



**Holy Week Devotions for the people of God around the Baltimore-Washington  
Conference of the United Methodist Church**

*Palm Sunday April 5, 2020*

*Matthew 21:1-12*

Palm Sunday is admittedly for me one of the strangest days of the year. I'm never quite sure how to embrace it or celebrate it. On the one hand, it is the triumphant, festive celebration of the entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem as Lord and King, surrounded by shouts of "Hosanna!" which means "save us." And yet, just days later we know that this same crowd would surround Jesus again, and their shouts would be utterly and shockingly different. Joyful Hosannas became an angry demand: "Crucify him! Crucify him!"

Palm Sunday has a way of showing us that things are rarely ever what they appear to be. We expect one thing, especially of God, and often receive something completely different. Right now, the life we're in is very different than what we have expected.

I invite you on this Palm Sunday to allow Christ and all his gifts to enter into your life on his terms this year. Things are quite painful and uncertain right now. But these times are NOT devoid of God's gifts, God's love, and God's presence. Be open to the unexpected, blessings in the midst of pain. Allow a humble Christ to show you what it truly means to be your King, Savior, and Lord in this moment of your life.

*Rev. Chris Owens, First Saints Community Church, Leonardtown, MD*

*Monday, April 6, 2020*

*Mark 14: 3 – 9*

Every year I am shaken by the abrupt shift from celebration on Palm Sunday to the ever-darker events of Holy Week. But I also know too well our tendency to be fickle humans – awash with hope, caught up with the energy of the crowd. But when the crowd turns, we turn too. Shouts of Hosanna are overwhelmed by demands to Crucify.

In Mark's gospel, a woman breaking an alabaster jar of ointment to pour over Jesus' head initiates a hard journey toward the cross. Jesus names her act an anointing for burial. And his affirmations – "She has performed a good service for me," and "She has done what she could" – stand in contrast to the frustration I feel as I read about the disciples' lack of understanding and lack of concern for how the world is unraveling around Jesus' life and ministry.

This unnamed woman is lavishing Jesus with what she has. From a place of abundance and deep devotion, she shows love and honor in concrete and deeply reverent ways. As I enter into Holy Week in an unprecedented season of social distance and anxiety, I pray to remember the well of abundance and deep devotion that bubbles up from the gift of eternal life so that I can offer love and honor to those who need it so.

*Rev. Laura Norvell, Faith UMC, Rockville, MD*

*Tuesday, April 7, 2020*

*Matthew 6:34*

“Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, and don’t get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes.” Matthew 6:34--The Message

Today is Tuesday, a full 48 hours before the world is about to unravel for Jesus, the disciples, and for that matter the rest of us. 48 hours before Jesus will have his final uninterrupted goodbye dinner with his best friends.

I wonder if Jesus was anything like me. Because if he was, on Tuesday he would be hoping to fast forward the time all the way up to Sunday morning. Yes, Sunday morning would be perfect because by then the betrayal, the trial, the torturing, the crucifixion, and dying would be all over. I wonder if he’s like me. But neither Jesus nor any of us have that luxury. Today is Tuesday and all Jesus has to do is to face what is given today. Or if today seems too much, all Jesus has to do is face the next hour, the next minute, the next few seconds deciding to be present, to be attentive, to listen, to pray, to love, to wait, to trust, to be.

The past cannot be changed and the future cannot be controlled. And all Jesus can do is teach us that today is a gift. Today all we can do is be present, to be attentive, to listen to those around us, to pray, to love, to wait, to trust, and to be. Today is enough. May we live for today. May we give our entire attention to what God is doing right now.

*Rev. Daniel Mejia, St. Matthew’s UMC, Bowie, MD*

*Wednesday, April 8, 2020*  
*12:1-11*

*John*

In these perilous moments, medical teams carry today's oils that are becoming more precious: protective gloves and masks, equipment and medicines. They also share their time, their energies, and their very lives.

I think of what Mary shares. First, it was her tears, mixed with the tears of the community, that moved Jesus to bring her brother back from death (John 11:33). Now, Mary brings in the most generous thing that she can to prepare Jesus. Even as the disciples will trail away, imagine the beautiful perfume sustaining him. It's a balm for the dying patient that anticipates the agonies ahead. It's also the extravagant blessing of a community that has seen her brother emerge from the tomb. Perhaps her loving care will sustain them, too, when virus or violence arrives.

The nurses, aid workers, and doctors have long labored tending the poor and the ill always among us. And in this season we see for each patient the need for Mary's wholehearted approach—her willingness to go to every length necessary to meet the moment. She comforts us: our tears in the midst of death and our gifts of love alongside those who labor will fuel the resurrection.

*Rev. Claire Matheny, Kittamaquundi Community Church, Columbia*

*Maundy Thursday, April 9, 2020*

*John 13:1-17, 31b-35; Luke 22:19-27*

The pandemic sheds light on a number of things for us, especially our society's dependence on hospitality, grocery, and food-service workers. At the center of it is the realization that shared meals are important for us.

Shared meals are a big deal to Jesus. Such a big deal that Jesus is called a *glutton* and a *drunkard*. But, more important to Jesus is who is at the table, remember he is also called *friend* of tax-collectors and sinners.

We Christians have consistently struggled to understand Jesus' open table practice- that is how he ate and with whom he ate. Jesus provides a welcome that could only come from God.

There was an assumed power structure in the typical Roman dining room. A seating order would place the most revered and powerful at central places on reclining sofas, and the rest of the seating order would signify status power (or lack thereof) or closeness to the benefactor. These people are far greater than the low-class table servers, table entertainers, and (how do I say it politely) forced table companions who would never recline at their own table.

But Jesus turns the tables, saying "I am among you as a *diakonos*, as one who serves the food at table.

I am among you, reversing all values, like a master who has his servants recline and girds himself to serve their table."

After serving at the table Jesus takes the place of the servant, saying "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and table server of all" and "Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your table server, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all."

The work Jesus does at the table and around the table at the feet of his followers becomes our own.

There will be abundant opportunities for us to be in service to our world in the months to come: Will we don our apron? Will we carry our bowl and towel?

*Pastor Chris Broadwell, Eastport UMC, Annapolis, MD*

*Good Friday, April 10, 2020*

*Matthew 27:45, 50, 55*

“From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon...Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last... Many women were also there, looking on from a distance; they had followed Jesus from Galilee and had provided for him.” Matthew 27:45, 50, 55

The women do not flee in the face of Jesus’ death. They watch. They witness. They weep.

Women, who are often overlooked or written out of the scriptures entirely, find their way into Jesus’ story in the poignant moments of his death and resurrection. When everyone else leaves, they stay. They grieve. And they act. Full of sorrow, they faithfully tend to Jesus’ body. Even as they mourn, they keep going, doing, honoring.

These are both the gifts that we have been given and the skills that we have honed for generations.

We have learned how to live in between Good Friday and Easter Sunday.

In the shock and grief of the present, and in the uncertainty and fear for the future, we are still living in between Good Friday and Easter Sunday. We, too, have seen the ending of some dreams, witnessed the death of certain hopes, and faced deepening sorrow and sleepless nights.

The women do not flee in the face of death. Nor will we.

Our role is not only to be witnesses of death. The women are also the first to see the resurrected Jesus. We are the doulas of good news, the midwives of hope, and the bearers of new life. Our role is as much to witness life as death, resurrection as crucifixion. We are to be in labor with God, bringing forth God’s new reality.

*Where is God asking you to “look on” in the face of fear, violence, and sorrow?*

*How is God calling you to midwife hope and bear new life?*

Prayer: Mothering Spirit, thank you for the generations of women who have been both witnesses and midwives. Give us the courage of our sisters who did not flee in the face of fear, violence, and death. May we keep crying and laboring with you for the birth of an age where your love for all reigns supreme. Amen.

*Rev. Michelle Mejia, University UMC, College Park*

*Holy Saturday, April 11, 2020*

*Luke 23:55-24:1*

They rested because they had to, not because they wanted to. The first day of the week is a day of rest, whether you want it or not. After the emotional roller coaster of the last week, they needed rest more than ever. And it was harder than ever.

Grief is just like that. It's trying to breath with an elephant on your chest. It's the pit in your stomach that is an endless abyss. It is knowing with absolute certainty that a gentle breeze will shatter you. It's trying to walk through cement and it's the need to do something, anything to change this impossible reality.

But it was the Sabbath, there's nothing they are allowed to do. Truth be told, there wasn't anything they could do, not that would really matter. Nothing. "Do nothing," decrees the Lord. "For this is the day from which life comes. This is the day when you do nothing, and remember that I am the one who creates life even out of death."

This Holy Saturday we have been enduring in not over yet. We must endure a while longer. And we will endure, because we know that while we are doing nothing, God is doing something big, something unimaginable. While we wait, grieving the death and destruction – while we impatiently do nothing, so badly wanting to pick up the pieces – God is bringing life even now, even when we cannot see it, even when it feels impossible.

So on this day we wait. We do nothing, trusting that God is indeed doing something.

*Rev. Jennifer Karsner, Asbury UMC, Arnold*

**Easter Sunday, April 12, 2020**

**Scripture: Luke 28:1-11**

“But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.” (Verse 11)

Idle: Unproductive. Irrelevant. Pointless. “Idle hands are the Devil’s workshop.” “Idling” your engine is a waste of gas. We don’t take kindly to idleness in our society. Many of us have spent these last few weeks sprinting on a metaphorical treadmill, trying to keep up some semblance of productivity. We have ramped up our digital connections, downloaded every video conferencing app available, and held fast to our to-do lists, convinced that they will save us from idleness.

But what are the stories that will be told about this time of physical distancing, when it’s all over? What tales of quarantine will we recount late into the night, when we are once again able to crowd around friend-filled dinner tables?

I sat on the curb with a fifteen-month old child the other day and watched the cherry blossoms “snow” in the breeze. We waved at a fire engine going by. We smiled at one person on the other side of the street. And we waited for the wind to blow again, so we could watch the petals some more.

Our days are made up of idle tales, it seems, in this strange season. A game of charades played over Zoom. A poem scrawled in a journal that will likely go unread by anyone else. Curb-sitting with a toddler. And so on Easter, of all days, we remember that what appeared at first to be an idle tale turned out to be the foundational story of our faith. What popular opinion dismissed as a waste of time became the well of hope to which we return, again and again.

*Spirit of surprises,  
may the idle tales we tell one day  
of the lives we’re living now  
bear witness for generations to come,  
of your redemptive,  
resilient,  
death-defeating love. Amen.*

*Rev. Kara Scroggins, Glenmont UMC, Silver Spring*



