

“Into the Darkness, Finding the Light”
“The Gift of Emptiness: Soul Desire”

The theme for Lent this year is “Into the Darkness, Finding the Light.” The image of Darkness is so appropriate for this final week of Lent. Today, we begin Holy Week. It is filled with many experiences: parades, dinners, uncertainty, betrayal and death. This week, it a difficult one. In order to be ready for Easter, we must first walk this dreary and uncomfortable way. May this week be a time of deepening faith and understanding as we find Jesus beckoning us to go through the darkness into the light of God’s love and grace. ---Pastor Cindy

Things I’d like to remember from today’s sermon: **“The Gift of Emptiness: Soul Desire”**

Prayer for the Week

Most Holy God, if our hearts are troubled during this Holy Week, let your everlasting mercy bring us quietness and rest. If our minds are torn by doubt stay beside us until we see. If our souls are time and confused, give us some small portion of that awe-full courage of Love. Blessed, then with the redeeming gifts of Christ’s life in us, we shall grow and change into Christ’s likeness, even as we shrink from the Cross and the tomb. Amen. (adapted from a prayer by Daniel H. Evans)

This week’s sermon may be viewed at <http://sundaystreams.com/go/firstwichita>

Study Guide

Monday, 4/10/17 Matthew 21: 1-11

This week always begins with such excitement. In our churches children parade with palm branches and we sing and shout, "Hosanna!" Who doesn't love a parade? How we love a new celebrity and how far that one can fall when our affections change. This Palm Sunday story begins well; yet we know how it will end, "Hosanna's!" will be "Crucify Him!" in a matter of days. Today, let's focus on the gift of grace and excitement. The shouts of joy and the taste of God's reign on earth. *Pray today, that you might be open to what God has in store for you this holy week.*

Tuesday, 4/11/17 Philippians 2: 5-11

"Though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, he humbled himself and become obedient to death, even death on a cross." These words fit so well the path of Holy week. Christ started out with shouts of "Hosanna," but in a few short days the cries turn to "Crucify Him!" Even if we do not feel comfortable with "blood" language, we all know we fall short of what we were meant to be. Even human beings make sacrifices, even ones that result in death in order for a great goal to be accomplished. Somehow, in Christ, our brokenness and our weakness is made whole through the amazing love we receive. Our darkness is turned into amazing light. *In what ways does your relationship with Christ make you whole?*

Wednesday, 4/12/17 Matthew 26: 69-75

This is part of the darkness. The story is known, Peter promises to stand by Jesus, but in end, just like Jesus predicted, Peter betrays him. Perhaps this is Holy Week in a nutshell, all people, ALL people sooner or later betray their highest ideals, lose sight of what is important and in fear turn away. In a world filled with evil great and small, some betrayals are much larger than others. It is out of this darkness, that the light of love, grace, mercy and forgiveness shines. It is acknowledging that each of us is broken and in need of healing and hope that God's does His greatest work in Christ. *Today, spend some time offering up your brokenness and allowing Christ's love to heal you.*

Thursday, 4/13/17 (Maundy Thursday) Matthew 27: 17-30

Today is the beginning of the last days of Holy Week, called the Holy Triduum (three days). Maundy means commandment. It was on this night that Jesus washed the disciple's feet (John 13: 1-11) and instituted the sacrament of Holy Communion. Christ commands us to love God and love one another and to be a servant to one another. In a world that is all about "me," serving and loving other has become inconvenient. Yet, this is the command. We, who claim we follow Jesus, are called to live as Jesus lived, in love and service. Tonight I encourage you to find a place of worship. Our service will be at 6:00 p.m. in the Wilke Center. We will gather together, and then have time to explore some prayer stations, have Holy Communion and share a meal. *Write some things down that you want to focus on over the next two days as we go into the darkness of Jesus' death and contemplate how that darkness leads us to the Light.*

Friday, 4/14/17 (Good Friday) Isaiah 53: 7-12, Matthew 27: 31-50

"He was oppressed...by a perversion of justice." There was nothing just or fair about Jesus' trial and crucifixion. This day is one of sorrow and darkness and an invitation to reflection. Through his life and death Jesus offers new life and new possibilities. On this one day, we are invited to truly focus on the grief, the shame and the sadness. Tonight at 7:00 there will be the Tenebrae (service of darkness) service in the Sanctuary. Through scripture, music and candles we will remember a life poured out for many. *Read the entire chapter of Isaiah 53 and meditate up the poetry and truth of these words. By walking through these final days of darkness, we are preparing ourselves for the Light that comes on Easter.*