

Holy Week Through The Mind Of Christ

Mark 11:1-11

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Babcock Presbyterian Church

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If you're a lifelong Christian you know the sad, confusing story of Holy Week starting with Christ being welcomed by the crowds on Palm Sunday and ending in his bloody trek to the cross on Good Friday. One day he's the conquering hero on their terms, seven days later he's the conquering hero on his terms, but in between Passion and Easter Sundays Christ willingly becomes our scapegoat by allowing himself to be punished the sins of the world.

If Holy Week seems like an out of control roller coaster ride to us, imagine what it was like for Jesus, after all, he was the one going through it, while we watch from afar and then put our own spin on the story.

It's become the preacher's task to wade through all the twists and turns of Holy Week, render the Church's interpretation of what happened and then explain how this central event in salvation history so decisively impacted the world. And so preachers retell the story, introduce the key players and then try to evaluate their motivations.

The disciples are portrayed as fair weather friends who desert, deny and betray their Master at just the critical moment. The Pharisees and High Priests are the villains, out to protect their turf by destroying Christ's reputation, even if it comes to cold blooded murder. Pilate becomes the religious establishment's cat's paw, manipulated into a role he doesn't want, but due to his own moral failure submits with gusto. And finally there's the fickle crowd, wanting to crown Jesus one day and crucify him the next.

But introducing the cast of characters and their motivations is only the beginning of the preacher's task. The next vital step is making the connection between them and us. You're asked to see yourself in each disciple and count the ways you've deserted, denied and betrayed Christ in your relationships with God and your neighbors. Since we're religious people, good solid Presbyterians at that, we're especially challenged to identify with the Pharisees and High Priests, because after all, we're just as good as them in claiming the religious high ground, and God help anyone who questions our time-honored traditions. Then there's Pilate, the crafty politician. So many times he coldly sat in the judgment seat condemning men to death, only to realize this time he was the one on trial. How often have we sat in the dock with him? And finally, we're encouraged to find our place in the fickle crowd, because we too are prone to agree with the last person we spoke to, thereby exposing our lack of conviction and loyalty to God and our principles.

But identifying the players, exposing their failures and then linking them to us doesn't quite complete the preacher's task. There's still one more player to consider before Holy Week can ever begin to make any sense and that of course is Jesus.

Probing the minds of the disciples, Pilate, the religious leaders and the crowds and then seeing ourselves in them is one thing. But probing the mind of the Son of God is an impossible task until you realize the scriptures reveal everything we need to know about Jesus.

One of today's lectionary readings, from Paul's letter to the Philippians, urges believers to be of "the same mind that was in Christ Jesus
who though he was in
the form of God
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited
but instead emptied himself...
and became obedient to the
point of death
even death on a cross." (Philippians 2:6-8)

Last Sunday's scripture told the story of the Greeks who said to Phillip, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." The sermon stressed the importance of believers seeing Jesus not as the world sees him, but as Jesus saw himself, as the Son of Man who would be lifted up on the cross for the sins of the world.

So besides seeing yourself in each of the supporting players of Holy Week you're also urged to see Jesus with the hope others will see Jesus living in you if only because you allow yourself, in Paul's words, to be of "the same mind that was in Christ Jesus."

Probably the best thing you can do for yourself during Holy Week is accept God's invitation to probe the mind of Christ. Realize that even though he was (and remains) equal to God in all ways he never exploited his status for his own ends. Jesus was the first to realize, "Hey, it's not all about me." He never insisted on his own way or claimed executive privilege. Instead, he gave up his rights and lowered himself. And he did it all without ever becoming anybody's doormat. How? He knew and trusted the deepest secret of eternity: real power comes from surrendering power to enable the love that conquers all.

Love empowered Jesus to submit to his Father's will and not slip away into the darkness moments before his arrest. Love empowered him to forgive his tormentors who stumbled and lied their way throughout the ordeal leaving Jesus the lone master of Good Friday because he alone mastered himself.

Yes, we can learn a lot about ourselves by watching Peter, Herod and the High Priests, but don't take your eyes off Jesus. Watch and learn. Watch, not just to applaud

Jesus' faith and courage, but to probe his mind and character so when you face your times of crucifixion, you can also be of the same mind and triumph over adversity.

You may be wondering, how? How do I start this transformative process that promises to make me over into Christ's image?

Just as St. Paul encouraged us to be of the same mind as Jesus, he also shows us the way. In Romans he wrote,

"I appeal to you...by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect."
(Romans 12:1-2)

Here St. Paul urges us to enter into the Paschal mystery, the mystery of the crucifixion, by following Christ's example. As Jesus offered up himself on the cross, we are invited to go and do likewise. Present yourself to God as a living sacrifice. That means making yourself available and becoming Christ-like in your workplace, home and neighborhood, by being a very present help in times of trouble even if it means entering into the suffering of others. And to insure your discipleship never runs out of steam, you allow your mind to be transformed by becoming melded or merged with Christ's by denying yourself and sacrificing your preconceived notions and self-centered ways to God's will.

So Holy Week isn't just about you and me turning over a new leaf, taking strategic steps to change your life for the better, it's really about being of the same mind as Jesus, by responding to his sacrifice with your own. That's really why Holy Week is so critical to our quality of life together.

So take a time out from your busy schedules to remember Jesus. Recall his patience with the crowds, welcoming him on Sunday but mocking him on Good Friday, but also recall the times Christ had to be patient with you. Ponder his cleansing of the Temple, so you can clean up and reform your own religious practices. Think of Jesus putting himself in harm's way every time he went back to the temple to teach and pray for God's people so when it's your turn to go into the Lion's Den, you'll go, if only because you know you must. Especially remember Jesus washing his disciples' feet and never forget we must humble ourselves and be servants to each other. And of course never forget on his death march to Calvary, despite his humiliations and sufferings he was able to forgive and that we too ought to forgive each other.

All of this he did for us. Now it's our turn. Don't let him down. Be of the same mind as Christ Jesus, offer up yourself as a living sacrifice and then wait for that third day when with Christ you are raised up into the new life he has already prepared for you.