

“One Week”

(Luke 19:29-40)

One week, seven days, one hundred sixty eight hours, six hundred four thousand eight hundred seconds, it is really not that long given the length of our lives. One single, solitary week and yet pause for a moment to ponder and mentally list what has filled the time since you last sat in your favorite pew or I stood here where the floor creaks each time I sway back and forth, I mean some of what we carry with us today from this past week feels pretty significant. In the six hundred four thousand eight hundred seconds since we last met; I re-preached my sermon at Fairhaven nursing home, laughed with Olivia, saw Ethan try to stifle a giggle as he set the table with two big serving spoons setting one at my spot at the dinner table and one where Gina sits all with a mischievous grin on his face, sat in eight and half hours of meetings, served home communion as a dog snored at my feet, sat in the sun with a church member feeling the warmth baptizing the back of my neck, talked on the phone and prayed for people, listened to folks at Bible study share meaningful stories of their faith, averted a palm branch crisis with the superhero help of Carrie and Fairview floral, drew with chalk on our drive way, ate chocolate (but that is a given), and sought to stay open to God as much as I could muster. One week, is not that long on the one hand and yet the truth and the tension is that when you compile a list of the events and experiences and encounters that the last seven days left upon our hearts it does start to feel kind of important.

And so today we find ourselves at the beginning edge of the week we call “holy”. This week is set aside within our faith to gather around a table to break bread and sip juice. This week we will remember the One we follow was deserted by his closest friends and wrongly accused. This week we will stand in the shadow of the cross, feeling pain and emptiness. One week that is all set in motion with this familiar joyous entry into Jerusalem. This is the holy city and at the very center stood the temple that was re-built after the Israelites had returned from exile in Babylon. This was no ordinary time, for crowds of people had gathered there to celebrate the Passover, a sacred, set aside holiday when the Jewish people remember how God had made a way out of no way, God led the people out of slavery, how God had passed over the homes that had a mark upon the doorpost, and how the moment when their ancestors bare feet touched the muddy bottom of a parted Red Sea and entered into the wilderness began a connection, a covenant between God and the Jewish people. The truth is that the themes of Passover echo loudly any time we gather around the communion table, Passover sets the stage for Holy Week and it all begins with Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey.

Until rummaging around Luke’s words this week, I’d always pictured Jesus hoisting himself upon that lowly donkey, steadying his hand upon the neck as he swung a leg over this about waist level borrowed creature of God. To be sure, I knew the prophesy that this donkey had never been ridden before, but I’d completely missed somewhere the image of the disciples actually setting Jesus on the donkey, which is a little odd when you stop and think about it. I mean how much help does someone need to maneuver onto an animal that stands about waist high? Perhaps someone need to help steady or hold tight onto the reigns of the donkey, but how many disciples does it take to set Jesus onto the donkey? (That actually sounds like it would be a set up for a great punch line...that I don’t have) So, I am left with this image of several disciples cradling Jesus in their arms, lifting him off the ground, as Jesus arms draped over their necks and his legs dangled freely just past their arms. It sounds like a big production for something that could be accomplished quite easily. But,

then, when you come to think about it, the disciples are pretty active throughout these twelve verses. The disciples go get the donkey, the disciples convince the owner of the borrowed donkey that it is okay, the disciples shrug off their cloaks setting them on the dusty fur of the animal, the disciples' muscles strain as the fullness of Jesus' weight was felt in their shoulders, the disciples' actions cause others to cast their coat onto the ground for the donkey to walk upon, the disciples sing out in a loud gusto-like voice, and it is the disciples, not Jesus, the disciples' actions that awaken the disapproving glares, shaking heads and harsh words from the Pharisees. The disciples on Palm Sunday got it right.

The week begins with such heartfelt, sincere actions of the disciples, but we know it will not be long before that all comes to an abrupt end. It is only a few days before these faithful, grace-filled moments give way to betrayal, confusion, scattering, denying, and unspeakable violence. And to be honest because we know all of this; Holy Week just does not feel all that holy. We know the storyline that is waiting for us and inviting us to enter into it anew so why do we have to rehearse it every year? Which would we rather do on Thursday night, gather around a somber last supper or try to relax after a long day? Which is more appealing on Friday take a walk outside listening for the birds singing or to listen to the words, "were you there when they crucified my Lord?"

Honestly, trying to discover the "holy" in Holy Week when it challenges our weary, overscheduled bodies can leave us either feeling like it is raining guilt or trying to make us some excuse like... "Uh, sorry, I got something to do" and dashing out the door. And pastors end up sounding like a parent trying to coax a child to open her mouth for gooey, pinkish colored, bitter tasting medicine that is suppose to make them feel better. Friends that did not compute for us when we were kids and the lingering taste Holy Week leaves on the tips of our tongues it certainly doesn't make sense why we would willingly subject ourselves to it now. But for all my conflict avoidance tendencies there is something about this week that has always compelled me and each service left me feeling steeped in the sacred. Maybe it is speaking the words, "On the night when Jesus was betrayed" at a time when sunlight isn't streaming into the sanctuary that makes communion taste different. Maybe it is the reality that eloquent, theological words simply feel more hallow than singing the words "Abide with Me" as my most heartfelt prayer on Maundy Thursday. Maybe it is the taste of bread and staring at a cross that reminds me brokenness and pain are real in this word. Maybe it is the taste of juice and sitting in silence that somehow mysteriously reassures me that brokenness is never the last word with God.

And so, Holy Week breaks open emotions we usually mask or push down when we walk inside churches. Emotions like pain, fear, hopelessness and emptiness. Emotions we might think that don't belong here. From this last week in addition to the laundry list of activities, we carry both brokenness and blessing. From this last week in addition to unfinished tasks, we carry both hopefulness and frustration. From this last week we hold within us moments we wished had not happened and prayers that somehow, in some way, we will be surprised by new life springing forth. Holy Week reflects back to us the full realities of our week. Holy Week is a cliff notes, crash course, compact week of the complexity that is life; and that life is steeped in the sacred.

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journey with us, sitting in a darkened sanctuary when all our words are inadequate and even unnecessary we will discover anew what is true. This one week seeks to mix together the tensions between faith and life, the sudden, all too quick turn we can experience of joy to sorrow, that we are not invincible or in control but vulnerable and loved by God. May this be a holy week for you. May the one hundred sixty eight hours this week not be filled with life as usual, but challenge yourself to come to a service you've not been to recently. May the six hundred four thousand eight hundred seconds that lay between now and Easter morning invite you to be steeped in the sacred, to pay attention and be open to God's presence, and most of all may the seven days ahead remind you that this one week makes all the difference in our lives, our faith, and in this world. Thanks be to God and let the people of God say, "Amen!"