

HOLY WEEK SERMONS

April 9, 2020 – Maundy Thursday

April 10, 2020 – Good Friday

April 12, 2020 – Easter Sunday

Pastor Zach Johnson

Hill Avenue Grace Lutheran Church

Pasadena, California

INTRODUCTION

Greetings, in this document you will find all three sermons from our Holy Week services of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday. Currently, we know that the stay at home orders for L.A. County are to last at least until May 15th. Because of this, we will continue to not gather for physical worship. We will continue to send out my weekly sermons to you during this time of social distancing. I also want to remind you that, if you would like to participate in worship during our virtual livestreams, please create a Facebook account and like the Hill Avenue Grace Facebook page. Or, if you would like to receive video copies of our worship livestreams, please make sure you are on our email list by contacting the church office. I would also like to give you a friendly reminder that, if you are able, to please continue to send in your weekly offerings to the church. We greatly appreciate the ways you generously support the ministry of Hill Avenue Grace Lutheran Church. Again, if you would like to reach out to me, please feel free to email me at pastor@hillavenuegrace.org or call me by phone at (626) 792-4169 ext. 101. If I do not answer, please leave a voicemail; I check it regularly and will call you back. Please continue to stay safe and may God continue to watch over you during this time.

SCRIPTURE READINGS AND SERMON – MAUNDY THURSDAY

First Reading: Exodus 12:1-4 [5-10] 11-14

¹The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: ²This month shall mark for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you. ³Tell the whole congregation of Israel that on the tenth of this month they are to take a lamb for each family, a lamb for each household. ⁴If a household is too small for a whole lamb, it shall join its closest neighbor in obtaining one; the lamb shall be divided in proportion to the number of people who eat of it. [⁵Your lamb shall be without blemish, a year-old male; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. ⁶You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month; then the whole assembled congregation of Israel shall slaughter it at twilight. ⁷They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. ⁸They shall eat the lamb that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. ⁹Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted over the fire, with its head, legs, and inner organs. ¹⁰You shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn.] ¹¹This is how you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it hurriedly. It is the passover of the LORD. ¹²For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both human beings and animals; on all the gods of Egypt I will execute



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judgments: I am the LORD. ¹³The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live: when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.

¹⁴This day shall be a day of remembrance for you. You shall celebrate it as a festival to the LORD; throughout your generations you shall observe it as a perpetual ordinance.

Psalm: Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19

Presiding minister will read the light printed verses; the assembly responds with the bold verses.

¹I love the LORD, who has | heard my voice,
and listened to my | supplication,

²for the LORD has given | ear to me
whenev- | er I called.

¹²How shall I re- | pay the LORD
for all the good things God has | done for me?

¹³I will lift the cup | of salvation
and call on the name | of the LORD.

¹⁴I will fulfill my vows | to the LORD
in the presence of | all God's people.

¹⁵Precious in your | sight, O LORD,
is the death | of your servants.

¹⁶O LORD, truly I | am your servant;
I am your servant, the child of your handmaid; you have freed me | from my bonds.

¹⁷I will offer you the sacrifice | of thanksgiving
and call upon the name | of the LORD.

¹⁸I will fulfill my vows | to the LORD
in the presence of | all God's people,

¹⁹in the courts of | the LORD's house,
in the midst of you, | O Jerusalem.

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

²³For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, ²⁴and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." ²⁵In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." ²⁶For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Gospel: John 13:1-17, 31b-35

¹Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. ²The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper ³Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, ⁴got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. ⁵Then he poured water into a basin and



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began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. ⁶He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" ⁷Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." ⁸Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." ⁹Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" ¹⁰Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you." ¹¹For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean."

¹²After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you?" ¹³You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. ¹⁴So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. ¹⁶Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. ¹⁷If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them."

^{31b}"Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. ³²If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. ³³Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' ³⁴I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

SERMON

There was no greater act of love and service that Jesus could've shown the disciple than washing their feet. Foot washing was not something you would expect your teacher or Lord to do for you. Foot washing was the job of a slave or servant. It was a sign of hospitality, for walking on dusty roads in nothing but sandals made the feet very dirty. But it was a degrading job, for most of us agree that feet are not the most desired part of our bodies; they get dirty, they smell, they look weird. The disciples, even though they didn't fully understand Jesus as God's Son, they still held him in high regard. It must've been quite uncomfortable to see their beloved teacher take the position of a slave or servant and wash their feet. I'm sure most of us would rather not have anyone, let alone Jesus, touch our feet. Peter certainly felt that way.

But Jesus wanted to show them just how far God's love is willing to go. Think about it, God, the creator of the universe; the being who gave us life; the person who turned water into wine, healed a crippled man and a blind man, and rose Lazarus from death; was willing to humble himself to the position of slave or servant in order to show immense love to the disciples.

This is something that is hard to comprehend because we live in a world that promotes power, status, and control over others. We live in a society that praises and rewards the most wealthy and the most powerful among us. We have been given messages most of our lives that the individual is the most important person, and we should do everything we can to get what "I" wants. If we need proof of this, we need look no further than the fact that there are certain Christian denominations petitioning state governors to let them gather together on Easter Sunday. They would be willing to risk the lives of their members just so they can say



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“Alleluia!” I can tell you that God does not delight in human sacrifices, even if it is for the sake of praise. God cherishes all life.

While it has been difficult and challenging, it is fascinating to me that we must all remain at home this Holy Week. Sacrificing our freedoms in order to help protect people from COVID-19 is a willingness to set aside our status, our power, our desires, in order to help care for others. It is taking the place Jesus took on this holy night; a humbling place that uplifts the other rather than the self. In doing so, we are sending our community and our world a message that Christ’s new commandment to love one another is the guiding principle in which we choose to live out our faith and our baptisms.

And we are free to live this way right now because, as we will experience over these next few days, Christ’s love for us is the greatest love we will ever come to know. It will start here this evening with our own symbolic hand washing. Normally, on this holy night we would practice a symbolic foot washing, but with the current recommendations to protect ourselves from COVID-19, I feel a symbolic hand washing is in order for tonight. As we wash our hands in the cup of water you have provided for yourselves, it is an opportunity for us to remember the gift of baptism and how it ties us into the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus. It is a time for us to remember that Christ washes us clean of our sins, so that we may be free to live a life grounded in God’s love.

After our symbolic washing of hands we will then come to the table together to contemplate the amazing gift of love that is poured out through the body and blood of Christ. Now, while tonight you will mainly be observing the Lord’s Supper, there is still power behind witnessing Christ’s act of love in communion. The journey of love then continues tomorrow as we take time to hear the story and reverence the cross. It is a wondrous thing that salvation comes to us through a means of pure death. And yet, we will hear Christ utter once again: “It is finished!” In those three words are the promise that turns the world upside down.

Finally, our journey will take on a joyous tone as we experience an earthquake that removes the stone and reveals that the tomb is empty. It will be a day filled with song, praise, and sacrament. And when we’ve gone through this journey yet again, we will remember that God’s love is the ultimate power in this world; a power stronger than death. We will be reminded that we can remain hopeful that this time of darkness is just a passing thing, and that the Son will rise again.

In the midst of our social isolation, it can be very hard at times to remain hopeful. How much more of this will we have to endure? Will I get through this without getting sick? What will the economy look like when this is over; will I still have a job? In the midst of these and other questions it can be hard to stay positive. Darkness can easily surround us.

There is a phrase from a choral work I sang with Chorale Midwest a few years ago. The choral work itself is entitled *From Darkness to Light*. Towards the end of the piece we sang the phrase “darkness sang to the light.” As we will experience in these holy days, darkness always precedes the coming light. But what if that darkness is just as excited to welcome the light as we are? What if the darkness knows that its purpose is to draw us



back to the light? If this is true, then we are free to remain hopeful on even the darkest of days, for those dark days will point us again to the light.

This is the purpose and goal of Holy Week. Yes, through the journey we will experience some darkness, but ultimately that darkness will lead us to new light. After all, the examples of love will continue to build and build from this moment forward—washing, table, cross, empty tomb. It will be a humbling experience for us, but it will bring us hope and promise. So, let's walk with Jesus as he shows us a humbling yet powerful love that brings new life. Amen.

SCRIPTURE READINGS AND SERMON – GOOD FRIDAY

First Reading: Isaiah 52:13--53:12

¹³See, my servant shall prosper;
he shall be exalted and lifted up,
and shall be very high.

¹⁴Just as there were many who were astonished at him
—so marred was his appearance, beyond human semblance,
and his form beyond that of mortals—

¹⁵so he shall startle many nations;
kings shall shut their mouths because of him;
for that which had not been told them they shall see,
and that which they had not heard they shall contemplate.

^{53:1}Who has believed what we have heard?
And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

²For he grew up before him like a young plant,
and like a root out of dry ground;
he had no form or majesty that we should look at him,
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.

³He was despised and rejected by others;
a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity;
and as one from whom others hide their faces
he was despised, and we held him of no account.

⁴Surely he has borne our infirmities
and carried our diseases;
yet we accounted him stricken,
struck down by God, and afflicted.

⁵But he was wounded for our transgressions,
crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the punishment that made us whole,
and by his bruises we are healed.



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⁶All we like sheep have gone astray;
 we have all turned to our own way,
 and the LORD has laid on him
 the iniquity of us all.

⁷He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
 yet he did not open his mouth;
 like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
 and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,
 so he did not open his mouth.

⁸By a perversion of justice he was taken away.
 Who could have imagined his future?
 For he was cut off from the land of the living,
 stricken for the transgression of my people.

⁹They made his grave with the wicked
 and his tomb with the rich,
 although he had done no violence,
 and there was no deceit in his mouth.

¹⁰Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him with pain.
 When you make his life an offering for sin,
 he shall see his offspring, and shall prolong his days;
 through him the will of the LORD shall prosper.

¹¹Out of his anguish he shall see light;
 he shall find satisfaction through his knowledge.
 The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous,
 and he shall bear their iniquities.

¹²Therefore I will allot him a portion with the great,
 and he shall divide the spoil with the strong;
 because he poured out himself to death,
 and was numbered with the transgressors;
 yet he bore the sin of many,
 and made intercession for the transgressors.

Psalm: Psalm 22

The presiding minister speaks the light printed verses; the assembly speaks the bold verses.

¹My God, my God, why have you for- | saken me?
 Why so far from saving me, so far from the words | of my groaning?

²My God, I cry out by day, but you | do not answer;
 by night, but I | find no rest.

³Yet you are the | Holy One,
 enthroned on the prais- | es of Israel.

⁴Our ancestors put their | trust in you,



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they trusted, and you | rescued them.

⁵They cried out to you and | were delivered;
they trusted in you and were not | put to shame.

⁶But as for me, I am a worm | and not human,
scorned by all and despised | by the people.

⁷All who see me laugh | me to scorn;
they curl their lips; they | shake their heads.

⁸“Trust in the LORD; let the | LORD deliver;
let God rescue him if God so de- | lights in him.”

⁹Yet you are the one who drew me forth | from the womb,
and kept me safe on my | mother’s breast.

¹⁰I have been entrusted to you ever since | I was born;
you were my God when I was still in my | mother’s womb.

¹¹Be not far from me, for trou- | ble is near,
and there is no | one to help.

¹²Many young bulls en- | circle me;
strong bulls of Ba- | shan surround me.

¹³They open wide their | jaws at me,
like a slashing and | roaring lion.

¹⁴I am poured out like water; all my bones are | out of joint;
my heart within my breast is | melting wax.

¹⁵My strength is dried up like a potsherd; my tongue sticks to the roof | of my mouth;
and you have laid me in the | dust of death.

¹⁶Packs of dogs close me in, a band of evildoers | circles round me;
they pierce my hands | and my feet.

¹⁷I can count | all my bones
while they stare at | me and gloat.

¹⁸They divide my gar- | ments among them;
for my clothing, | they cast lots.

¹⁹But you, O LORD, be not | far away;
O my help, hasten | to my aid.

²⁰Deliver me | from the sword,
my life from the power | of the dog.

²¹Save me from the | lion’s mouth!
From the horns of wild bulls you have | rescued me.

²²I will declare your name | to my people;
in the midst of the assembly | I will praise you.

²³You who fear the LORD, give praise! All you of Jacob’s | line, give glory.
Stand in awe of the LORD, all you off- | spring of Israel.

²⁴For the LORD does not despise nor abhor the poor in their poverty; neither is the LORD’s face hid- | den from them;



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but when they cry out, | the LORD hears them.
²⁵From you comes my praise in the | great assembly;
 I will perform my vows in the sight of those who | fear the LORD.
²⁶The poor shall eat | and be satisfied,
 Let those who seek the LORD give praise! May your hearts | live forever!
²⁷All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn | to the LORD;
 all the families of nations shall bow | before God.
²⁸For dominion belongs | to the LORD,
 who rules o- | ver the nations.
²⁹Indeed, all who sleep in the earth shall bow | down in worship;
 all who go down to the dust, though they be dead, shall kneel be- | fore the LORD.
³⁰Their descendants shall | serve the LORD,
 whom they shall proclaim to genera- | tions to come.
³¹They shall proclaim God's deliverance to a people | yet unborn,
 saying to them, "The | LORD has acted!"

Second Reading: Hebrews 10:16-25

[After the Holy Spirit says,] ¹⁶"This is the covenant that I will make with them
 after those days, says the Lord:
 I will put my laws in their hearts,
 and I will write them on their minds,"

¹⁷he also adds,

"I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more."

¹⁸Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.

¹⁹Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh), ²¹and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²²let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. ²³Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. ²⁴And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, ²⁵not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Gospel: John 18:1--19:42

¹[Jesus] went out with his disciples across the Kidron valley to a place where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. ²Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, because Jesus often met there with his disciples. ³So Judas brought a detachment of soldiers together with police from the chief priests and the Pharisees, and they came there with lanterns and torches and weapons. ⁴Then Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, came forward and asked them, "Whom are you looking for?" ⁵They answered, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus replied, "I am he." Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. ⁶When Jesus said to them, "I am he," they stepped back and fell to the ground. ⁷Again he asked them, "Whom are you looking for?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth." ⁸Jesus answered, "I told you that I am he. So if you are looking for



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me, let these men go.”⁹This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken, “I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me.”¹⁰Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it, struck the high priest’s slave, and cut off his right ear. The slave’s name was Malchus.¹¹Jesus said to Peter, “Put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?”

¹²So the soldiers, their officer, and the Jewish police arrested Jesus and bound him.¹³First they took him to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year.¹⁴Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was better to have one person die for the people.

¹⁵Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest,¹⁶but Peter was standing outside at the gate. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out, spoke to the woman who guarded the gate, and brought Peter in.¹⁷The woman said to Peter, “You are not also one of this man’s disciples, are you?” He said, “I am not.”¹⁸Now the slaves and the police had made a charcoal fire because it was cold, and they were standing around it and warming themselves. Peter also was standing with them and warming himself.

¹⁹Then the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching.²⁰Jesus answered, “I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret.”²¹Why do you ask me? Ask those who heard what I said to them; they know what I said.”²²When he had said this, one of the police standing nearby struck Jesus on the face, saying, “Is that how you answer the high priest?”²³Jesus answered, “If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong. But if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?”²⁴Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

²⁵Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They asked him, “You are not also one of his disciples, are you?” He denied it and said, “I am not.”²⁶One of the slaves of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, “Did I not see you in the garden with him?”²⁷Again Peter denied it, and at that moment the cock crowed.

²⁸Then they took Jesus from Caiaphas to Pilate’s headquarters. It was early in the morning. They themselves did not enter the headquarters, so as to avoid ritual defilement and to be able to eat the Passover.²⁹So Pilate went out to them and said, “What accusation do you bring against this man?”³⁰They answered, “If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you.”³¹Pilate said to them, “Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law.” The Jews replied, “We are not permitted to put anyone to death.”³²(This was to fulfill what Jesus had said when he indicated the kind of death he was to die.)

³³Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?”³⁴Jesus answered, “Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?”³⁵Pilate replied, “I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?”³⁶Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.”³⁷Pilate asked him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.”³⁸Pilate asked him, “What is truth?”

After he had said this, he went out to the Jews again and told them, “I find no case against him.”³⁹But you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover. Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?”⁴⁰They shouted in reply, “Not this man, but Barabbas!” Now Barabbas was a bandit.



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^{19:1}Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. ²And the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they dressed him in a purple robe. ³They kept coming up to him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” and striking him on the face. ⁴Pilate went out again and said to them, “Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no case against him.” ⁵So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, “Here is the man!” ⁶When the chief priests and the police saw him, they shouted, “Crucify him! Crucify him!” Pilate said to them, “Take him yourselves and crucify him; I find no case against him.” ⁷The Jews answered him, “We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God.”

⁸Now when Pilate heard this, he was more afraid than ever. ⁹He entered his headquarters again and asked Jesus, “Where are you from?” But Jesus gave him no answer. ¹⁰Pilate therefore said to him, “Do you refuse to speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?” ¹¹Jesus answered him, “You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.” ¹²From then on Pilate tried to release him, but the Jews cried out, “If you release this man, you are no friend of the emperor. Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against the emperor.”

¹³When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus outside and sat on the judge’s bench at a place called The Stone Pavement, or in Hebrew Gabbatha. ¹⁴Now it was the day of Preparation for the Passover; and it was about noon. He said to the Jews, “Here is your King!” ¹⁵They cried out, “Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!” Pilate asked them, “Shall I crucify your King?” The chief priests answered, “We have no king but the emperor.” ¹⁶Then he handed him over to them to be crucified.

So they took Jesus; ¹⁷and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. ¹⁸There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them. ¹⁹Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” ²⁰Many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. ²¹Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, “Do not write, ‘The King of the Jews,’ but, ‘This man said, I am King of the Jews.’” ²²Pilate answered, “What I have written I have written.” ²³When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. ²⁴So they said to one another, “Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it.” This was to fulfill what the scripture says,

“They divided my clothes among themselves,
and for my clothing they cast lots.”

²⁵And that is what the soldiers did.

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, “Woman, here is your son.” ²⁷Then he said to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

²⁸After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), “I am thirsty.” ²⁹A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. ³⁰When Jesus had received the wine, he said, “It is finished.” Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.



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³¹Since it was the day of Preparation, the Jews did not want the bodies left on the cross during the sabbath, especially because that sabbath was a day of great solemnity. So they asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified men broken and the bodies removed. ³²Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him. ³³But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. ³⁴Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. ³⁵(He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth.) ³⁶These things occurred so that the scripture might be fulfilled, “None of his bones shall be broken.” ³⁷And again another passage of scripture says, “They will look on the one whom they have pierced.”

³⁸After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body. ³⁹Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. ⁴⁰They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. ⁴¹Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. ⁴²And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

SERMON – We wait in the tomb.

Perhaps it is the ultimate irony that this year’s Good Friday is one where we are able to better relate to what it must be like to wait in a sealed tomb. For those of us here in the state of California, it is unknown when our stay at home restrictions will be uplifted. On top of that, here in Pasadena, it has been raining all week, so there has been little to no opportunity to even venture outside for a walk. The L.A. County Public Health Department also encouraged all people to, if at all possible, not to even venture out to essential places like the grocery store or the pharmacy this week. Perhaps this week, more than most, we feel the isolation of the sealed tomb.

To feel so cut off from our world is to feel the sting of death. To even know that the minute we do step out of our homes we are exposing ourselves to a potential contraction of COVID-19 is to feel the shroud of death surrounding us. To know that so many people across our country and the world are affected by COVID-19 is to witness the destructive power of death. Perhaps, more than any other Good Friday, we feel what it is like to watch Jesus die cruelly on the cross.

And so we wait in our homes; our tombs; some days in much despair, not knowing if we will be able to get through this pandemic. Other days, there are signs of hope that keep us going for a little while longer. But we wait for the darkness to pass and a new light to dawn.

Yet this day is known as Good Friday. We proclaim it to be good because it is the day that Jesus turns the world upside down with his ultimate act of love. Jesus willingly goes to the cross, to his dark and isolated tomb in order to show us and all the world that, no matter how much we may feel the power of death breathing down our necks, it cannot stop the action of God’s redeeming love. In his words: “It is finished,” we hear Jesus



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telling death, “You can break me, you can scatter my flock, you can even take my life, but God’s love will prevail and redeem all.”

A little later in tonight’s service we will take a moment to reverence the cross. The cross that we reverence is an empty cross. This empty cross reminds us that death could not contain Jesus in the tomb. Death tried to isolate God from us by locking God away in the depths of death’s tomb, trying to cut God off from us and us from God. But God’s love tears the veil in two so that there is nothing that separates God from us and us from God. The chasm that death tries to create is sown back together through Christ on the cross and Christ in the tomb.

I don’t know about you, but I have seen amazing signs among our society of that show God’s redemptive work while we wait in our tombs. I have read Facebook post after Facebook post of families enjoying time together and the realization that being with family is more rewarding than working ourselves to death for the almighty dollar. I have witnessed social media turning from a place that used to be rank with cyber bullying and nasty messages, to a place of encouragement and support. I have seen more creativity come out of people trying to do their part in keeping up morale and helping us fight boredom. I have seen greater appreciation for workers who were at one time either ignored or belittled.

These are all signs of God’s redemptive work that comes from waiting in a tomb. We wait in our tombs to help lower the amount of people who will potentially die from COVID-19. In other words, we wait in our tombs to promote life. Perhaps, more than any other Good Friday, we finally understand why salvation comes through the cross and the tomb.

There is a Taizé song that has the lyrics: *Stay with me; remain here with me. Watch and Pray. Watch and Pray.* As we continue to wait in our tombs for the new life of resurrection, which we will celebrate on Sunday, and which we will celebrate again on that day when our social isolation is finally over, we wait knowing that God’s redemptive work is alive and active in the world. We wait, knowing that death will not win the day. We wait, knowing that Christ is once again turning the world upside down by making the tomb our means of salvation. Perhaps, more than any other Good Friday, we are thankful that salvation comes through death on the cross and a sealed tomb. Amen.

SCRIPTURE READINGS AND SERMON – EASTER SUNDAY

First Reading: Acts 10:34-43

³⁴Peter began to speak to [the people]: “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, ³⁵but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. ³⁶You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. ³⁷That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: ³⁸how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. ³⁹We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; ⁴⁰but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, ⁴¹not to all



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the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. ⁴²He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

Psalm: Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24

The presiding minister speaks the light print; the assembly responds with the bold print.

¹Give thanks to the LORD, for the | LORD is good;

God’s mercy en- | dures forever.

²Let Israel | now declare,

“God’s mercy en- | dures forever.”

¹⁴The LORD is my strength | and my song,

and has become | my salvation.

¹⁵Shouts of rejoicing and salvation echo in the tents | of the righteous:

“The right hand of the | LORD acts valiantly!

¹⁶The right hand of the LORD | is exalted!

The right hand of the | LORD acts valiantly!”

¹⁷I shall not | die, but live,

and declare the works | of the LORD.

¹⁸The LORD indeed pun- | ished me sorely,

but did not hand me o- | ver to death.

¹⁹Open for me the | gates of righteousness;

I will enter them and give thanks | to the LORD.

²⁰“This is the gate | of the LORD;

here the righ- | teous may enter.”

²¹I give thanks to you, for you have | answered me

and you have become | my salvation.

²²The stone that the build- | ers rejected

has become the chief | cornerstone.

²³By the LORD has | this been done;

it is marvelous | in our eyes.

²⁴This is the day that the | LORD has made;

let us rejoice and be | glad in it.

Second Reading: Colossians 3:1-4

¹If you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, ³for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory

Gospel: Matthew 28:1-10



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¹After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. ²And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. ⁴For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. ⁵But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. ⁶He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. ⁷Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.' This is my message for you." ⁸So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. ¹⁰Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

SERMON Do not be afraid! The Tomb is Empty!

The women came to see the tomb where Jesus' body had been laid. While the gospel writer doesn't give us much detail as to why, it would be fair to say that they wanted to go and grieve and pay their respects to their former Lord and teacher. I can only imagine how heavy their hearts must've been; the image of Jesus, broken and hanging on the cross still fresh in their minds. They came most likely expecting to find some way to reorient themselves in the midst of the finality of death.

But when they arrived there was a mighty earthquake that shook their very foundation. Then, an angel appeared and rolled away the heavy stone; causing the soldiers guarding the tomb to become so stricken with fear that they became as still as corpses. The angel was wearing a garment that was as white as snow. The angel's appearance was God's action; God's intervention in the story that would've been yet another tragic death.

And what did the women see? Not only are they greeted by God's messenger, not only do they experience the will of God through earthquake, but they see an empty tomb. There is no body! Jesus is risen! The angel confirms it as he tells them not to be afraid anymore, but to go with joy and spread the news of Jesus' resurrection to the disciples.

Now, here is where the women are to be admired. Not seeing Jesus appear to them right at that moment, to only have the proof of an empty tomb, they still leave in faith that what the angel has told them is true. Yes, they leave still with some fear, but also with great joy!

But, as if to put an exclamation point on this good and wondrous news, Jesus does appear to them on their way back to the disciples. He greets them with the word "Rejoice!" and they immediately worship him. He then affirms the angel's proclamation and reiterates to them that there is no more reason to be afraid. Their hearts can be filled with nothing else but great joy, for the power of death has lost its sting!

How are our hearts this day? Are they filled with only great joy? I suspect that, if you're like me, it is hard to be too joyful this Easter Sunday because this Easter Sunday is different. There will be no rousing proclamation of "Christ is risen! Alleluia!" from an entire church filled with people. There will be no festive organ music to



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accompany us on our hymns. No choir will sing of resurrection praise this day. And all of us will not be able to gather with extended family to share an Easter meal. There is some sadness in the fact that our Easter celebrations today will be subdued from normal. Plus, it can be hard to fully celebrate Christ's resurrection when we, ourselves, are still trapped in our tombs until at least May 15th.

And yet, the message from the angel is "Do not be afraid!" The message from the risen Christ is also "Do not be afraid!" Yes, our Easter celebrations may not be the same this year, and we still have plenty of concerns over the COVID-19 pandemic, but Christ Jesus has defeated death! The tomb is empty! Christ is risen! God so loves this world that God chose to intervene on our behalf in order to show us that nothing is powerful enough to truly separate us from God. No matter when we may be laid in our tomb due to death, the good news of great joy this day is that God will shake up the earth and roll the stone away so that we too will be raised to new life.

And what makes this even better news is that it reminds us that our tombs through social isolation will not remain shut forever. There will come a day when it will be declared that we no longer have to fear this pandemic and that our hearts can be filled with great joy! And when that day comes, we will celebrate Easter! We come together and we will shout with a church full of people: "Christ is risen! Alleluia!" We will come together and sing hymns with fantastic organ music! We will come together and listen to the joyous music sung by our choir. But we will also come together at the table and share in the life-giving meal once more. We will reunite and it will feel like the same joy the women must've felt at the sight of their risen Lord. It will be a resurrection joy!

But until that day, we have the good news of an empty tomb to remind us that we do not need to be afraid, for Christ's resurrection has destroyed death's hold over us. No matter what happens in the coming days, the cross remains empty, the tomb remains empty, and the great joy of resurrection is the foundation in which we can build our hope.

We may not get a mighty earthquake or the appearance of an angel, but God will continue to intervene and bring the power of resurrection to our broken world. There is great joy in the ways people are taking care of each other during this time. There is great joy each time someone recovers from COVID-19. The latest report I've seen from John's Hopkins University is that over 100,000 people have recovered worldwide from COVID-19! There is great joy in the fact that we still get to be the church and spread the good news, even if it has to be done virtually.

So, while our Easter Sunday looks and feels different this year, we can take comfort in the words of the angel: "Do not be afraid. I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has been raised..." What great joy it is that we get to say: "Christ is risen! Alleluia ! Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!"

Amen.

