

Holy Week Devotional

This holy week devotional by the Rev. Jen Williamson, youth pastor at Grace and St. Stephen's, is intended for both individuals and groups, youth and adults.

Monday, April 6

Collect: Almighty God, whose most dear Son went not up to joy but first he suffered pain, and entered not into glory before he was crucified: Mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the cross, may find it none other than the way of life and peace; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Reflection: Yesterday was Palm Sunday and Passion Sunday. That means that we began the worship service hearing about how the people shouted “Hosanna” and waved palm branches while Jesus entered Jerusalem. They treated him like royalty. We wave palm branches and process outside to remember this, but then our worship turns toward the cross as we read the passion, or the story of Jesus’s death on the cross. What do you think it was like for Jesus to go from hearing shouts of joy and “blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord” to then being put on trial and hearing the people yell “crucify him?” Try saying both out loud “blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord” and “crucify him!” What does that feel like? Humans are capable of such kindness and love and also such anger and meanness. How do you balance the two in your life?

Read through (or listen on your streaming service) these lyrics from Coldplay’s “Viva la Vida.” Do you hear that same juxtaposition of having power and then being despised or tossed aside? Have you ever felt both of these things in the same month ... week ... day ... hour? How can we find strength in the steadiness of Christ during these times?

*I used to rule the world
Seas would rise when I gave the word
Now in the morning, I sleep alone
Sweep the streets I used to own

I used to roll the dice
Feel the fear in my enemy's eyes
Listen as the crowd would sing
Now the old king is dead! Long live the king!

One minute I held the key
Next the walls were closed on me
And I discovered that my castles stand
Upon pillars of salt and pillars of sand

I hear Jerusalem bells are ringing
Roman Cavalry choirs are singing
Be my mirror, my sword and shield
My missionaries in a foreign field
For some reason I can't explain
Once you go there was never, never a honest word
And that was when I ruled the world*

*It was a wicked and wild wind
Blew down the doors to let me in
Shattered windows and the sound of drums
People couldn't believe what I'd become*

*Revolutionaries wait
For my head on a silver plate
Just a puppet on a lonely string
Oh, who would ever want to be king?*

*I hear Jerusalem bells are ringing
Roman Calvary choirs are singing
Be my mirror, my sword and shield
My missionaries in a foreign field
For some reason I can't explain
I know Saint Peter won't call my name
Never an honest word
But that was when I ruled the world*

Tuesday, April 7

Scripture: Psalm 71:1-14

- 1 In you, O Lord, have I taken refuge; *
let me never be ashamed.
- 2 In your righteousness, deliver me and set me free; *
incline your ear to me and save me.
- 3 Be my strong rock, a castle to keep me safe; *
you are my crag and my stronghold.
- 4 Deliver me, my God, from the hand of the wicked, *
from the clutches of the evildoer and the oppressor.
- 5 For you are my hope, O Lord God, *
my confidence since I was young.
- 6 I have been sustained by you ever since I was born;
from my mother's womb you have been my strength; *
my praise shall be always of you.
- 7 I have become a portent to many; *
but you are my refuge and my strength.
- 8 Let my mouth be full of your praise *
and your glory all the day long.
- 9 Do not cast me off in my old age; *
forsake me not when my strength fails.
- 10 For my enemies are talking against me, *
and those who lie in wait for my life take counsel together.
- 11 They say, "God has forsaken him;
go after him and seize him; *
because there is none who will save."

12 O God, be not far from me; *

come quickly to help me, O my God.

13 Let those who set themselves against me be put to shame and be disgraced; *

let those who seek to do me evil be covered with scorn and reproach.

14 But I shall always wait in patience, *

and shall praise you more and more.

Reflection: This Psalm refers to God as a “refuge.” During these times of social distancing and isolation we are forced to take refuge in our homes. A refuge is meant to be a safe space/a shelter, but home is not always that for everyone. Often in life our refuge can be found inside ourselves, the light of Christ deep in our soul, dwelling in our heart. What spaces and places feel like a refuge for you? How can you find refuge within when everything outside of you feels chaotic? One of my favorite Lenten disciplines is to keep a journal. Not the kind where you write about your day so you can remember it later, but the kind where you write your deepest thoughts for no one else to read. Maybe writing isn’t your thing, drawing works too. For your devotion today reflect on the word “refuge” and draw whatever comes to mind. You don’t need to put your name on it or label it, it’s only for you and God to see.

Wednesday, April 8

Scripture: Hebrews 12:1-3

Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart.

Reflection: We are almost at the end of Lent. Perhaps this has been a time of resisting temptation. Maybe it has been a time to think about how weak humans can be and how much we need God. Maybe it has been a stressful time of getting through school assignments and hoping for a normal routine again. Have you heard of the “It Gets Better Project?” It was started as a way of combating the hopelessness that many LGBTQ+ young people may feel, particularly in their teenage years. It is a collection of inspiring stories of hope from people who went through difficult times and found joy on the other side. Sometimes people forget how hard high school can be, they get nostalgic and say it is the best years of your life. I never say that. I think it is hard and I wish I could go back to some of those difficult moments and whisper in the ear of my younger self “it gets better.” How might this scripture reading from Hebrews bring someone encouragement in dark times? When you look back at your life is there a time you wish you could have told yourself “it gets better?” When? People are saying that this pandemic we are experiencing is historical, that we will tell our children and grandchildren about it. When you tell the story of this time period,

what are some happy endings you hope for? In times of struggle try to listen for that voice from your future self. It does get better ...

Maundy Thursday, April 9

Scripture: John 13:1-17, 31b-35

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. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

"Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Reflection: I've led several week long mission trips with teens and on the last night we always had a foot-washing. The leaders would grab a plastic bin full of warm water and a towel and we would wash the feet of the teens. Every single time the room filled with tears. Once I asked them "why the tears?" They couldn't explain it and I regretted asking because it was a beautiful Holy Spirit moment not meant to be explained. Our church does a foot-washing every year at the Maundy Thursday service. Have you ever had your feet washed by another? What was it like? If you do not want to have your feet washed, why do you think that is? Imagine what it would be like for

Jesus to wash your feet. How has the practice of “social distancing” changed the way you look at touching others? How can we love, serve and comfort others when we can’t be near them?

Good Friday, April 10

Scripture: Psalm 22

1 My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? *
and are so far from my cry
and from the words of my distress?
2 O my God, I cry in the daytime, but you do not answer; *
by night as well, but I find no rest.
3 Yet you are the Holy One, *
enthroned upon the praises of Israel.
4 Our forefathers put their trust in you; *
they trusted, and you delivered them.

Reflection: In her book **Inspired**, Rachel Held Evans writes:

“Often I hear from readers who left their churches because they had no songs for them to sing after the miscarriage, the shooting, the earthquake, the divorce, the diagnosis, the attack, the bankruptcy. That American tendency toward triumphalism, of optimism rotted in success, money, and privilege, will infect and sap of substance any faith community that has lost its capacity for “holding space” for those in grief. As therapists and caregivers explain, to “hold space” for someone is to simply sit with them in their pain, without judgment or solutions, and remain present and attentive no matter the outcome. The Psalms are, in a sense, God’s way of holding space for us. They invite us to rejoice, wrestle, cry, complain, offer thanks, and shout obscenities before our Maker without self-consciousness and without fear. Life is full of the sort of joys and sorrows that don’t resolve neatly in a major key. God knows that. The Bible knows that. Why don’t we?

It is telling, and extraordinary, that in his most vulnerable moment, Jesus himself turned to the Psalms. Hanging from a Roman cross between two thieves, while his mother and loved ones watched in shock, he cried, “Eli, Eli lema sabachthani?”

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46). It’s a cry straight from Psalm 22, the God to whom these words were first spoken, speaking them back in human form. Three days later, Jesus would rise from the

dead, but in that moment, when all hope was lost and the darkness overwhelmed, only poetry would do.” (pgs 110-11)

When have you experienced a time when “all hope was lost and the darkness overwhelmed?” When was a time you “held space” for someone? When was a time someone “held space” for you?

Holy Saturday, April 11

Today is a day of darkness. The church is dark, Christ has died, the altar is stripped as a sign of his abandonment. We know what will happen tomorrow. We know the good ending at the end of this story, but for now we sit in darkness. Try to sit with the darkness for a moment. Sometimes when unpleasant thoughts come into our mind we grab our phone or turn on the tv or find a way to distract ourselves. Try to refrain from doing that and let the thoughts pass, almost like you can watch them move through your mind, just sitting with them, finding a word from God in the darkness. What does it feel like to sit in darkness? What are we afraid of in the darkness? What observations, feelings, knowledge or wisdom have you gained from this season of Lent?