***Embracing the uncertain***

**Lenten Worship Series – Palm Sunday**

***Jesus and the Uncertainty of Obedience***

**April 5, 2020**

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| **WORSHIP SERVICE OUTLINE**SEach worship outline contains all elements needed for your worship service. The order of each service presented is only a *suggestion*. No doubt changes will be needed to accommodate the flow and worship style of your corps. The outlines are flexible and allow opportunities to “cut and paste” as needed. If you are blessed with instrumental or vocal music resources, you may find there is more structured material here than needed. Sermon manuscripts are included as a *sample* and not to be preached verbatim. |

***What Kind of Path Will We Follow?***

**Call to Worship:**

1 As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, 2saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. 3If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ say, ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.’”

4They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, 5some people standing there asked, “What are you doing, untying that colt?” 6They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go. 7When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. **\*** 8Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. 9Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted,

“Hosanna!”

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

10“Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!”

“Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

 (Mark 11:1-10, NIV)

[**\****Children enter sanctuary waving palm branches.*]

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| **Song – Hosanna, Loud Hosanna*****(words below are not in S.A. Song Book)*** | TB-127 – Ellacombe | HTD1-T9 (3 vs. – band ending) |
| 1) “Hosanna, loud Hosanna!” The little children sang:Through pillared court and temple the lovely anthem rang;To Jesus who had blessed them close folded to His breast,The children sang their praises, the simplest and the best. |
| 2) From Olivet they followed ‘mid an exultant crowd,The victor palm branch waving, and chanting clear and loud,The Lord of men and angels rode on in lowly state,Nor scorned that little children should on His bidding wait. |
| 3) “Hosanna in the highest!” That ancient song we sing,For Christ is our Redeemer, the Lord of heav’n our king.O may we ever praise Him with heart and life and voice,And in His blissful presence eternally rejoice! |
|  **Additional Optional Songs** |
| **HC#97 – Blessed Be the Name of the Lord** | HC-97 | HCD8-T17 |
| **HC#141 – All Hail the Power****SB#73 – All hail the power of Jesus’ name** | HC-141TB-306 – Coronation | HCD13-T11HTD5-T5 (4 vs.) |
| **HC#158 – Blessed Be Your Name** | HC-158 | HCD14-T18 |
| **HC#188 – Save Now** | HC-188 | HCD17-T18 |
| **HC#171 – Stand Up and Bless the Lord****SB#391 – Stand up and bless the Lord** | HC-171TB-149 – Falcon Street | HCD16-T11HTD3-T12 (3 vs.) |
| **HC#195 – Hear Our Praises** | HC-195 | HCD18-T15 |
| **HC#225 – Hosanna (Praise Is Rising)** | HC-225 | HCD21-T15 |
| **SB#56 – Praise to the Lord, the Almighty****HC#251 - Praise to the Lord, the Almighty** | TB-735 – Lobe den Herren | HTD4-T11 (4 vs.) |
| **SB#225 – Jesus comes! Let all adore Him** | TB-392 – Ottawa  | HTD9-T14 (4 vs.) |

**Choric Reading**

**Reader 1:** Our Lenten journey now enters the most important week of the Christian year, in which we follow Jesus through the city gates on Palm Sunday and walk with him along the dusty, well-worn path that will lead to a hilltop cross.

**Reader 2:** We know the story of Holy Week. We know how it begins and how it ends. It begins with the crowds, including the disciples, all on the side of Jesus. The crowds were filled with people who were waiting with eager anticipation for the arrival of their liberator, their king, their messiah. Jesus, in their minds, could do no wrong.

**Reader 3:** But as every day of Holy Week passed by, there would be fewer and fewer people by his side.

**Reader 4:** Like the crowds and the disciples, we always have a choice: whether to listen for God’s voice and do what is difficult, or choose the more comfortable path.

**Reader 1:** We choose to follow Jesus, as long as he meets our own expectations.

**Reader 2:** We choose to identify with Christ, so long as it is convenient.

**Reader 3:** We stand by Jesus’ side until the risk becomes too great.

**Reader 4:** So, here is the question that compels us this Holy Week: what kind of path will we follow?

**Reader 1:** Here we are, on this Palm Sunday, celebrating the arrival of this Jesus. Will we choose to follow only the Jesus we are comfortable with, the one who comes to meet our needs and fulfill our expectations, or will we allow him to lead us into the difficult, uncertain places of surrender, self-sacrifice, and obedience?

 (*Embracing the Uncertain*, pp. 67, 71-73)

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***Embracing the Uncertain***

**[Each week, *Embracing the Uncertain* is a time of silent prayer by the congregation. The leader should walk the congregation through the bullet points below.]**

**Leader:** Spend some moments in prayer considering potential changes you need to make in order to surrender and obey God more completely.

* Ask the Lord to call you to obedience.
* Ask to hear his voice through scripture, through others, or through silence.

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| **HC#205 – Closer Still** | HC-205  | HCD19-T15 |

**Prayer:** God, thank you for calling me to obedience. Forgive me for not always hearing your voice. Accept my desire to hear you as itself an offering of obedience. Lead me to a place of surrender, that I might experience the joy of the Resurrection in Jesus. Amen.

(*Embracing the Uncertain*, p. 77)

**Announcements and Offering**

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| **Drama – Wide Awake** |

**Scripture Alive!**

**Leader:** It is indeed a dark, bitter night. The disciples are sad and confused, and maybe a little bit prideful. Peter cannot believe that he could ever betray his Lord.

 36At that, Jesus led His disciples to the place called Gethsemane.

**Jesus:** I am going over there to pray. You sit here *while I’m at prayer*.

**Leader:** 37Then He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee with Him, and He grew sorrowful and deeply distressed.

**Jesus:** 38My soul is overwhelmed with grief, to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with Me.

**Leader:** 39He walked a little farther and finally fell prostrate and prayed.

**Jesus:** Father, *this is the last thing I want*. If there is any way, please take this *bitter* cup from Me. Not My will, but Yours be done.

**Leader:** 40When He came back to the disciples, He saw that they were asleep. *Peter awoke a little less confident and slightly chagrined.*

**Jesus:** So you couldn’t keep watch with Me for just one short hour? 41*Now maybe you’re learning:* the spirit is willing, but the body is weak. Watch and pray and take care that you are not pulled down during a time of testing.

**Leader:** 42With that, Jesus returned *to His secluded spot* to pray again.

**Jesus:** Father, if there is no other way for this cup to pass without My drinking it—*then not My will*, but Yours be done.

**Leader:** 43Again Jesus returned to His disciples and found them asleep. Their eyes were heavy-lidded. 44So Jesus left them again and returned to prayer, praying the same sentiments with the same words. 45Again He returned to His disciples.

**Jesus:** Well, you are still sleeping; are you getting a good long rest? Now the time has come; the Son of Man is just about to be given over to *the betrayers and* the sinners. 46Get up; we have to be going. Look, here comes the one who’s going to betray Me.

(Matthew 26:36-46, The Voice)

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| **SB#179 – King of my life, I crown Thee now** | TB-89 – Lead me to Calvary | HTD9-T8 (4 vs.) |
|  **Additional Optional Songs** |
| **SB#894 – The cross that He gave may be heavy** | TB-855 – The cross is not greater than His grace | No CD |

**Prayers of Repentance [Silent Prayers]**

**Pastoral Prayer**

**Testimony of Faith – [Choose someone from the congregation who can testify on this theme.]**

**Message – Obedience**

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| **HC#253 – Jesus Paid It All**  | HC-253 | HCD24-T13 |
|  **Additional Optional Songs** |
| **HC#139 – There Is a Message****SB#439 – There is a message** | HC-139TB-879 – same | HCD12-T19No CD |
| **HC#205 – Closer Still**  | HC-205 | HCD19-T15 |
| **HC#207 – Grace Alone****SB#699 – Every promise we can make** | HC-207TB-640 – Grace alone | HCD19-T17No CD |
| **HC#214 – Holy Spirit**  | HC-214 | HCD20-T14 |
| **SB#178 - Jesus keep me near the cross**  | TB-238 – Near the crossTB-237 – Healing Stream | HTD2-T5 (3 vs.)HTD5-T8 (3 vs.) |
| **SB#179 – King of my life, I crown Thee now** | TB-89 – Lead me to Calvary | HTD9-T8 (4 vs.) |

**Benediction:**

Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

(Hebrews 13:20-21)

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| **SB#923 – God is with us** | TB-394 – Austria  | HTD1-T2 (3 vs.) |
|  **Additional Optional Songs** |
| **HC#161 – My Great Redeemer’s Praise****SB#89 – O for a thousand tongues to sing** | HC-161TB-57 – Azmon TB-75 – Grimsby  | HCD15-T11HTD3-T4 (4 vs.)No CD |
| **HC#209 – Come People of the Risen King**  | HC-209 | HCD19-T19 |
| **HC#239 – Fountain/Doxology** **SB#202 – There is a fountain filled with blood** | HC-239TB-71 – Fountain  | HCD22-T19No CD |
| **SB#271 – Rejoice, the Lord is king!** | TB-200 – Darwalls | HTD1-T7 (3 vs.) |

DeVega, Magrey R. *Embracing the Uncertain: a Lenten Study for Unsteady Times*. Abingdon Press, 2017.

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| **Lent 2020 – Palm Sunday** |
| **DRAMA****Wide Awake****By Martyn Scott Thomas**© Copyright 2019 by Martyn Scott Thomas. All rights reserved. Used by permission. |
| **Topic:** | Waiting, Uncertainty |
| **Scripture:** | Matthew 26:36-46 |
| **Synopsis:** | Two people try to stay awake for the birth of their first grandson. |
| **Characters:** | Ron Goodwin – Grandfather-to-beDenise Goodwin – Grandmother-to-beTerry McIntire – Father-to-be |
| **Props/Costumes:** | Casual dress with a jacket for Ron. Two (or more) chairs, a small table, a TV remote, and a small coffee cup. |
| **Setting:** | The waiting room at a hospital |
| **Running time:** | 5 minutes |

[*Ron and Denise enter and start pacing. Ron places his jacket on a chair.*]

**Ron:** I am so excited. I can hardly contain myself.

**Denise:** I know. Can you believe that we’re going to be Nana Ron and Grandpa Denise?

**Ron:** What did you say?

**Denise:** [*correcting*] I mean Grandpa Ron and Nana Denise. I’m so excited I can’t even think straight.

**Ron:** I know. Me neither.

**Denise:** I’m pretty tired, too. What time is it anyway?

**Ron:** [*yawning*] 2:00 am.

**Denise:** So did Terry tell you anything?

**Ron:** Only to hurry to the hospital because Maddy had gone into labor.

**Denise:** I can’t wait to meet little Lucas.

**Ron:** Any minute now we could have our first grandson.

**Terry:** [*enters*] Oh hey guys, I’m glad you could make it so quickly.

**Denise:** [*excited*] Me, too. So when can we meet baby Lucas.

**Terry:** Well, it could be a little while.

**Ron:** [*disappointed*] You mean, Maddy’s not having the baby?

**Terry:** Oh, she’s having the baby. It just might be a little while.

**Denise:** What do you mean ‘a little while?’

**Terry:** Well, the doctor said it could be twenty minutes or it could be a couple of hours.

**Ron:** [*in disbelief*] A couple of hours?

**Terry:** Yeah, are you guys good hanging out for a little while?

**Denise:** Oh sure, whatever you want. We don’t have anywhere else to go.

**Ron:** Yeah, we wouldn’t miss this for the world.

**Terry:** Great. Why don’t you have a seat and take a little nap? I’ll be right back. [*exits*]

**Denise:** [*calling after Terry*] Nap? Who could sleep at a time like this?

**Ron:** [*sitting and yawning*] Well, I am a little tired. It is 2:00 am after all.

**Denise:** [*reprimanding*] Don’t you even! You are not falling asleep on me.

**Ron:** You heard our son-in-law. He’ll come get us when something happens.

**Denise:** I am not sleeping through the birth of my first grandchild. And neither are you.

**Ron:** [*grudgingly*] Okay, okay. [*looking around*] So what do you want to do?

**Denise:** [*pointing up on the wall*] Well, we could watch TV.

**Ron:** Are you serious? When we sit down in front of the television at home after 8:30, it’s the kiss of death – we’re both asleep in five minutes.

**Denise:** But that’s on our nice comfy couch. [*sits*] These chairs are awful. I could never fall asleep on these.

**Ron:** [*sits and picks up remote*] Okay, then let’s see what’s on. [*mimics scanning through channels*] There’s the hospital channel. [*clicks*] Barnaby Jones. [*clicks*] Some televangelist with a bad wig. [*clicks*] And an infomercial on kitchen knives. So what do you think?

**Denise:** [*light snoring*]

**Ron:** [*giving her a nudge*] Denise!

**Denise:** [*jumping up*] Is he here?

**Ron:** Who?

**Denise:** Baby Lucas.

**Ron:** No, it’s only been 30 seconds. You fell asleep.

**Denise:** [*defiantly*] I did not.

**Ron:** Then why is there drool running down your chin?

**Denise:** [*wiping*] I’m really excited about this baby.

**Ron:** Nice try. So much for television. [*puts remote down*]

**Denise:** Why don’t you go see if there’s some coffee?

**Ron:** And leave you here to sleep?

**Denise:** I’m fine. I’m awake now.

**Ron:** [*shakes his head*] I’ll be right back. [*exits*]

**Denise:** [*calling after him*] With cream and sugar, please.

[*Denise starts to slouch in her seat, head nodding and eyes closing, then sits straight up quickly.*]

**Ron:** [*enters with a coffee cup*] I saw that!

**Denise:** I was just resting my eyes.

**Ron:** It’s okay. You can take a nap if you want.

**Denise:** No, I will not fall asleep and miss this baby being born.

**Ron:** If you say so. [*hands her the cup*] Here.

**Denise:** Thank you. [*takes a drink from the cup and almost spits it out*] Ugh! This is disgusting. What is it?

**Ron:** [*sits*] Cream and sugar.

**Denise:** Where’s the coffee?

**Ron:** They were all out.

**Denise:** Then why did you give me this?

**Ron:** It’s what you asked for.

**Denise:** Yes, with coffee.

**Ron:** But they don’t have any coffee.

**Denise:** [*stares angrily at Ron*]

**Ron:** But you’re awake now, aren’t you?

**Denise:** Yes, I am.

**Ron:** [*yawns*]

**Denise:** Stop that right now. You are not falling asleep on me.

**Ron:** [*closes eyes*] You want to bet?

**Denise:** [*jumps up and starts jogging in place*] Come on! Get up and run with me.

**Ron:** [*grabs her arm and pulls her down into chair*] Or you can sit with me and rest.

**Denise:** I don’t want to rest. I want to see my grandson.

**Ron:** And we will. [*closing eyes again*] Right after our nap.

**Denise:** Ron Goodwin! Wake up this minute!

**Ron:** [*loud sigh*]

**Denise:** Fine, you sleep! I’m just going to sit here and wait. [*pause*] It’s going to be any minute now. You’ll see. [*long blink with a head drop, then a quick jump*] I’m not going to miss this. [*head drops onto Ron’s shoulder – a little groggy*] Our first grandchild.

**Ron:** [*puts his arm around Denise*]

**Denise:** [*soft snore, settles in closer to Ron*]

[*Ron and Denise sleep for a moment, then both sit straight up.*]

**Ron:** [*crying out*] I’m awake! I’m awake!

**Denise:** Me, too!

[*They both quickly resume their resting position, eyes closed.*]

**Terry:** [*after a moment,* *enters excited*] He’s here! He’s here!

**Ron:** [*loud snore*]

**Terry:** Mom? Dad?

**Denise:** [*loud snore*]

**Terry:** I guess you’ll see him when you wake up. [*picks up jacket and places it over Ron and Denise.*] He’s absolutely beautiful. You’re going to love him. [*exits*]

**Ron:** [*after a moment, jumps up*] I’m awake! I’m awake!

**Denise:** [*standing up*] Me, too! [*looking around*] Did you hear something?

**Ron:** [*looking around*] No. Did you?

**Denise:** [*thinking*] No. How much longer do you think it’s going to be?

[*They both sit.*]

[*Blackout*]

***Embracing the Uncertain***

**Lenten Sermon – Palm Sunday**

***Obedience***

**April 5, 2020**

by Rev. Magrey deVega

[Based on *Embracing the Uncertain*, by Magrey R. deVega

Chapter 6: *Jesus and the Uncertainty of Obedience*]

**Scripture:** Matthew 26:36-46

March 25, 2018, was a very special day in the Christian calendar. For the first time in 73 years, Annunciation Day, the day that the Church celebrates when the angel Gabriel visited a very young girl named Mary and changed her life forever. The fact that Annunciation Day landed on Palm Sunday in 2018 presented some very compelling connections that shouldn’t be missed. Those connections provide such a beautiful backdrop for the central question that is our theme today: What does obedience to God look like? What difference should it make to you and me?

If there is anything we know and have come to appreciate about Mary is that she was obedient, right? She said yes to God, even though she was afraid and doubtful. Even if though there would have been any number of reasons for her to say no—and in fact if she had said no to God, we wouldn’t have blamed her, given how fearful and doubtful she was. But she said YES!

Because she was obedient to God—regardless of the cost, regardless of the pain and suffering she would endure—he changed her life forever and he changed the world.

Fast forward 33 years from the moment she said yes, there was another scene of another person who was caught with a decision to make. This one was not between an angel and a young girl, but with Jesus, the son of Mary, in the Garden of Gethsemane. Here he is, facing the very same kinds of questions that his very own mother faced at the moment the angel visited her and he was conceived. The very same choice: between comfort or obedience; between self-preservation or self-sacrifice; between doing his will or doing the will of God.

It’s interesting, that of all the words Jesus could have used in that prayer that he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, his words were so precise (Matthew 26:39): “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not what I will, but as you will.” Many of us have heard this prayer before. It’s a standard part of our Passion Week/Holy Week scriptures—we know it very well. In fact, most of the prayer that Jesus prayed and his word choices are pretty self-explanatory.

Look at the way Jesus begins the prayer: “My Father,” which in the original Greek language was “Abba,” which in the most literal translation means “Daddy.” This was Jesus praying in the most intimate relational terms with God. In that moment of this keen decision in his life, he chose not to pray some ritualized, formalized prayer, or conceive of God as some transcendent distant being to which he needed to appeal. This was Jesus in the raw, Jesus in the real, his most vulnerable. And he chose to appeal to God just like you and I have appealed to our mommies and daddies in our times of need. This was Jesus saying, “Daddy…”

The first part of that prayer is compelling and clear. And so is the last part of the prayer. The way he concludes the prayer he simply says, “Not my will, but yours be done. Not what I want, but what you want.” It’s very clear that regardless of the strain that was going on within his body, regardless of the stress that was pulsing through his blood-stained brow, no matter how fearful or doubtful he might have been, his conclusion was clear. He was going to do the will of God and have done to him whatever God wanted to be done.

The first part of that prayer is clear, and the last part of that prayer is, too. What I find so compelling is the part in the middle. The center section of this prayer caught my attention, and would not let me go. The part of the prayer where Jesus says, “Let this cup pass from me” (v. 39). I thought to myself, *What an interesting word choice.* What does it mean for Jesus to say, “Let this cup pass from me”? What a strange and unexpected choice of words. What kind of cup was Jesus talking about? Was it a symbolic cup or a literal cup? Surely he wasn’t talking about a literal cup! What was he referring to? And most importantly for us, what does this cup have to do with obedience, and what difference should it make to us?

The common way that we have understood those words is that the cup which Jesus was praying about represented agony, anguish, and suffering. You might even say it also represented God’s wrath or God’s punishment. That’s the common way that the image of the cup is used all throughout the Bible. If you look at the prophet Habakkuk or the epistles of Paul, over and over again there’s a cup that is referenced, and that image represents the fullness of God’s wrath and punishment upon humanity. This cup would have been, for Jesus, all of the agony and suffering that he was going to take upon himself. So we’ve commonly understood that this very human Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane that night was wrestling deep within his spirit. About whether or not he really wanted to go through with this mission and endure God’s punishment and the wrath that was meant for humanity and take it upon himself. So he was thinking about all that this cup would represent: every single whip crack, every single punch to the face, every single jeer, every single side-eyed glance, every single spit upon his face, every single thorn pressed upon his brow, and every single nail piercing his flesh.

When Jesus was saying, “Let this cup pass from me,” he was really saying, “Daddy, I don’t know if I really want to do this—this part of the mission. In fact, if there is any way to fulfill your purpose without the cross, I’m all ears.”

But what if there was a different way to understand what that cup means, and what it symbolized to Jesus? What difference would that make to us? As I pondered that question, I came across an amazing book by a wonderful Catholic theologian named Scott Hahn called, “The Fourth Cup.” His conclusion is deeply profound and dramatically unlocks new meaning and understanding of what Jesus was really praying for with this cup in the Garden of Gethsemane. It begins with a reminder that this story is from the Gospel of Matthew, and Matthew was writing to a predominantly Jewish audience—Jews or Christians who once were Jews. Which means that the people who originally heard Matthew’s version of the gospel would have been very familiar with Jewish custom, symbolism, and imagery. They would have immediately recognized that a few hours before this Garden of Gethsemane prayer, Jesus would have been practicing what every Jew would have been doing at that time. Just a few hours ago, in the upper room with his disciples, he was practicing Passover. The great Passover meal—not just any meal—but a meal of remembrance that had such specific instructions for people to follow that he would have been following the same instructions that countless generations prior to him would have followed, and even Jewish people today would be using the same liturgy, order and structure to that Passover meal.

So we remember that the instructions for the Passover that Jesus followed were very clear, practiced in the same way for centuries. They involved prayers, they involved the retelling of stories, they involved the eating of a meal, and they involved…cups. The order of the meal is essentially divided into four parts (much like four quarters of a football or basketball game).

The first section is the opening—the welcome to the meal—and it involves a dish of herbs and a cup—the first cup: the “cup of blessing.” The words instruct the host to say a blessing over that cup as a way of setting a tone for blessing of the entire meal to come.

The second section involves a retelling of the Passover story. It’s a reminder to all of the participants of all that God had done centuries ago to free the Israelites from slavery to Pharaoh and lead them into freedom through the wilderness and into the Promised Land. As that story is recounted, there is a second cup: the “cup of remembrance.” It is blessed and then drunk.

The third part of the meal (the biggest part of the meal) where the actual food is eaten, includes delicious lamb and unleavened bread. Along with that unleavened bread is a third cup. Now this Catholic theologian, Scott Hahn, has concluded that it is here in the third part of the Passover meal that Jesus goes “off script.” He starts improvising his own instruction! He goes rogue. In that third part of the meal, he takes the unleavened bread and says something the disciples have never heard before at countless Passovers past, and says, “This bread is Me. Whenever you break of this bread you’ll remember what I have done for you.” Then he’s just getting started. After he takes that bread and lifts it up, he then takes that third cup and says something the disciples have never heard before. He says, “This cup is My blood poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.” I can just imagine the disciples sitting there at the table saying, “Jesus, are you feeling alright? Did you forget how to read? The instructions are right here…you’re not following the directions. What is this stuff about the bread and the cup? I’m not sure what’s goin’ on here.”

Regardless of how surprised the disciples must have been in that moment, it was nothing compared to the surprise that Jesus still had in store. Then they got to the fourth and final part of the Passover meal. In that fourth part of the meal, it involves the singing of a hymn. Traditionally, the words that are sung come straight out of Psalm 114-118. It’s a song called, “The Great Hallel,” the great praise. What is in Psalm 114-118? I invite you to look it up for yourself between now and Easter. It’s a recounting of all of God’s saving acts to the people of God all throughout history, including their freedom from Pharaoh and their leading through the wilderness into the Promised Land, and a promise to the people of God that God would always be there to restore them and give them new hope and all that would be called upon the people is utter and complete obedience to God. And that’s the hymn they’re supposed to sing. After that is when you are to drink of the fourth cup: the “cup of consummation”; the cup of completion.

But Matthew is very clear in his gospel that when Jesus and the disciples got to the fourth quarter of the meal, they did sing the hymn, but then Jesus stopped the meal. He cut it short and he did not offer that fourth and final cup of completion to the disciples because in his mind it was not yet finished. The story of God’s saving love was not yet complete. I can just imagine the disciples saying to Jesus, “Ummmm…Jesus, aren’t you forgetting something?” It would be like stopping the football game at the 2-minute warning. It would be like walking out of the movie theater with five minutes left of the film. It would have felt unresolved and uncomplete. But not to Jesus. Because he knew the saving love of God, the faithful work of God and this salvation story was not yet over.

When Jesus is in the Garden of Gethsemane and he’s praying that prayer to his “Daddy,” perhaps the more accurate translation of his prayer in that moment would have been this:

“Daddy, if there is no other way to complete this story… If there is no other way to fulfill your mission… If there is no other way to do your will than for me to become the fourth and final cup of this story, then I’m ready.”

This was not a Jesus who was looking for an escape hatch at the last second. This was not a Jesus who was looking for the eject button to parachute out of this mission at the last minute. This was a Jesus who was clear that there was a mission to complete, and there was a fourth cup to drink, and that cup had to be him.

In fact, if you look at Matthew’s gospel, he gives us a hint just a few verses before in verse 29 when he said to the disciples that he would not drink of the fruit of the vine until the mission was complete. And later, when he’s hanging on the cross, Jesus says the words, “I thirst—I’m thirsty.” Now the other gospels say that, too, but Matthew is the only one to record that when Jesus was offered sour wine and vinegar to drink, Jesus refused to drink of it. Why? Because that wasn’t the fourth cup. It was his body that needed to be poured out. And that’s why at the very moment that he died and breathed his last, that’s when Jesus said, “It is finished.” The only cup that would be sufficient would be that of his own body poured out for us as the fourth and final cup, and he was ready.

Which brings us back to Mary—this model of obedience. When Annunciation Day and Palm Sunday fall on the same day, it’s clear to see that when Jesus is praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, he was not only praying to his Daddy; he was probably thinking about his mama. I’d like to think that on this day when Jesus was wrestling with the greatest decision of his life, he remembered that someone within his own family wrestled with that very same decision. His own mother who chose, in a way, to become a cup herself; a vessel through which God’s grace and love would be poured out through her for the benefit of all humanity. His own mother decided to carry within herself the blessing of God’s love for the world. He would remember that she, too, would sing a hymn of praise. In fact, the words of *The Magnificat* (Luke 1:46-55) are some of the most beautiful words ever to be sung in the Bible. After Mary sang that hymn, she too would offer herself in obedience to God’s will. Where in the world did Jesus learn to do that? He learned it from his mama.

That’s why this journey ahead is so important; that’s why this Holy Week that lies before us is so critical. Good Friday Services are not just “events” for you to attend. They are reminders of the great lengths that Jesus went to to become the fourth and final cup of completion for your salvation. When we come together for Good Friday Services, it’s not simply to support a program or ministry in the church. It is so much more important than that. It is so you can complete the meal. You can see how the story is supposed to end. It is to remember that the story of your salvation—your new life in God—is given to you by a Jesus who was obedient, even to the point of death, even death on a cross. Don’t jump right to Easter without at least reading two important portions of scripture:

1) Psalm 114-118 – Its words constitute the great hymn that was probably sung by Jesus and his disciples on that night to remind them (and us!) of God’s saving love.

2) Luke 1:46-55 (*The Magnificat*) – Read the words that Mary sang before she came to a point of obedience to God, and remember that these words are for you.

Sisters and brothers, welcome to holy week. It was not only a week that changed the world, but it is a week that can change your life.

Let us pray:

Gracious and holy God, thank you for the stunning example of obedience that you have given us in Jesus. In him we find new life. As he weighed the fears and doubts that all of us have in the face of suffering and agony, he chose to confront the realities of the cross with boldness and courage and faith, knowing that in him the story of your love would be fulfilled. We approach these coming days with profound gratitude for the sacrifice and love given to us by Jesus. We choose to be obedient ourselves, following you in the way that leads to the cross, so that on Easter morning we might experience the transformation and new life that you give to all people. Through your Son, Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray, Amen.

Recorded: March 25, 2018

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