

March 30, 2018

Holy Week 2018

*The Ultimate Disappointment*

Matthew 27:45-54

**Opening words:** There are 52 weeks every year. Each one is important and not a single one should be wasted. Have you ever stopped to consider how many weeks have occurred in the history of the world? However, there is one week that changed our world forever: Holy Week! On the Christian calendar Holy Week is the last week of Lent, beginning on Palm Sunday and ending at dawn on Easter. It is the week the church remembers the final days of Jesus' earthly ministry.

This is Holy Week. According to the Gospel of Mark, it went this way. May we never forget:

On Sunday, Jesus rode a noble animal to Jerusalem to communicate to everyone that he was the Messiah. The problem was, he wasn't the kind of Messiah they wanted. It was his point of no return.

On Monday, Jesus cleansed the temple. It has nothing to do with the youth fundraising in the hallway for their next mission trip. It has nothing to do with selling dinner tickets to aid the church's budget. However, it is about religious leaders abusing their position for personal gain.

On Tuesday, Jesus cursed the fig tree. It was the only thing that Jesus cursed. I hope you remember, the fig tree symbolized Israel itself. It was like burning an American flag. They got the message.

On Wednesday, Jesus taught in the temple courts about the Kingdom of God. Those are some of Jesus' most memorable words. I would encourage you to read them.

On Thursday, Jesus washed the disciple's feet, observed his last Seder, went to the garden to pray, was arrested, and was tried by his own people, the Sanhedrin.

This is Friday of Holy Week. We call it Good Friday. However, it wasn't such a good day for Jesus. For on this day, we remember how Jesus stood before Pilate, was rejected by the crowd and was abused by the soldiers. This is also the day we struggle with the death of Jesus. May God have mercy on each one of us.

**Matthew 27:45-54**

<sup>45</sup> From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land. <sup>46</sup> About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "*Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?*" (which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?").

<sup>47</sup> When some of those standing there heard this, they said, "He's calling Elijah."

<sup>48</sup> Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. <sup>49</sup> The rest said, "Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to save him."

<sup>50</sup> And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.

<sup>51</sup> At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split <sup>52</sup> and the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. <sup>53</sup> They came out of the tombs after Jesus' resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared to many people.

<sup>54</sup> When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, "Surely he was the Son of God!"

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The Mackenzie River is Canada's largest river system. It runs through vast sections of her barren Northwest Territory and empties into the Arctic Circle. It was named after a Canadian explorer, Sir Alexander Mackenzie. He lived near the end of the eighteenth century and longed to lead an expedition across Canada to the Pacific Ocean. His incredible journey was completed in 1793, 11 years before Lewis and Clark. That was his second attempt. His first attempt ended in failure in 1789. The first attempt failed because the group traveled on the Mackenzie River. They hoped it would empty into the Pacific Ocean. Instead, it turned north. History tells us the original group was devastated. In his diary, Mackenzie himself called the river that now carries his name, The River of Disappointment.

Has anyone here this evening ever experienced disappointment? Have you ever been disappointed in your spouse? Have you have been disappointed in your children? Have you ever been disappointed in your parents? Have you ever been disappointed in your friends? Has anyone here ever been disappointed in the government? Have you ever been disappointed in your church? Have you ever been disappointed in your pastor? Have you ever been disappointed in yourself? You can admit it. From time to time, we all do it. You turn your critical eyes inward, and you don't like what you see. You are not alone. Some of the greatest people in the history of the world have been disappointed in themselves. Consider these names with me:

Did you know Alexander the Great conquered Persia, but broke down and wept in disappointment because his troops were too exhausted to push on to India?

Did you know Hugo Grotius, the father of modern international law, knew disappointment? Near the end, he said, "*I have accomplished nothing worthwhile in my life.*"

Did you know John Quincy Adams, sixth President of the U.S., knew

disappointment? In his diary he wrote, *"My life has been spent in vain and idle aspirations, and in ceaseless rejected prayers. I hope I did something beneficial for my species."*

Did you know Robert Louis Stevenson wrote words that continue to delight and enrich our lives, and yet he knew disappointment? He wrote these words for his own headstone, *"Here lies one who meant well, who tried a little, and failed much."*

Did you know Cecil Rhodes, who opened up Africa and established an empire, knew disappointment? His last words were, *"So little done, so much to do."*

In 1858, the Illinois legislature--using an obscure statute--sent Stephen A. Douglas to the U.S. Senate instead of Abraham Lincoln, although Lincoln had won the popular vote. When a sympathetic friend asked Lincoln how he felt, he said, *"Like the boy who stubbed his toe: I am too big to cry and too badly hurt to laugh."*

You are not the first person and ours is not the first generation to experience disappointment. It is one of those things that links one generation to the next. However, this evening's scripture lesson is not just about being disappointed. Tonight's scripture lesson is about the ultimate disappointment, death! If you are ready to look at this evening's scripture lesson say, **"Amen!"**

We find ourselves this evening in the twenty-seventh chapter of Matthew. Much has already happened. The events of that first Palm Sunday, just days earlier, seem like years ago. The cheering crowd has disappeared, replaced by a grieving handful. The picture is not pretty. Jesus is being executed. In my station in life, I have witnessed many die. It is always hard. No matter how prepared we might be, the end is shocking. The person goes from being a human being to a corpse, in a matter of seconds. Each time, I am reminded of the fragility of life. It was no different for Jesus. The young man full of life earlier in the day is now gone; he is now just another rotting corpse. The eyewitnesses of his execution are not just disappointed, they are devastated. We visit the death of Jesus annually, but it never changes. The death of Jesus is shocking. It must have been hard to witness. Today, Good Friday, we are forced to answer this question:

**Why was the death of Jesus necessary?** There is not a single answer. There are several answers. Let me give you just three.

**1. The death of Jesus reminds us of the ugliness of sin!** Our world has demoted sin. Many believe they can earn their salvation. That is simply not true. We are saved by grace, because we are all sinners. (Romans 3:23)

**2. The death of Jesus reminds us that the eternal is more important than the temporary!** Jesus's hours of agony on the cross made the opportunity of eternal life possible.

**3. The death of Jesus reminds us of God's great commitment to us!** The people that love you the most, have sacrificed the most. Jesus sacrificed it all.

The theological reasons behind Jesus' death cannot replace the sting of his death. After all, death is the ultimate disappointment. If death makes you uncomfortable, say, **"Amen!"** There is no way to observe Good Friday without accepting the death of Jesus.

Years ago, I started this worship service in this place. A mausoleum in the middle of a cemetery is a good place to be on Good Friday. After all, Jesus was dead. For me, the first year was the most uncomfortable. It was new, so I came out in the middle of the afternoon to just settle. The weather was perfect for Good Friday. It was cold, and the rain could not have been any harder. I stood at the back door and watched the rain come down in buckets. I was thinking about the death of Jesus, and I was humbled. I was completely alone, except for an elderly woman. She wasn't inside, she was outside, holding an umbrella, standing next to freshly dug grave. I didn't know her story, and yet I did know her story. Her long-time husband had died, and she came to visit him. The rain and the thunder could not mask her crying. Listen to what I am about to say. She wasn't just crying. She was wailing. Her heart was broken; the love of her life was gone. She wasn't just disappointed; she was devastated. For a second, I thought about going out to comfort her, but she needed to be alone. With nothing else to do, I watched her grieve. Then, it hit me. It was Good Friday and she was crying over the death of a loved one, just like Jesus's loved ones cried for him. It is Good Friday. How many tears have you shed for Jesus today? After all, Jesus is dead, and death is the ultimate disappointment.

Will you pray with me?