

GLENKIRK CHURCH



WEEKLY DEVOTIONS

The DEVO

APRIL 15 - 19, 2019

Palm
SUNDAY



Last Week of Lent

This week the Gathering Place is open between 7:00am and 9:00pm for a time to prayerfully participate in the Stations of the Cross. Be sure to schedule an hour and walk through this experience. Our Maundy Thursday service is on Thursday at 7:00pm.

Mark records the last words of Jesus in Chapter 15:34: *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”* Have you ever cried those words out to God? “Why does God sometimes seem to fail us just when the chips are down, just when we need Him most? ... We often glibly say that we want to be like Jesus. We want our lives to be like His life. We want our values to be shaped by His values. We want our relationship with God to be like His relationship with God. So we pray to be like Jesus. But we’re generally blind to the full reality of who Jesus is.

“We want to be shaped by the glorious Jesus. We want to heal the sick and raise the dead; we don’t want to feel His grief at the unbelief of Jerusalem. We want to speak eloquent words of wisdom, but we don’t want to say to anyone, ‘Get thee behind me, Satan,’ or ‘You brood of hypocrites!’ We want to be raised to new life but go to great lengths to avoid the cross. We want an intimate life with God but never want to know the experience of being forsaken. But to share in the life of Jesus means to share in all of His life, and that means to share in His suffering.

“Gerhard Forde ... says it simply: ‘It is only through suffering and the cross that sinners can see and come to know God.’ That’s why Paul says what can seem so absurd: ‘*For His sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in Him ... that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and may share His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead*’ (Philippians 3:8-11, ESV).

“For us to suffer the loss of all things means, among other things, to suffer the loss of the props that have become idols. It means to crucify a faith that avoids the Cross. ... *To suffer the loss of all things means to say with Paul, ‘I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me’* (Galatians 2:20 ESV).” (Mark Galli) Do you avoid the cross or pray for the power to embrace it?

What was Saturday like—that in-between time of the Cross on Friday and Easter Sunday morning? Jesus is gone; all seems loss; there is a sense of failure, hopelessness, directionless defeat. “A medieval theologian, Anselm, once described the kind of faith that comes with Saturday—*fides quaerens intellectum*: ‘faith seeking understanding.’ By that, he meant that faith isn’t something that

arises after moments of understanding. Rather, faith is something that you cling to when understanding and reason lay dead.

“We don’t believe once we understand it—we believe in order to understand it. Saturday’s like that: offering a day of waiting, a day of ambiguity, a day when God is sovereign even if our ideas and theologies and expectations about Him are not. ... We don’t love God once we understand Him; we love God in order to understand Him. ... Faith isn’t just Good Friday and Easter Sunday; faith is awkward Saturday too. ... The silence is deafening.” (A. J. Swoboda)

Where is God calling you to wait in the midst of uncertainty?
The Good News is that we know about Sunday. We know Sunday is coming. How can you take that knowledge into the uncertainties of your life now?

Sources:

- Quoted material in the first four paragraphs is written by Mark Galli. “Mercifully Forsaken,” *Journey to the Cross: Lent/Easter 2019*. A Christianity Today Special Issue.
- Quoted material in the fifth paragraph is written by A. J. Swoboda. “Waiting in the Tomb,” *Journey to the Cross: Lent/Easter 2019*. A Christianity Today Special Issue.

MONDAY

John 12:1-8; Luke 19:29-44; Mark 11:15-19

It's Holy Week and we join our Lord and Savior as He walks faithfully toward crucifixion upon Calvary's cross. Before considering Monday's activities amidst the most significant seven days in history, let's start by revisiting two events of the prior weekend.

Remember that Jesus was fully man while also fully God. Accordingly, like any of us, He enjoyed time with friends, particularly knowing what the week ahead held. Thus, Jesus stayed in Bethany with Mary, Martha and Lazarus. Mary, likely anticipating His execution, anointed Christ with spikenard (John 12:1-8), a fragrant ointment used to prepare corpses for burial. Judas Iscariot protested such "wasteful extravagance." This may have been a "last straw" incident convincing Judas to betray Jesus. Judas was perhaps expecting that the Messiah would "step up" and lead a successful uprising against Roman oppression.

Yesterday, Palm Sunday—the day that the Passover lamb was selected (Exodus 12:3,6)—the "Lamb of God" (John 1:29) triumphantly entered Jerusalem. This included public admiration and open declaration of His Messiahship, fulfilling Zechariah's prophecy (Zechariah 9:9). Previously, Jesus discouraged such recognition, awaiting the right timing. Palm Sunday's display provoked the Jewish leaders—they could no longer stomach such a "blasphemous" threat to their authority. Jesus wept for Israel (Luke 19:41-44), knowing that nearly all would reject Him, the only Way to reconciliation with God and resultant salvation.

Then Monday Jesus proceeded to Jerusalem's temple. Adjacent to this is one of the strangest acts in Jesus' ministry, His cursing the fig tree (Matthew 21:18-19)—more on this tomorrow. At the temple, money-changers and those selling animals for sacrifices grossly overcharged both Jews and "God-fearers" seeking the LORD. Jesus, righteously indignant, overturned the exploiters' tables and drove them out. Their bosses, chief priests and other corrupt leaders then felt compelled to pursue "a way to destroy Him" (Mark 11:18).

What powerful imagery within these first days of Holy Week! Jesus came to die sacrificially, anointed accordingly. He led an insurrection; however, His insurrection was not political but regarding our sinful hearts. And He cursed the fig tree and cleansed the temple, the latter a final provocation of Jewish leaders also symbolizing Israel's impending judgment.

QUESTIONS

Why did Mary of Bethany anoint Jesus with expensive spikenard? Why did Jesus finally allow public admiration and declaration of His Messiahship at the Triumphal Entry? Why did Jesus cleanse the temple?

PRAYERS FOR NEIGHBORHOOD HOMEWORK HOUSE

Pray for Neighborhood Homework House (NHH), which has been serving Azusa students since 1997. The work of these tutors focuses on academic support for over 200 low-income students through daily after-school programs. NHH tutors are committed to family engagement, social and emotional development, and ultimately connecting to local churches for discipleship.

TUESDAY

Matthew 21:18-19, 23:37-39, 24:1-51

Though it likely occurred on Monday of Holy Week, let's revisit the peculiar incident of Jesus cursing the fig tree. This was the Savior's only recorded miracle of destruction, harmonizing with His temple cleansing and today's teaching. "The fig tree represented the spiritual deadness of Israel, who ... [was] spiritually barren because of [its] sins. ... Jesus was pronouncing His coming judgment of Israel and demonstrating His power to carry it out." (GotQuestions.org)

Jesus returned to the temple Tuesday to teach, whereupon the Jewish leaders challenged His authority. He thwarted them again and shared three parables—of the two sons, the vineyard tenants, and the wedding feast—regarding their treachery and God's plan to supplant them (Matthew 21:23 - 22:14). They then tried to trap Him with questions about paying Roman taxes, the afterlife, and the Law. Jesus outmaneuvered them again, silencing His adversaries with a challenge: "Whose Son is the Christ?" (Matthew 22:41)

When Jesus then pronounced seven woes regarding the Jewish leaders' hypocrisy and unfaithfulness, their hostility intensified. Regardless, He lamented their rebellion and coming judgment—reminding us that God takes no pleasure in judging the wicked (Ezekiel 33:11)!

Traveling toward Bethany again later on Tuesday, Jesus taught the disciples at the Mount of Olives (Matthew 24). He responded to their questions on “signs of the end of the age,” Israel’s judgment and destruction, and His second coming in passages hotly disputed within Christendom. Despite differences regarding details, true believers agree that Christ will return. The greater controversy pertains to the meaning of “the end of the age” and the circumstances and timing of “Jacob’s trouble” (Jeremiah 30:7).

Some interpret the “end of the age” and “Jacob’s trouble” as pertaining solely to Jerusalem’s trouble and the temple’s destruction by Rome in 70 AD, signifying the dissolution of Jewish practices and their corporate hope for covenant relationship with God. Others, conversely, see these words as applying to a future “Great Tribulation” fostering ethnic Israel’s mass redemption and preceding “the end times.” Regardless of interpretation, Jesus’ related prophecy was at least partially fulfilled in 70 AD. And Christ’s return? “No one knows” its timing (Matthew 24:36), but Jesus promised He’ll come again to judge humankind and to claim His Bride (Matthew 25:31-46).

QUESTIONS

What did the cursed fig tree represent? What is controversial regarding Jesus’ final teaching at the Mount of Olives?

PRAYERS FOR NEIGHBORHOOD HOMEWORK HOUSE

NHH is currently planning for the summer program where they devote much of their time to faith formation in the students through sleep-away camp, day camps, and VBS (at Glenkirk!). Pray that the kids will know how much they are loved by Jesus and that they would come to know Him as Savior.

WEDNESDAY

John 8:37-47; Luke 22:1-6; Mark 11:20-21

Did Jesus love the scribes, Pharisees and priests? Christ taught His disciples to love enemies and pray for persecutors (Matthew 5:44), clearly exhibiting the latter while dying on the cross (Luke 23:34). Today's John verses, characteristic of Jesus' other sharp exchanges with Jewish leaders, don't sound very loving. But we know that Jesus was sinless (1 Peter 2:22); thus, He was no hypocrite. Biblical love [agápē] is unconditional, wanting nothing but the best for the other; in this case, perhaps only loving "shock therapy" might get them on track.

The earlier John 8 dialog and similar ones prior to this—yesterday's tough discussion with Jesus and other events of the past few days of Passion Week—intensified the Sanhedrin's scheming. Then on Wednesday Judas falls into their laps, offering to betray the Lord for thirty pieces of silver (Matthew 26:15), a slave's price. This was a match made in hell, but prophesied by Zechariah 550 years earlier (Zechariah 11:12-13) and planned by God before the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8). Judas' personal plans, however, went awry and he later committed suicide as Friday's events unfolded (Matthew 27:3-5).

Like Judas, Israel's leaders and virtually all ancient Jews anticipated the Messiah as a militant isolationist, "Israel first" type. They saw Rome as the true enemy, not their own corruption. The Savior they sought had a military and political agenda, not one of spiritual

redemption. They didn't appreciate how "upside-down" they were—flesh-led, souls following their flesh, spirits withering apart from God. Jesus came to change this.

What is the gist of Jesus' contentions with His adversaries, explicit in John 8:37-47? Ancestry and empty religion cannot save; God has only children, not grandchildren. God's redemptive plan is for *all* of fallen creation, not only national Israel and the Jews. But most of the Jewish hierarchy violently opposed this, with Nicodemus and a few others being notable exceptions (John 19:38-42). Salvation comes only by recognizing our desperate need for the Savior and surrendering accordingly, turning from the enemy's ways and our own fallen ways.

Wednesday of Holy Week provides a sobering illustration of the consequences of their choices and the corresponding destiny of ancient Israel and most Jews: the cursed fig tree had withered.

QUESTIONS

Why was Jesus seemingly so harsh in His exchanges with the Pharisees and other Jewish authorities? How was Jesus very different from what most ancient Jews expected of the anticipated Messiah?

PRAYERS FOR NEIGHBORHOOD HOMEWORK HOUSE

During May, NHH leaders will need "Super-Subs" to jump in as substitute tutors as they lose their APU student tutors. Pray for not only the process of recruitment but that those who come will be engaged to continue serving at NHH beyond a one-time capacity.

THURSDAY

Luke 22:14-23; John 13:1-17; Mark 14:32-50

Maundy Thursday is a day of stark contrasts and implications. Jesus joined the disciples for the Last Supper, wherein He explained the New Covenant in His spilled blood [wine] and broken body [bread] offered in atoning sacrifice. Instituting what we commemorate via Communion, He personified the Old Covenant's animal sacrifices and Passover, which are pictures of His redemptive mission.

Ironically, during supper Jesus' disciples again argued regarding who was the greatest (Luke 9:46; 22:24). The Savior used this as an object lesson, rising and washing their feet. Jesus exemplified how "the first shall be last" (Matthew 20:16), demonstrating the secret to joyful, abundant life: godly service. Peter, proud of his humility, resisted until he was rebuked. Jesus also warned that His betrayer was among them, each responding, "Is it I, Lord?" (Matthew 26:22)—every disciple knew that he was capable of betraying Christ. Judas departed to further his treachery; brash Peter remained, being warned by Jesus that he would deny Jesus three times within hours.

Afterward at Gethsemane, we find Jesus deeply anguished. But why? Isn't He God the Son, who came specifically and willingly for this purpose? Father and Son had been in eternal fellowship up to this point. In just hours they would be separated temporarily, Jesus "becoming sin" for us (2 Corinthians 5:21) and the Father bringing our rightful judgment fully upon Christ. The gravity of this was overwhelming—I believe that the spiritual, relational torment

immeasurably outweighed the physical pain and humiliation of His pending ordeal.

Three times at Gethsemane Jesus appealed for another way, the Father's "No" answers coming via stony silence. Critics of Christians often disparage our "arrogance and exclusivism." But if there was another way, why would the Father have subjected His beloved Son to what followed? The cults' "Jesus" is a created being—their "god," therefore, is cruel and cowardly. Our God took this upon Himself.

Thursday of Holy Week concludes with the Sanhedrin's posse coming for Jesus. When asked twice, "*Whom do you seek?*" His assailants answered, "*Jesus of Nazareth.*" Jesus' response, "*I am he*" (John 18:4-8; CEB, CJB and TLV translations), knocked them back with the LORD's covenant name (Exodus 3:14). Even in surrendering, Jesus powerfully proclaimed His deity and glorified God.

QUESTIONS

Why did Jesus wash His disciples' feet, including even Judas Iscariot's, during the Last Supper? Why was Jesus so deeply distraught in the Garden of Gethsemane?

PRAYERS FOR NEIGHBORHOOD HOMEWORK HOUSE

Five seniors are on track to graduate from high school in June. Pray for this transition for them and their families as they finalize next steps. NHH is working to continue support for the alumni members as they navigate college, including trying to match them with mentors.

FRIDAY

Mark 14:53-72; Luke 23:32-43; Matthew 27:45-51; John 19:30

It's Good Friday, commencing with our Lord's illegal early morning trials before Annas, Caiaphas, and the Sanhedrin, then Pilate, Herod, and back to Pilate. Just as the Passover lamb must be spotless, Rome's authorities found the "Lamb of God" faultless (Luke 23:14-15). Pilate desperately tried to sidestep involvement—he had Jesus flogged brutally, hoping to satisfy His enemies, and proposed releasing Him rather than murderous Barabbas ("Son of the Father"). But the crowd demanded Jesus' execution (Matthew 27:21-22).

Fulfilling Jesus' earlier prophesy, Peter denied Him three times while warming himself in Caiaphas' courtyard—demonstrating the perils in seeking comfort near the enemy. Meanwhile Judas, devastated by failed plans, hung himself (Matthew 27:5). Peter, though having betrayed Jesus, was later reinstated by the risen Christ (John 21:19).

Then on to history's pivotal event and only hope for fallen humankind, Jesus Christ's crucifixion. Despite the agony and humiliation, Jesus asked for forgiveness for His tormentors and executioners. Perhaps this stirred the repentant criminal on the cross to turn to Him, Jesus assuring him of his salvation. The mockers challenged Him to save Himself—Jesus could have, but then we would remain lost. He passed this test, as He had earlier at Gethsemane.

Darkness enveloped the scene from noon to three, when the fullness of the Father's judgment came upon Jesus as the Passover lambs were being slain (Exodus 12:5-6). Jesus cried out, "*My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?*"—fulfilling the prophecy in Psalm 22:1 and proclaiming His Messiahship. The thick temple curtain, previously signifying the separation between God and humankind, tore from the top—something that only God Himself could do. The transaction happened: Jesus exchanged His perfect, righteous life for our immense sinfulness. His final declaration before dying was "*tetelestai*," a legal term meaning "it is finished; paid in full [bail posted]."

Jesus embodied where the temporal met the eternal. He hung on the cross, suspended between heaven and earth; God the Son became a man so that we might become children of God. Moreover, Sunday is coming—He would rise (Mark 16:6), ratifying the sufficiency of His sacrifice. He is risen! He is risen indeed!

QUESTIONS

Why was Simon Peter reinstated and saved whereas Judas Iscariot apparently was not? What's the significance of Jesus' declaration on the cross, "*My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?*" and His final declaration before dying, "*tetelestai*"?

PRAYERS FOR NEIGHBORHOOD HOMEWORK HOUSE

Pray for each of NHH's 211 students and their families—that they would be safe, healthy, and ultimately thriving. Pray for the staff and volunteers to be alert to needed support and love for each student.

Sources:

- GotQuestions?org quote can be found at www.gotquestions.org/curse-fig-tree.

