

April 2023 – Pastoral Message

*“Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus’s head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed.” – John 20:6-8 NRSVUE*

Beloved Neighbors in Christ,

Grace and peace to you, my family, and friends, in the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! I don’t know about you, but I’m ready for Easter. I’m ready for the wonderful hymns, the life-giving energy of our worship services, and the miracle of resurrection that defines our shared faith and promises that we have been given.

Palm Sunday, or Sunday of the Passion, begins the week-long journey as we walk with our Lord Jesus Christ into the holy city of Jerusalem, and to his eventual cross. We hear the words of the masses shouting for joy as the rabbi rides into the city and is lauded as Messiah, or king. This is the one who has been foretold who will bring down the empire that has suppressed Israel and will make all things new, again. But this king is not adorned with a crown of gold or wears pure linen robes. No, he is riding a beast of burden, is tired, and is weathered. His long journey has led him to Jerusalem to share in the Passover celebration after having healed the sick, having cast out demons, and having fed the poor. But the story quickly turns dark, and he becomes a marked man by the same people he is helping. The Jewish elite and Roman occupiers conspire to bring him down and destroy him.

We move to Maundy Thursday, also known as Holy Thursday in some traditions. This is where we gather as the faithful and confess to God and one another that we have sinned in thought, word, and deed. Absolution comes, but at what cost? It comes at the cost of our Lord giving himself to us in the form of a servant-slave. As servant-slave, we remember the story of Jesus washing the feet of those whom he has chosen and shows absolute love by doing that which is most intimate. Maundy, a Latin derivative for mandate, is where we are given the command to love and serve one another – no matter who they are! This is the most difficult of the commands and mandates Christ asks us not only to do, but to take on in our natural lives. We go to celebrate Jesus’ last supper in the celebration of the simple, but holy meal of bread and wine. We call this the eucharist, or holy communion. As we leave the sanctuaries of the churches we call home, we know what is next for our Lord, and we share in that the next day.

Good Friday quickly comes upon us, and the sun rises to a new tomorrow. In the biblical narrative, by then, we remember that Jesus has already been betrayed, arrested, beaten, and humiliated before we even finish our morning breakfast or coffee. As the hours of the day stretch on, our Lord and Savior is ultimately forsaken by his Father, denied by his followers, and abandoned by his closest friends and confidants. Ultimately he is condemned and put to death by an empire

that chooses to not listen to his message of love and compassion. We celebrate his life and death this day and hear the words from the Gospel According to John in a service of light; the candles are continuously extinguished one by one until only the Christ candle remains lit. This the light we hold onto in our hearts and in our minds. Altars are stripped, tears are shed, and we leave the holy places we love so dear knowing that the second person of the Holy Trinity has died. God is indeed dead.

Then for a few days we sit in the mystery of our faith: the liminal place that is between life and death. Holy Saturday remains a holy time, but somehow we don't know what to do - I certainly don't. But as the day turns to darkness and a new dawn awaits us we look to the next day.

The Resurrection of Our Lord is triumphantly celebrated on Easter morning, depending on the time and place you choose to worship at. We put on our Sunday best. I'm going to show off a brand-new stole. The organs are turned up to the loudest settings, and we might even hear a trumpet or two. We return to a familiar liturgy and proudly sing the songs we love. The miracle of resurrected life and promise is given to our Lord Christ and is then passed along to us. We are freed. We are made new. We are loved. And we are saved. Christ has risen! He is risen indeed!

Please join me at the choice of your three Neighbors in Christ Parish congregations for Holy Week and Easter worship services. I look forward to seeing you soon! Keep the faith, beloved!!!

In Christ,

Rev. Erik Karlson

Pastor, Neighbors in Christ Parish