

THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER

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GOOD

the perpetual challenge of our darkest day

by Drew Downs

As a small child, I remember being confused by the name “Good Friday.” There was nothing good about it. At least from theological and liturgical stand points. For me, however, it was a day off of school and they had free food at church when we hosted the annual ecumenical service. But also, I wasn’t allowed to watch TV or play video games from noon to three (the hours Jesus hung on the cross) out of respect. So, it overall leaned toward the bad.

Perhaps it is cold comfort to remember that only God is good and that good things can come from bad. And many traditions have fashioned the cross as a point of celebrating the goodness of God. To which I say: have you forgotten the resurrection? But there is something to their point. For what is Jesus’s purpose but to reveal the glory of God? And to understand the glory, we must contrast the good with the bad. We experience the low to rejoice in the goodness at the end.

LENT

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WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Disciples, Apostles, and Saints!

The Story of Holy Week

The story of Jesus's final week is packed with activity and teaching, making it a goldmine for those looking to learn from him. There are significant differences in each of the gospels, but there are common themes we raise up in our liturgy, particularly at the end of the week. We remember the last supper, the betrayal, the praying in the garden, the arrest, persecution, trial, and then the long walk to the crucifixion, the hanging there, the dying. We then hear about Jesus being removed from the cross, placed in a tomb, and left for dead.

The rest of the week is just as important, through many of these stories are covered toward the end of the liturgical year. After the triumphal entry on Palm Sunday, Jesus goes to the Temple and flips tables. He comes back the next day and teaches at the Temple, humiliating the religious leaders, and wowing the crowds. On Wednesday, he stays back in Bethany, where a woman anoints his feet with oil and wipes them with her hair while the disciples argue over whether this was a waste of expensive oil.

As we're in Year A, which is mostly Matthew's gospel, we don't just miss out on all of the great teaching that happens at the Temple, but chapters of teaching of the disciples that comes at the last supper. Confounding parables that are dark and kind of disturbing, but which culminate in a moment of deep reversal in chapter 25, when he names the real stakes. When you have treated the strangers in need around you with dignity, you have treated Jesus with dignity. And when you have denied your neighbors dignity, you have denied it to Jesus. That is the source of judgement in the end. This is the last teaching of Holy Week in Matthew. His final theological teaching before the Temple authorities and the Roman army strip him *and others* of dignity.

With love,
Drew+

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FOR SUNDAY

Palm Sunday

March 29, 2026

Collect

Almighty and everliving God, in your tender love for the human race you sent your Son our Savior Jesus Christ to take upon him our nature, and to suffer death upon the cross, giving us the example of his great humility: Mercifully grant that we may walk in the way of his suffering, and also share in his resurrection; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

Reading

Matthew 21:1-11

When Jesus and his disciples had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, just say this, 'The Lord needs them.' And he will send them immediately." This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, saying,

"Tell the daughter of Zion,
Look, your king is coming to you,
humble, and mounted on a donkey,
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting,

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"Hosanna to the Son of David!
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!
Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, "Who is this?" The crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee."

Reflection

We open Holy Week with a bittersweet story of Jesus's triumphal entry into Jerusalem. It is a curious moment; a bit of "guerrilla street theater" as the scholars Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan describe it. What with the riding on a donkey and getting his disciples to fetch it and his seeming to play with the whole sense of expectation around him, that he is a prophet or even the highly anticipated messiah who has come to save them and restore them to independence and prominence once more. The story is electric (a double meaning) — it is both energizing and dangerous.

We are called to enter Jerusalem wearing a kind of dual-consciousness: as people devoted to experiencing what Jesus invites us into and as people who already know the story and where it goes. That the week ends in Jesus's crucifixion and death. And also that the new week begins with Jesus's resurrection. We do this *and* we enter into the season as disciples, too. Disciples who have been told of what Jesus is preparing to do and where this mission is supposed to go.

And it is because of this dual-consciousness, we can feel the fearful sadness at the end of the week and joy at the start of the next one. And perhaps, just as importantly, we can see how the disciples, crowds, and religious leaders misunderstand the experience. Our ability to listen and anticipate, gives us an advantage and an always new opportunity to trust in Jesus.

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