

Palm Sunday/Maundy Thursday

On Palm Sunday, Jesus entered the Holy City of Jerusalem on the back of a donkey. Palm branches were waving. Shouts of Hosanna filled the air. (Slide #1)

The next day, Monday, Jesus curses the fig tree, he clarifies the purpose of Blood Sacrifices, he clears the temple, and he challenges the Jewish religious authorities. (Slide #2, 3)

On Tuesday, there is again more challenge by the Jewish authorities. They become even more defensive toward what Jesus is doing and preaching. (Slide #4)

On Wednesday, he is a guest in the home of Simon the leper. The unnamed woman anoints him for burial with expensive ointment. Judas prepares to betray Jesus. (Slide #5)

Today we focus on Thursday. The day before Good Friday. The day often referred to as Maundy Thursday.

Holy Thursday is full of drama. Thursday evening, Jesus eats a final meal with his followers. (Slide #6) He goes to the Garden of Gethsemane and prays for deliverance. (Slide #7) He is betrayed by Judas. (Slide #8) He is denied by Peter. (Slide #9) He is abandoned by the rest of the disciples. He is arrested in the darkness. He is interrogated and then condemned to death. All of this happens before daybreak on what we now call Good Friday.

Remember how on Palm Sunday, Jesus asked two disciples to go into the city, and find the colt of a donkey tied up. (Slide #10) They were to tell the owner that Jesus had need of it. The two disciples brought the colt back to Jesus.

Today, on the Thursday before Good Friday -Jesus asks two disciples to go into the city where they will find a man carrying a jar of water. (Slide # 11) They are to follow him. Whatever home he enters, they are to go too and then ask him where there is a room in which the master might share the Passover meal with the disciples. Jesus tells

them that he will show them an upstairs room that is furnished and ready. They are to make preparations for the meal there. The disciples went about their task and found things just as Jesus had said.

When it comes to Palm Sunday, going to get the donkey, that was for a public event.

When it comes to the Passover meal, the Last Supper, there is something clandestine about this. Where will the disciples find the man carrying the water? Where he will go? Where this upper room will be?

It has been suggested that this secrecy was intentional. Jesus knew that Judas was in the process of betraying him. He did not want the religious authorities to know about this Last Supper he would share with his disciples. Jesus kept the location for this gathering a secret so that Judas would not be able to let his accusers know.

It would have been impossible to be oblivious to the growing hostility of the authorities toward Jesus. He assumed that his arrest

and his execution were close and inevitable. The noose was tightening. He was moving closer to the cross. It was important to Jesus that this last meal happen uninterrupted by his enemies.

When evening came, Jesus and the 12 arrived at the home and went upstairs.

3 important things happen here:

1. (Slide #12) They eat the Passover meal together
2. (Slide #13) Jesus speaks of his imminent betrayal
3. (Slide #14) Jesus invests the bread and wine with meaning associated with his impending death

Today I want to focus on the second element....(Slide # 15) Jesus speaks of his imminent betrayal –

Before Thursday night was over, Jesus would be betrayed by Judas. He would also be denied by Peter who, when confronted,

claimed he did not know Jesus. And finally, he would be abandoned by the other disciples. What a night Thursday was going to be!

Sharing a loaf of bread and a cup of wine with his disciples, we are told that Jesus took the bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them. "Take, eat, this is my body." Then he took the cup and said, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many."

Jesus' Last Supper, was in some ways, the First Supper of the future.

Briefly, I want to say a few things about the significance of meals with Jesus. Meals were of great importance in his ministry!

Jesus often used meals and banquets to teach. Sometimes he ate with the rich and famous. Mostly he ate with the 'undesirables' - the marginalized, the outcasts - tax collectors, lepers, the poor, the handicapped, and sinners. In a society with sharp, well defined social boundaries, Jesus broke all the rules. His meal practices were about inclusion. Think about that word....inclusion.....

For Jesus, bread was always part of a wonderful meal. Bread was essential. Sometimes, bread was all that some of his listeners ever had to eat. Bread symbolized the essentials for living... “give us this day our daily bread”.

When Mark describes the Last Supper, he uses 4 verbs –
(Slide #16) Took, blessed, broke, gave

It harkens back to an earlier scene.....looking up to heaven, Jesus took the 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish. He blessed and broke the loaves and gave them to his disciples to share with the crowd.

What we also learn about Jesus and food is this. He does not call for manna to reign down from heaven as we saw in the Old Testament. He uses what is available.....bread, fish, wine.

Nothing extraordinary, very common, every day..... It passes through his hands and there is enough for everyone. He makes it extraordinary.

After they had finished the meal, and had sung a hymn, Jesus and the disciples went out to the Mount of Olives. It is there that Jesus told them, “You will all become deserters”. Of course it was Peter who protested – (Slide # 17) “Lord even if all the others desert you, I will not”. Jesus looks at Peter solemnly and tells him, that before the cock crows 3 times, Peter will desert him. Peter continues to protest, “Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you.” And all the others said the same.

Jesus takes with him Peter, James and John to Gethsemane. There Jesus asks them to stay awake while he goes into the garden to pray. Three times they fall asleep. Each time they are reprimanded by Jesus. Each time they assure him they will do better.

Jesus prays for deliverance. Judas arrives with a group of temple soldiers. Jesus is arrested. The disciples flee.

It's been quite a day....quite a Thursday. We spend so much time and we know so much about the Friday Story and the Sunday story, but the Thursday we seem to race over.

The Last Supper, the trip to the Garden of Gethsemane, He prays for deliverance...."Lord, take this cup from me, but not my will, but Thy will be done".....the disciples continue to fall asleep. Judas betrays him. Peter says he never met him. The rest of the disciples abandon him. He is utterly alone. Arrested. Interrogated. Condemned to death. All of this on Thursday. In some ways, Friday is just the natural conclusion.

Our focus has been on discipleship lately – what it means to be a disciple, a follower of Christ.

What can we learn from the first disciples?

1. When he told them he was going to die, they refused to believe him. But the woman with the ointment believed him and prepared his body for burial.

2. He told his disciples that in his hour of need, they would desert him. But they refused to accept this. Especially Peter who declared that even if all the others abandoned him, he never would.
3. A simple request like, “Stay here, while I go into the garden, and stay awake.”, was too much for them. Not once, but 3 times they fell asleep.
4. Judas betrayed him....turned him over to the hands of his enemies.
5. Peter denied him. When asked by the enemies if he knew this Jesus fellow, Peter, the one who was most enthusiastic in the profession of his love for Jesus said, No, he had never met him.
6. The rest of the disciples, the men and women who had travelled with him, sat learning at his feet, saw him heal, heard him preach, professed their love for him, they left. They abandoned him.

It is just too easy and trite to draw the comparison between ourselves and the disciples and shame ourselves for a time.

We fall asleep when we have agreed to keep watch.

We have betrayed when we should have been loyal.

We have denied when we should have told the truth.

We have abandoned when we should have held strong.

We know all of that. We like to turn our nose up at those first disciples and declare how righteous and holy and disciplined we are. How much we express our love for Jesus and that which is good and kind and compassionate.

But it's not so black and white is it? Not so clear cut. There are shades of grey everywhere. Not unlike the disciples, we get tired too and sometimes we fall asleep. Sometimes we too get tired of some of the people in our lives. Sometimes we get tired

of everyone else depending on us, or asking things of us.

Sometimes we get tired, and fed up, and we do not do, that which is asked of us.

Not unlike the disciples sometimes we betray and sometimes we deny. We feel pressure on us from so many different directions.

At some point we have to do what is best for us. If we don't take care of ourselves who will? Sometimes that might mean telling a little white lie, and sometimes that might mean running away. We tell ourselves, that it is not what we want to do, but it is what we have to do.

It is not easy being a disciple. Sometimes it is hard work.

Amen

|