

## PALM SUNDAY, 2018

### Mark 11.1-11

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It is the week called holy. Christians enter into again the contemplation of those events which are the foundation of our faith. We do this in our worship together, in prayer and scripture reading privately, in our fasting and abstention from the pleasures and entertainments of this world. The goal of this week is that Christ will be formed in us, that our life together will be shaped by the "mind of Christ," as Paul says.

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Tombstone, Arizona is one of the most famous towns in the old West. It would be unknown and probably non-existent now, except for what happened there one day in October of 1881: the gunfight at the O. K. Corral, the greatest gunfight of the old West

Outside the town is a cemetery, known as Boot Hill. It is full of interesting graves. There are the graves of Billy Clanton and the McLaurys, killed in the gunfight. There is the grave of Marshall White, killed by Curly Bill (a scene in the movie).

Another points to a miscarriage of justice: George Johnson, 1882, "hanged by mistake." His marker reads: "He was right; we was wrong. But we strung him up, and now he is gone."

There is my favorite: "Here Lies Lester Moore. Four slugs from a 44. No Les. No More."

And then there is this grave, which bears a warning from Frank Bowles, who died in 1880, to all who pass by: "Remember that as you are so once was I; and as I am so you soon will be."

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"As you are, so once was I; and as I am you soon will be." That is the story of your life, of every life. That is the stark truth about all of us. As Groucho Marx once said, "If you live long enough, you will die. Mortality is the one fact of life that is common to all. It exempts no one: rich or poor, male or female, educated or not, high class or low, young or old. We all have to walk through that val-

ley over which hangs the shadow of death, and there are no alternate routes, no free passes.

Faced with this final fact of life, the human race has responded in three ways. One is simply despair. Life is pointless. A second option, born also of despair, is to descend into a life of self-indulgence. Best expressed as, "Let us eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we may die." Go for the gusto. Be all you can be. Pursue your pleasure. If it feels good, do it.

The third option, characteristic of our time, is the frantic and ultimately futile attempt to preserve one's youth. There is a huge industry of pills, plastic surgery, and other things designed to help you stay young-looking, sexy, and athletic.

But in fact, they all fail. Death comes to us all. End of discussion.

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But there is a fourth option. It is the distinctly biblical gift: The way of faith. The end is not the cross, nor the empty tomb. But resurrection, life of world to come. As St. Paul wrote, "For to this end Christ lived and died, that He might become Lord of the dead and the living" (Romans 14.9).

Holy Week is a school of suffering and death, to learn how to live, to die, and live again. It is following Christ and sharing in His suffering, that we might grow in discipleship and learn, as St. Paul writes, to "have Christ's mind among ourselves." In other words, to "think like Jesus."

There is a hymn in our worship book (ELW #347), "Go to Dark Gethsemene." The hymn is a primer on the lessons of Holy Week. It begins:

*Go to dark Gethsemene,  
All who feel the tempter's power.  
Your Redeemer's conflict see;  
Watch with Him one bitter hour;  
Turn not from His griefs away;  
Learn from Jesus Christ to pray.*

The first lesson Holy Week teaches is how to pray, especially in the midst of temptation and evil. We learn from Jesus how prayer can overcome our inner demons, the weakness of our sin, and to how

to remain steadfast in faith in the midst of temptations that seek to take us away from God. We learn how to pray: "Not my will, Lord, but yours be done." We learn to pray this prayer over all we do in life, so that we can discern right from wrong, good from evil, sin from righteousness. In learning from Jesus how to pray, we learn to discern the devil's temptations in our lives and hold fast to God.

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The second verse is to learn to bear the cross

*Follow to the judgment hall,  
View the Lord of life arraigned;  
Oh the wormwood and the gall!  
Oh, the pangs His soul sustained!  
Shun not suffering, sham, or loss;  
Learn from Christ to bear the cross.*

The second lesson we learn in Holy Week is how to bear suffering, how to have the courage of our convictions in the presence of those who would oppose and harm us.

Look at Jesus in Holy Week. He knows the suffering that lies before Him as He enters Jerusalem this day. Several times He even predicted it and told His disciples what was coming. Yet He continued onward, resolute in his determination to hold fast to what He knew was right, even through suffering and shame. We learn from Jesus in Holy Week how to suffer for the cause of right, to live in truth, how to bear the cross.

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Next: We learn from Christ how to die:

*Calv'ry's mournful mountain climb  
There' adoring at His feet,  
Mark the miracle of time,  
God's own sacrifice complete:  
"It is finished!" Hear the cry;  
Learn of Jesus Christ to die.*

Death is in the future for all of us. You don't even have much control over where or when or the circumstances of death. "As I am, so you soon will be." So the only issue is: How will you face death?

We learn from Jesus in Holy Week how to face death with courage and faith in God, not despair. Jesus ended his life on earth with the cry of triumph, not defeat: "It is finished!" That is: my work is done; it is completed, fulfilled.

We can learn from Jesus in Holy Week to live in faith and hope so that the end of our life becomes a completion, not a resignation. We can learn from Jesus how to live, so that at the end of our days we can say, with St. Paul: "I have fought the good fight of faith.... I have finished the race." You can learn from Jesus how to live so that at the end of your life you can say: I was faithful to my Lord and God. I kept my promises and commitments. I lived with integrity. I made the best use of my time, talents, wealth, and opportunities to serve my God and other people. What else is there to do in life?

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And the last verse:

*Early hasten to the tomb  
Where they laid his breathless clay;  
All is solitude and gloom;  
Who hath taken Him away?  
Christ is ris'n! He meets our eyes:  
Savior, teach us so to rise.*

We learn the living hope of a new birth through the resurrection from the dead, to receive an inheritance that can never spoil, perish, or fade (I Peter 1.3). We learn from Jesus the hope of sharing in the glory of God (Romans 5.5) because God's love has been poured out for us in Jesus. Because, the last word of this Holy Week is not Good Friday and death, but the new life of the new world to come. From Jesus we can learn how to rise: that no matter how low we go, no matter how bad the defeat, that God will raise us up to new life.

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This is the point of Holy Week: to learn from Jesus. So come and hear and listen and learn once again the old, old story of Jesus and his love. Learn from Jesus how to pray, how to bear suffering, how to face death, and how to rise again that you may live in faith, hope, and love. Amen.