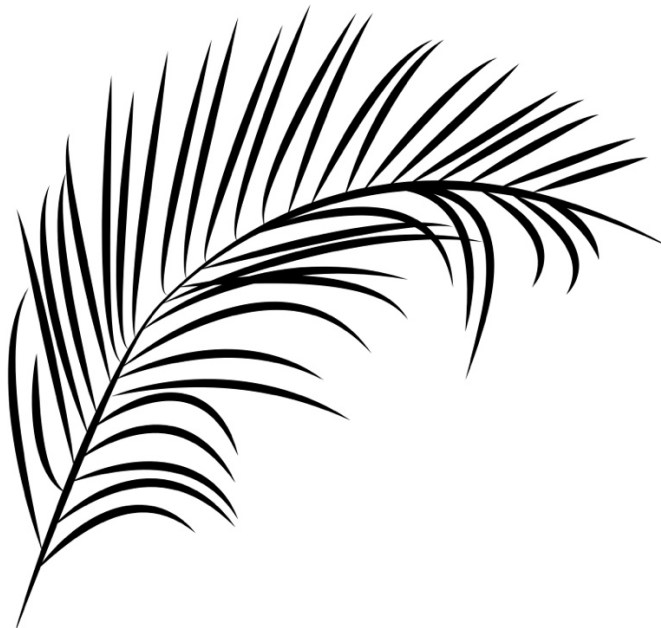




The Rev. Jennifer King Daugherty
The Sunday of the Passion: Palm Sunday – April 13, 2025

Holy Week Journey

Isaiah 50:4-9a; Psalm 31:9-16; Philippians 2:5-11; Luke 19:28-40, 22:14-23:56



[Luke 19:28-40] *After telling a parable to the crowd at Jericho, Jesus went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, saying, "Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it.'" So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?" They said, "The Lord needs it." Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, saying, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!" Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, order your disciples to stop." He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out."*

I have a confession to make. Before I started down the path to priesthood, I was a very spotty participant in Holy Week. I showed up on Palm Sunday and Good Friday out of a sense of obligation to my church community and would occasionally attend Maundy Thursday services and the Great Vigil.

I experienced Holy Week as a series of somber church commitments where we retold the story of Jesus' last days in order to gain a fresh appreciation of Jesus' selflessness and sacrifice. I felt like a passive witness to a painful, yet ultimately hopeful drama. Holy Week, at times, was just the precursor to Easter joy.

Nine years passed from when I began discernment for holy orders to the day of priestly ordination, and in that time my experience of Holy Week shifted.

I began to understand that the story of Jesus' last week isn't just about events 2000 years ago that gave birth to Christian practice and vocabulary, but about the fundamental, persistent complexity of being human. How our longings, heroic risk-taking, failures, confusion, and surrender of illusion are part of a cycle of growth and transformation. And how the Holy One is present in it all, drawing out

courage, wisdom, and humility, and knitting us into one body in Christ.

I now anticipate Holy Week like I would a journey to a place I've never been before. A place that I've read about and maybe seen photographs, but that I haven't fully experienced with all of my senses. A place that receives us as we are, making no demands, but offering an encounter with divine truth and a rediscovery of our deepest identity and purpose.

The journey of Holy Week is marked by discrete events in Jesus' life: his triumphant procession into Jerusalem on Sunday, overturning exploitative commerce in the Temple on Monday, and conflict with religious authorities on Tuesday. Wednesday is the hinge of the week, with final instruction to the disciples and Judas' desertion and betrayal. Thursday centers on the Last Supper and Jesus's Great Commandment, only to culminate in Jesus' arrest. Friday is a day of cruelty, suffering, and death. Saturday a liminal day of shock and grief.

These events are distinct, but they are not isolated from each other. They are part of a single, unified story of joy, confusion, doubt, fear, anguish, and surrender that somehow miraculously arrives at an even greater joy and

deeper hope. When we immerse ourselves in this story, we notice dynamics that still shape our lives and our world today:

- A political and civic system of domination that oppresses and exploits many people for the enrichment and power of a few
- How vilifying or diminishing someone can form cultural bonds, creating a scapegoat so that the real doers of harm can avoid responsibility
- The way fear and self-doubt can disconnect a person from their essential values and lead them to terrible choices
- The reality of helplessness in the face of suffering and how bearing faithful witness to that suffering is holy and life-giving, and finally,
- How limited our human intellect and imagination are in understanding the depth and power of God's love and faithfulness

Journeying through Holy Week, staying present to the Passion of Jesus that continues to unfold in our world today – that is hard work. It brings us face to face with our own brokenness -- the violence and cruelty we are capable of,

as well as our passivity in alleviating the suffering of others. And it reveals our longings – for strength, for forgiveness, and for healing. Only when we acknowledge our own flaws and neediness can we then open our hearts to God's grace and mercy.

So, come be a part of this community as we move through Holy Week together. Bring your need for healing on Wednesday evening and add your voice to prayers for wholeness for others. Come eat a holy meal with your brothers and sisters in faith on Thursday night and give thanks for Christ's love that binds us together. And contemplate the mystery of the cross on Friday night as we bear witness together to Jesus' willingness to hand over his life in solidarity with all of humanity.

And whether or not you are able to be part of the liturgies here, know that in your journey through Holy Week, you are not alone. We hold each other in prayer and hope, trusting that the same God who brought Jesus to new life receives us as we are, making no demands, but offering an encounter with divine truth and a rediscovery of our deepest identity and purpose.

Amen.