Passion Week

Holy Monday

Scripture Reading: John 14:1-14

On Monday of his final week, Jesus wasn’t afraid to stir up public controversy. He cleansed the temple and refused to rebuke the children’s hosannas. But, it was the words he spoke that were so controversial. Of all the controversial claims Jesus made, the one in John 14:6, may be more controversial in our day than all the rest.

In our age, we read these as fighting words: a stand against the idea that any way and any truth will do. But how did these words brought comfort to Jesus’ disciples back then as he prepared them for his death?

His disciples are fearful, one of them left as a traitor, Jesus announced that he would be leaving them, and Jesus lets them know that Peter will deny him three times but Jesus as “the way” brings comfort, peace, and assurance for his followers. Not controversial but comforting.

God has a big house and a big heart. God’s house has many rooms and that says something about his welcoming arms and generosity. And these are not just rooms and mercy in general; there is a room “for you,” there is mercy “for you,” Jesus goes “to prepare a place for you.”

Jesus will take you there. Not only are the Father’s heart and house ready for his chosen people, but Jesus himself will come back and take us there.

Jesus himself will be there. Jesus says, “I will come again and will take you to myself.” This is the great comfort for troubled disciples. Jesus won’t just get them to heaven, but he himself will be there.

Jesus has prepared the place for you. Twice Jesus says, “I go to prepare a place for you.” What does this mean? Does heaven need to be tidied up? No, there is a second “way” in this passage and it’s not for us but Jesus alone. It is the way of the cross, to death. Without Jesus taking this way on our behalf, there is no way for us to the Father. Preparing a place doesn’t mean renovation in heaven, but crucifixion on earth.

Jesus will be enough. What comfort, then, do we find in confessing Jesus as “the way”? In essence, Jesus tells his disciples, “I will be enough for you. You’re disoriented, and I am the way. You’re confused, and I am the truth. You’re afraid, and I am the life.

Jesus gets the glory of being “the way” (not “a way”), “the truth” (not just true), and “the life” (not just alive). We get the joy, peace, stability of having such a Lord and Savior and Treasure. “The way” is not, at its heart, belief in certain principles and execution of particular actions, but trusting and treasuring a living person. The heart of Christianity is not principles to live by, but a person to know and enjoy. Jesus is the way. Stand for this truth wherever you are, but first let it be sweet in your own soul.

Passion Week

Holy Tuesday

Scripture Reading: Psalm 110

In just three days, Jesus would be shamed and humiliated, tortured and executed. How did Jesus keep going? On the inside, he was singing.

That Tuesday was intense. He had captured their attention with a donkey (Sunday) and a whip (Monday), and then fed them a full day of teaching (Tuesday), showing the Jerusalem elite the one who spoke with authority. Jesus didn’t avoid the inevitable conflict with the ruling powers but went into their space and held his ground. When they questioned his authority, he answered with three parables, which were directed at them. Having endured their challenges with patience, he then turned the tables with Psalm 110.

Jesus asked the question: “What do you think about the Christ?” Whose son is he?” As expected, they answered, “The son of David.” Then came Psalm 110 and the zinger: “If then David calls [the Christ] Lord, how is he his son?” How could David’s son be greater than David himself? Unless…but the conversation was done as, “No one was able to answer him a word, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions (Matt. 22:46).

Jesus would use Psalm 110 again as he stood trial on Thursday before the high priest. The priest asked if he was the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus willingly sealed his fate, combining “Son of God” and Psalm 110 with “Son of Man” prophecy from Daniel 7:13. The high priest shouted “Blasphemy” and Jesus was sent to be condemned, scourged, and crucified. After Christ’s ascension, Psalm 110 is referenced by his disciples as they go and make disciples. In fact, the New Testament can be summarized like this: Psalm 110 has come true. Jesus is not only of David’s line but is also David’s Lord.

How did this psalm have Jesus singing in his heart as he was being sent to his death? The promises that was to be his.

Verse 1: God will see to it that Jesus gets the victory by putting his enemies under his feet

Verse 3: God will work in the people’s hearts so that they follow him gladly

Verse 3: God will refresh Jesus continually and not leave him weak

Verse 4: God will not change his mind

Verse 5: God will defeat leaders who oppose Jesus

Verse 6: God will repay unbelievers who threaten Jesus

Verse 6: God will destroy those who mean harm against Jesus

Verse 7: God will give Jesus all he needs to endure each step

Verse 7: God will preserve Jesus in what is coming upon him

Jesus remembered who he was to his Father: his right-hand man. The Son knew that he was destined for his Father’s right hand, and he acted as his Father’s right hand. He served as ultimate human instrument through which God channels his power to remake the world.

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Passion Week

Maundy Thursday

Scripture Reading: Mark 13:32-42

Now it is Thursday, and the hour has come. All history hinges on this hour and it is terrifying. Jesus must decide: will he turn to protect himself or will he stay the course and embrace his Father’s perfect and painful will? Never has a soul been in such anguish. Never has a human been so underserving of death. Never has anyone faced such a horror: to be made sin on behalf of others—to put himself forward in our place.

As early in Jesus’ ministry and throughout, there were moments where it seemed that Jesus was about to be arrested but no one put a finger on him, and this was because the hour had not yet come for Jesus. But when Jesus reclined with his disciples in the upper room, he knew this was the hour.

Why is today called “Maundy”? Scholars believe that the word comes from the Latin *mandatum*, meaning command. It’s a reference to Jesus’ charge to his disciples in that upper room, after washing their feet and watching Judas leave in John 13:34-35. It can be easy to focus on our love, and not that of Jesus from this command. When Jesus said, “as I have loved you,” he was not just referring to his washing their feet. He was looking forward to what the foot-washing foreshadowed—to his own death the next day and the ultimate sacrifice he would make to rescue them.

When Jesus finished praying the upper room, “he went out with his disciples across the brook Kidron, where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered” (John 18:1). Jesus hour had come. And here in the garden, he must make the final choice to subject himself to hell itself. He must embrace the pain, not just endure it. He must choose the nails and the darkness. He must step forward to receive his Father’s holy wrath. He must welcome his hour.

Jesus began to be “greatly distressed and troubled” (Mark 14:33) and he prayed that “if it were possible, the hour might pass from him” (Mark 14:35). So great was this distress that “his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground” (Luke 22:44). Jesus knew that hell itself was coming. How then could he embrace it in all its horror? In all the terror and torment, in all his sorrow and distress, he chose the cross because he tasted the joy to come (Hebrews 12:2). At last, he resolved, “Not my will, but yours, be done” (Luke 22:42). He would obey his Father’s command. This is the love shown to us.

Having been loved like this, how can we not love one another? But as we obey, we focus not on ourselves but marvel at what Jesus embraced for us. On Maundy Thursday, we don’t mainly step up to the charge to love others. We fall awestruck to our knees, face to the floor, and say: How marvelous, how wonderful, is my Saviors love for me!

Passion Week

Holy Saturday

Scripture Reading: John 19:28-37

It was just like any other day. After the night, the sun came up, the day happened, and night again. But to the disciples and close friends of Jesus, it must have felt like the longest day in the history of the world. On that Saturday, what moments did they grieved the most? And yet in their devastation, did they have it in them to even wonder about the way Jesus’ dead body came down from the cross? As John writes, “They did not break his legs” (v. 33).

The Sabbath of the Passover was the next day and this presented a problem. The normal Roman practice was to leave crucified men and women on the cross until they died—which could take days. If there were some reason to hasten their deaths, the soldiers would smash the legs of the victim with an iron mallet, which prevented the victim from pushing with his legs to keep his chest open to breathe. Strength in the arms would soon be not enough, and lead to suffocation.

It was the Jewish leaders who asked Pilate to have the legs broken so the dead men could be taken away before the Sabbath. The soldiers smashed the legs of the two criminals, but when they came to Jesus and “saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs” (v 33). Instead, they pierced his side with a spear, to confirm he was dead. And the apostle John saw the ray of hope in this surprising event. He remembered Psalm 34:19-20. Without going much into what bones have to do with all this, God’s keeping the bones of the righteous in Psalm 34:20 is a promise of resurrection, of new life on the other side of death. The apostle John saw a remarkable ray of resurrection hope.

The soldier with the iron mallet pauses, seeing that Jesus is already dead. The one with the spear pierces his side and confirms it—and the bones of Christ remain unbroken. And Jesus will rise again with his bones intact.

As long as Holy Saturday may be, these unbroken bones are the turning point. Here is an invitation to the disciples to dare to hope, even as they wipe the streams of tears from their faces.

As God’s covenant people in Christ, we make no claim that we’re immune to fears, troubles, afflictions, or death. Yet in the most trying of times, and even in death itself, our God keeps hope alive. In Christ, he promises resurrection on the other side. And he will deliver his people—not in our preferred timing, but in his.

If we only knew deep down, in the midst of our troubles, however severe—what a resounding rescue we have coming! How much more ready might we be to bear up under our momentary trials, including the darkest and longest of days.