

## **Holy Week at Grace Church in the Mountains**

*“In this week, the holy is redefined and recreated for us. The temple is rebuilt as the body of the crucified Christ, not a place of exclusions, a house of merchandise where we must barter to be allowed in, trading our daily lives, our secular joys and pains for the sacred currency of ritual and acceptable pure gifts that will placate God, but the cross by the roadside, unfenced, unadorned, the public and defenseless place where God gives us room.*

*Holy Week, with all its intensity of ritual and imaginative elaboration, comes paradoxically to break down the walls of self-contained religion and morality and to gather us around the one true holy place of the Christian religion, Jesus himself, displayed to the world as the public language of our God, placarded on the history of human suffering that stretches along the roadside. This is a week for learning – not management, bargaining, and rule-keeping, but naked trust in that naked gift.”*

– Rowan Williams, former Archbishop of Canterbury

### **What will we do?**

There are four primary liturgies of Holy Week:

Palm/Passion Sunday – 8 & 10:30 am

Maundy Thursday – 5:30 pm

Good Friday – 5:30 pm

Easter Vigil – 8:00 pm on Saturday / Easter Day 8 & 10:30 am

All four Gospel accounts attest to these sacred events in Jesus’ earthly presence. In each liturgy, the Church (that is you...and me) are encouraged to walk alongside Jesus soberly, somberly, and finally joyfully. These days lead up to and comprise the great Paschal Mystery, the Death and Resurrection of our Lord, the first fruit of the consummation of all time and space.

Grace is offering additional ways to mark this week as holy. We will celebrate a simple Eucharist Monday – Thursday this week at noon. On Friday, we participate in the community cross-walk meeting at First Presbyterian Church at 10:45 am followed by lunch at FUMC provided through Pathways Holy Cow food truck. We will also offer a guided Stations of the Cross on Friday at 3:00 pm.

### **Why do we do this?**

In some way beyond the limits of human reason, we experience our own death and resurrection when we are baptized into the Christian faith, becoming part of Christ’s living body on earth. Throughout our lives, we experience mini-deaths and mini-resurrections along the way. In our baptismal liturgy we pray,

*“Grant, O Lord, that all who are baptized into the death of Jesus Christ your Son may live in the power of his resurrection and look for him to come again in glory, who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.”*

When we welcome a new person into God's family through baptism, we tell them: "*We receive into the household of God. Confess the faith of Christ crucified, proclaim his resurrection, and share with us in his eternal priesthood.*" Holy Week is a time to experience in a very full way what we proclaim each week when we come together for the Eucharist. We experience the truth of the Christian Way, not only through studying it or hearing about it, but by *participating in it*. Through this participation, we live our lives in light of Jesus' resurrection, even as "we await his coming in glory." We discover our story in God's Story.

AND...there's more! We also practice participating in the Divine Economy of giving & sacrifice and receiving & renewal. Throughout the 40 days of Lent, we have sought to remove obstacles that prohibit us from receiving God's grace by repenting of our sins, amending our lives, and cultivating a desire for the Holy. In this way, we are "putting on Christ" (Gal 3:27) and living the "life that is really life" (1 Tim 6:19).

### **Where did these rituals come from?**

The idea of "walking the way of Christ" emerged early among Jesus' first followers. It is likely that the Passion narrative from the Gospel of Mark (the first of the four Gospels) emerged from the prayerful and devotional practice of *being where Jesus was* in the last days of his life. Before the Gospels were written, the people we call early Christians processed around Jerusalem and paused to pray at important locations and recalled stories from the Holy Scriptures they had at the time, our Old Testament. This embodied, prayerful practice is the foundation of our Holy Week liturgies.

Palm Sunday recreates Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. The Agapé meal and foot washing of Maundy Thursday remind us of Jesus' Last Supper in the upper room where Jesus commands us to love one another, even as Judas leaves to betray him. Good Friday commemorates Jesus' last hours – the mock trial before Jewish and Roman authorities, his humiliation, his compassion for the crowds and the criminals who died on either side of him, the seemingly paralyzed bystanders, the soldiers, and a few women followers who witnessed Jesus' suffering near the cross.

Easter Vigil is the culmination of the 40 days Lent and the beginning of Great 50 Days of Easter. This liturgy unites the opposites and binaries that constrain our daily lives: light and dark; the old human (Adam) and the new human (Jesus); cross and empty tomb; death and eternal life; beginnings and endings.

The liturgy helps us understand God as liberator and savior: for the ancient enslaved Israelites who crossed the Red Sea into freedom; for Jesus through his defeat of death and sin; and for us as we are united in Christ and adopted as God's children in baptism. In the early Church, new Christians were baptized at this service and included in the Paschal Feast (the Holy Eucharist) for the first time. The Easter Vigil is the high point in our liturgical year when our salvation history comes alive through ritual, scripture, and sacrament.