one another as we see in Philippians 2.

Good Friday brings us to the crucifixion. This is a dark day, and yet, it is a most holy day, and in that sense it is glorious and filled with hope. It truly is Good Friday.

Finally Holy Week comes to the silence of Holy Saturday with Christ in the tomb.

When we consider the overall week, it might be easy to overemphasize the morbidity of Christ’s suffering. Some movies of the life and death of Christ tend to focus on this morbidity. But actually, according to the Gospels, this is a story of every increasing glory. Each day of the week is revealing to a greater degree humans grasping for power. True power comes from God alone: not from the chariot, the horse or even human ingenuity.

Holy Week reveals the power of God revealed in weakness. Hans Urs Von Balthasar captures this sense in his work, “The Heart of the World.” He writes, “No fighter is more divine than the one who can achieve victory through defeat. In the instant when he receives the deadly wound, his opponent falls to the ground, himself struck a final blow. For he strikes love and is thus himself struck by love. And by letting itself be struck, love proves what had to be proven: that it is indeed love. Once struck, the hate-filled opponent recognizes his boundaries and understands: behave as he pleases, nevertheless he is bounded on every side by a love that is great than he. Everything he may fling at love—insults, indifference,

² *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Jn 12:35–36.

³ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Jn 13:34.

contempt, scornful derision, murderous silence, demonic slander—all of it can ever but prove love's superiority; and the black the night, the more radiant does love shine." (43-44)

The Lord welcomes us into this unspeakable love through Jesus Christ. Though we live in a world of power-grasping and self-promotion, we are invited into the way of Christ. We are love by an unspeakable and ungraspable love. The way of cross involves following Christ into the way of humility where we consider others better than ourselves. We humble ourselves before one another trusting that the Lord has welcomed us into His glorious love.