

“Why This Week?” Palm Sunday 2016 Passion story from Mark 14 & 15 March 20, 2016

What nice little Christians we might be, if nothing about our lives needed Holy Week! We could confidently state that God so loved the world – *US* – that God came down to earth to show us in human form how interested God was in us and how much God thought we were wonderful... Hence, Christmas! The sweet baby born in Bethlehem, not even crying on that lovely night, and everybody seeing what those wise men from the east were pointing to: Wow, God has done something BIG here in this baby Jesus’ birth. We had better worship and listen to this Jesus!!

And then, we could celebrate how Jesus had such strength that even when he was famished in a desert and tempted by the Devil, he still kept to the straight and narrow, defending his faith and never veering from the way of God!

What a leader, we could marvel, so strong, so dedicated, such a great teacher. And those teachings!! We could hold them close to our hearts and be so glad that we, people who have ‘caught the faith’ or at least been born into it, hold on well to what Jesus taught. We would remember that he said it is better to give than to receive; and that we are to love another as much as he loved us; and that he wants us to feed the hungry and clothe the naked and forgive those who have hurt us and even pray for those people we cannot stand - even our enemies. And we could look back at his teachings and be so proud of ourselves for never letting a curse word escape from our lips, and for always showing love to each other and to Jesus by the wonderful ways we go through our days and use up our lives.

And we could say to ourselves, no wonder Christians get to celebrate Easter! Of course we do, since we live so similarly to Jesus Christ and show others his love all the time. We deserve a big Easter celebration with all the fixings and the assurance that death is not the end, but a new beginning!!

What nice little Christian lives we could tell ourselves we were living. (Pause)

But if we did, we would be lying through our teeth, because we who call ourselves Christian very often fall flat when it comes to following and acting like our Lord Jesus. We *don't* love each other lots of the times and we certainly forget to pray for our enemies. Our mouths are as quick to criticize and even hurt people with our words as we are to show kindness and patience and forgiveness. We blow it a lot of the time when it comes to re-presenting the spirit of Jesus Christ, here in this church, with our families, and when we’re out in the world. So most of us, myself included, are sometimes NOT such nice Christians.

Reminds me of the story of the woman waiting for her delayed flight in an airport. She bought a small package of Oreo cookies and went and sat down. A while later she noticed that a man across from her reached over to take one of her cookies. She couldn’t believe it! So she reached across and took one for herself. To her surprise, in a few minutes he took one again. So did she. Then, with cookie remaining, the man had the gall to offer it to her! Feeling angry, she took it. He then got up and left. Later, when her flight had been called, she reached into her bag for her

boarding pass and right then found her unopened package of Oreo cookies!!
How quick we can be to pass judgment on someone else, and to get mad at another person, without realizing that WE may be out of line, ourselves.

The Bible tells us that God knows who we are and what we do, whether we're home having a squabble or at work trying to get ahead of somebody or here in our church getting frustrated or angry and maybe knocking somebody else down with our words or our actions. God knows, God sees and understands the meanness and the anger and the fears we all have, and God for some reason still loves us anyway. Which is WHY we have been given the week that begins today: Holy Week.

Holy Week gives us a way to fit into Christ's story without pretending to be something we are not. It's kind of like a step on a huge truck, giving us a way to get in. Holy Week is a week where *everybody* let Jesus down as they were more concerned about their own skins than staying faithful to Jesus. Everybody failed to live up to their calling. And that's exactly what we do, most of the time.

God so loved the world that God gave his only Son, Jesus, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved.... 3:16

This week gives us a way to get on board, for through the events of this week Jesus declares, "Forgive them, Father, for they do not know what they do." Two thousand years ago fear and anger kept folks from understanding; today the same happens. But God offers forgiveness and a way - the way of Jesus - forward.

Life in this world today pressurizes us; we easily find ourselves deflated, angered, hurt, pushed to our limits, and feeling almost ready to explode or give up. For us, the story of this tumultuous, devastating week of Jesus' life and death is given, that we may let go of all the things that keep us from loving, and instead enter into the abundant, now and forever life Jesus came to make possible for us.

May Holy Week speak to each of us as – by the grace of God – we find ourselves in it. Amen.