

The Greatest Wonder of All- Palm Sunday, 2022

A busy but a joyous and exciting day. It is always wonderful to receive new people into membership in our church. I find it a special joy having worked with these three young people since September, 2021. We met weekly first on Wednesday after school and these past months we have met on Sunday following worship. We worked our way through the Old and New Testaments and finished by discussing this Presbyterian Church U.S.A. The Statement of Belief on page four of your bulletin serves as a reflection and review of where we had been in the past months.

Additionally, each was asked to choose a verse or two from Scripture that spoke to them. It is hoped that at least for this time in their lives, this verse will come quickly to their minds and hearts when the need arises. They have been reminded often that the Holy Spirit is ever present with them. When Jesus returned to heaven, the Holy Spirit was sent as the part of the Trinity- Creator, Christ and Holy Spirit- that continues to be available to us. That ever-present, sustaining part of God that gives us peace in a sometimes chaotic life.

Let's step back for a few moments to the verses Nayeli, Hayden and Allen chose.

*Nayeli- II Corinthians 5: 17- "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!" What a distinct realization that through Christ, we are different people- our lives and actions reflect a change.

Hayden- Exodus 15: 2- "The Lord is my strength and my might, and he has become my salvation; this is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him." For these young people and likely most of us, the sense of being overwhelmed with the world and people around us is part of everyday life. What a joy to believe there is an ever-present strength we can draw upon.

Allen- John 3: 16 & 17- "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. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him." This verse familiar to many people puts this whole Lenten season into a concise package. As we remember the purpose for which Christ came to earth, we also celebrate that because Christ overcame death through his resurrection, we are promised life everlasting.

I hope the examples our young people have given us, will bring to each of our minds those precious words found in Scripture that ring within our hearts and minds. If that exercise is one that has gotten rusty in your life, I challenge you to be encouraged by the example given to us this morning by our youngest Confirmed members.

It seemed important to place a focus on the personal scripture texts from our Confirmants this morning rather than the usual Palm Sunday scriptures. BUT today is also Palm Sunday- a day when we recall Jesus' ride into Jerusalem. Our young people gave us just a taste of the joy of waving palms as they brought them forward this morning. As Jesus rode into Jerusalem, he had full knowledge of what was ahead of him. Jesus was certainly quite capable of quietly moving the other direction, but his love for us did not allow him to take that easy way out. Jesus instead moves humbly forward on our behalf riding on the back of a donkey- a common beast of burden- rather than on a glorious horse that a king would deserve. Today begins the week we refer to as Holy Week, these days as Jesus moved toward his death and burial.

For this Palm Sunday and again on Easter Sunday, the Lectionary's recommended Scripture draws the message from the Gospel of Luke. But during the Holy Week in between, it moves to the Gospel of John.

I would like to focus on those Lectionary readings- for your quiet contemplative time this week-

*Today- Palm Sunday- Jesus entrance into Jerusalem is drawn from (Luke 19: 28-40.) Jesus humility is evident riding in on a donkey. The crowd shouts, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" In the midst of the joy of Jesus followers, there had to be some people at the back of the crowd that found the whole scene rather amusing. What kind of a king rides on a donkey??

*Monday of Holy Week- the lectionary (John 12: 1-11)- we can reflect back to Stan's message last week- the account of Jesus coming to Bethany and Mary anointing his feet with expensive perfume while her sister, Martha served the dinner. Judas Iscariot complains about the waste of the perfume when the money used to buy it could have helped the poor. Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You will always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me." Remember Stan's visual- a large circle representing a relationship with God- Mary in the middle, fully clear on worshipping Jesus. The Pharisees- totally outside that circle- could only think of how to get rid of this troublemaker so many people were being drawn to. And then there was Judas, part of Jesus' band of disciples- someone who had a front row view of all Jesus taught and did- still easily forgets where true worship must lie and chooses the opposite- the world of money and self service. Consider: where do we fit in that circle?

*Tuesday of Holy Week- the lectionary (John 12: 20-36)- we can reflect on Jesus predicting his upcoming death. We will hear the familiar reminders- "Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.....Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also."

Jesus then speaks about his death, even indicating the kind of death he was to die- "...when I am lifted up from the earth...." Consider: which life do we love?

*Wednesday of Holy Week- the lectionary (John 13: 21-32)- Jesus tells the group gathered around him that one of them will betray him, and in response as to whom it was, Jesus gives a piece of bread to Judas Iscariot, telling him to "Do quickly what you are going to do." Consider: do our actions ever betray Christ?

*Thursday of Holy Week- Maundy Thursday- we will meet and reflect on the lectionary (John 13: 1-17, 31-35)- the Call to Servanthood. Modeling an example of a true servant, Jesus washes the disciple's feet even when Peter objects. Jesus is clear, "So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you." We will also on Thursday remember Christ and Christ's sacrifice for us by celebrating the Lord's Supper.

*Friday of Holy Week- the lectionary (John 18 and 19) follows Jesus' path of his betrayal by Judas, his arrest, trial before the high priest and Pilate, Jesus being sentenced to death, his crucifixion and burial. I encourage you to begin with the first verse of John 18 and read through to the end of John 19 without interruption, if possible. Consider: what did our mind, heart and soul "feel" as we read?

*Saturday of Holy Week- is listed as The Holy Vigil of Easter. It is a quiet time to collect our thoughts and aspirations from this last week. We recall the whole story of Jesus' pain, suffering, darkness and death.

Then in the midst of that darkness and death- We should be prepared to experience the full glory of Easter Sunday and be reminded of our God- arms spread wide in forgiving love- The Greatest Wonder of All!! Amen