

Epworth Chapel on the Green  
March 25, 2018  
Palm/Passion Sunday  
Rev. Dr. Brook Thelander

Isaiah 52:13-53:12  
Psalm 22:1-11  
Philippians 2:5-11  
Mark 14:32-15:47

For most of the church's history, today was known simply as *Palm* Sunday. The day was highlighted by the palm waving processional, and the Scripture lessons focused on the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem.

But some years back, theologians and pastors grew concerned about this, as people were either unable or chose not to attend the services of Holy Week that come between Palm Sunday and Easter. Obviously, if you go straight from Palm Sunday to Easter you miss a key part of the story. The pivotal chapter in the drama that we live each year is omitted.

So, in an effort to address this, reformers took the service of Palm Sunday and added the Passion narrative to it, combining it into the service of Palm/Passion Sunday.

I'm not sure that this was the right thing to do, but this is not the place to debate the issue.

What I *do* want to do this morning is to encourage all of us to participate in Holy Week, even if you are not able, or choose not to, attend the special services

*here*. For choosing *not* to observe Holy Week is like going to the movie theater to watch an action packed thriller, only to get up and leave as the movie comes to the resolution and climax of its plot. It is tantamount to reading a captivating and spellbinding mystery novel, only to quit before the last chapter. It would be like going to the symphony, only to have the orchestra walk off the stage after the third movement of the great piece.

Use any analogy you choose, the truth is that this week is the climactic resolution of the whole story for Christians. And it is an utter mystery to me why any Christian would want to close the book at the very place where the story is reaching its climax and resolution. This is especially true given that Christianity is not just about believing *ideas*, *but about living and dying and rising with Christ*. *And our participation in the life of Christ comes through the transforming power of the liturgy*.

Having said that, you all know me well enough to know that I am not a legalist, and I do not resort to guilt or other forms of manipulation. The services of Holy Week here at Epworth are scheduled for *your* benefit, not mine. But I also understand reality.

I understand that the services of Holy Week are demanding -- physically, emotionally, and spiritually. I understand that there are legitimate reasons why

some may simply be unable to participate. So in the minute or two I have left, I want to try to encourage you and empower you this morning.

What I want to encourage you to do this morning is to *observe* Holy Week, even if you don't participate fully in everything that we do *here*. For this week should be qualitatively different than every other week in your calendar.

So if you can't be here this week, take this morning's folder home with you that contains the Scripture lessons for Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and the Easter Vigil. Take some time to be alone, and read the lessons for each day. Contemplate what is happening at that point in the story. Make some time to pray and to reflect.

On Thursday, pause and give thanks for the gift of Holy Communion that we observe each week here at Epworth. Think about how God's grace is given to you every time you come to the Table. And consider Jesus' commandment that our love for one another should be the mirror image of God's great love for us.

Many churches offer a Good Friday service at noon, or early in the day. If you can't be *here* on Friday evening, perhaps you could attend one of those services closer to where you live or work.

In any case, remember that the purpose of Good Friday is not just for personal reflection about what Christ did for *you*. As important as that is, the purpose of Good Friday is also about *intercession* for the world. On this day the

church prays for the entire creation for which Christ died, for there are no bounds to God's love revealed at Calvary. **So Friday is a good day to pray for the world, for your enemies, for those different from you, for all those whom you feel are beyond the reach of God's grace and mercy.**

And when Saturday comes, I encourage you to take the day off if possible. If you can't attend the Easter Vigil, then pause several times during the day to reflect. This is the day the world is silent as Jesus lies in the tomb. It is a day of waiting, of hoping, of longing, of considering the implications if Christ does not come forth from the grave.

So, by the grace of God, let us not merely transition from this day to Easter without anything in between. Let us tell and live and experience the *whole* story. In the words of our liturgy, let us continue to prepare our hearts for the Paschal Feast.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.