A Holy Week
Luke 19:29-40

For many years I have preached this same sermon every Palm Sunday. Using all four Gospels, we can piece together what may have occurred during what we call “Holy Week.” It begins here.

29When he had come near Bethphage (beth-pha’-gee) and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, 30 saying, “Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. 31 If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it.’”

32So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. 33As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?” 34They said, “The Lord needs it.” 35Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it.

36As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. 37As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, 38 saying, “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!”

39Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, order your disciples to stop.” 40He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.”

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What was so “holy” about this week? Believe it or not, you need to start with the politics. The Roman Empire ruled. Rome had conquered Israel, Jesus’ homeland, and held them under oppression.
What Rome would not tolerate was any hint of rebellion. Once a year, the majority of the Jewish population would go to the capital city, Jerusalem, for Passover. It is a festival celebrating Israel’s independence from their former Egyptian slave-masters. Rome would send in its legions of soldiers to fortify the city, making sure there would be no uprisings, no new quests for independence.

So, when a 33-year-old peasant carpenter, from the insignificant village of Nazareth, claims to be the king of the Jews, you can understand why that was a problem for Rome. There will be no “king of the Jews.” There’s only one king, one ruler of the empire, and that is Caesar. The Jews needed to get this Jesus guy under control. So this week begins with a political clash.

* But you also have to understand the religious issues. The Jews were expecting a Messiah, a religious leader, to come and restore Israel to power. Jesus didn’t fit the bill. Back in the day, the most powerful king they had was King David. David was the king who established Israel as a mighty nation. They expected a new David. You can hear it in the shouts they made as Jesus entered Jerusalem on what we call Palm Sunday;

- Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!

(Mark 11:10)

Here’s what the Jews were expecting in a coming Messiah.

- He would be a great military leader who would overthrow Rome and establish Israel as a world government.
- He would lead an ethical revival, renewing Israel to the law and the prophets.
- The Messiah would establish world peace.
- And most interestingly, he was not expected to be divine, but human. Though he would be an agent of God, the Messiah would not be the incarnation of God. God was too holy to be tainted by human flesh.

Rome would have no king, and the Jews would not have a peasant carpenter who claims to be God as their Messiah. So, things heat up.
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Jesus has been at this for 3 years. He and his disciples come every year to Jerusalem for the Passover celebration. The city was full of music, food, merchants selling their wares. Some estimate over a half million Jews came to Jerusalem for Passover.

They stay each night this week in Bethany, two miles outside the gates of Jerusalem, in the home of Lazarus and his sisters, Mary and Martha. Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead. That tends to make you best friends!

Each day this week they will go into Jerusalem and then come back to Bethany to spend the night, until Thursday night – the night of his arrest.

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On Sunday, Jesus sent two disciples to get a donkey he had arranged to borrow in order to ride into Jerusalem. This is intentional. A donkey was a sign of humility, not the horse of a king. It was part of a prophecy in Zechariah (9:9). Every Jew would know this. The way he came into Jerusalem made a huge statement. Jesus orchestrated this whole thing.

His followers laid down branches and clothing on the road to cover the dust and pave the way. The Jewish leaders asked him to order his disciples to stop, but Jesus said, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.” (Luke 19:40) Those same Jewish leaders said, “You see, you can do nothing. Look, the world has gone after him!” (John 12:19)

Mark tells us that on Sunday, after Jesus entered Jerusalem,

\[...he \text{ went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.} \text{ (Mark 11:11)}\]

That was Sunday evening.

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On Monday, he and the twelve go back into Jerusalem to the temple. It was likely on Monday when he turned over the tables of the moneychangers. (Matthew 21:12) Moneychangers would take secular Roman money and convert it to sacred temple money, so the Jews could pay their temple tax and buy their sacrificial animals for Passover. But the moneychangers made huge profits on the exchange. In anger, Jesus overturned their tables, made a whip and drove out the animals saying,

\["My \text{ house shall be a house of prayer for all nations. But you have made it a den of robbers."} \text{ (Matthew 21:13)}\]
He walked right into the temple complex and turned over the system, right under the chief priest’s nose. It would be like walking into the White House and burning the Constitution! This thing is coming to a head.

According to the Scriptures, he spent the rest of Monday teaching in the temple and then returned to Bethany to spend the night.

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On Tuesday they go back into Jerusalem. It is a day of confrontations, questions and traps. The Pharisees ask him about paying taxes to Caesar, (Luke 20:20). They tried to trap him with questions concerning what was the greatest commandment. (Matthew 22:34-40).

It may have been on Tuesday when Jesus sat down in the temple courtyard to watch people bring their offerings. Luke tells us,

> He saw rich people putting their money into the treasury; he also saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. (Luke 22:1-2)

He elevated her above the giving of the rich. Now he’s aggravating everybody.

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There are no records of the day on Wednesday.

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Thursday was the Day of Preparation for the Passover meal. Jesus sent Peter and John into Jerusalem to look for a room he had prearranged and prepare the meal. Later in the day, Jesus and the other disciples would come to celebrate Passover before sundown.

When they got to the room, Jesus washed the feet of his disciples. What kind of king is this? And he said to them,

> “If I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet.”  (John 13:14)

At that Passover table, Jesus took the unleavened bread, and proclaimed it to be a new symbol of his body broken for all of us.
He took one of the four cups of wine and proclaimed it to be a symbol of his own blood for the forgiveness of sins and the redemption of all humanity.

We call it Maundy Thursday, from the Latin word “mandate,” because at the table Jesus gives us a new mandate;

> “…that you love one another as I have loved you.”  (John 15:12)
They argued at the table as to who would be the greatest in the new kingdom. Little did they know that almost all of them would die as martyrs for the sake of this kingdom. It would be a different kind of greatness.

Judas left to betray Jesus to the Jewish authorities. The other disciples sang a hymn and left the city through the eastern gate, crossing into the Mount of Olives, into the Garden of Gethsemane. They were headed towards Bethany, but didn’t make it.

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In the garden, he leaves eight of his disciples at the entrance and tells them to keep watch, but they fall asleep. He takes Peter, James and John deeper into the garden. They also fall asleep. The irony is that God is at work in the world while humanity is asleep.

It is here we see the human struggle of Jesus. He struggles to do the will of God. He asked that “this cup might be removed from me.” Who wants to be crucified, even if you know you will rise from the dead? But the answer is “No.” The cup won’t pass. God is going to allow humanity to exercise its freewill, even if it means the crucifixion of the Son of God.

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By now it’s in the wee hours of Friday morning. He is arrested, not by Rome but by the temple police, in the garden while the city is asleep. They take him back through the gates of Jerusalem to the home of Caiaphas, the High Priest. There is an illegal trial. The priest asked him if he is the Messiah and Jesus answers, “I am.” (Mark 14:62a). They don’t need anything else.

Outside the rooster crows at dawn and a maid comes to work for the priest. She sees Peter with the others and says, “You also were with Jesus!” (Matthew 26:69), to which Peter replies,

“I do not know the man.” (Matthew 26:70-74)

He denies even knowing Jesus! And Peter is the leader of the twelve. This week is certainly not “holy” because of what the humans are doing in the story.

The Jewish court did not have the authority to execute anyone for their crimes, so they trump up three charges, all political in nature, and send him over to the Roman governor. These are the three;

1. He’s been perverting the nation.

2. He promoted the forbidden of paying taxes to Caesar.

3. He claims himself to be a king. (Luke 32:2)
Sometime before 9am on Friday, they take him to Pilate’s headquarters. Pilate struggles with this. He can’t justify crucifixion, but caves in and has Jesus stripped, beaten and sentenced to crucifixion.

He is nailed to a cross between two common thieves from 9 am in the morning on Friday until 3 pm in the afternoon. Crucifixion is a slow form of suffocation. It was meant to intimidate.

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We’re a long way from his “triumphal entry” into Jerusalem six days ago! The disciples have scattered in fear. Judas had betrayed him. Peter had denied him. John was at the cross with Jesus’ mother, Mary. Joseph had likely already died, or he would have been there with Mary. It looked like everything Jesus had worked for over these past three years had crumbled and fallen.

He died, and they removed his body from the cross before sundown on Friday, the beginning of the Jewish Sabbath.

It’s over…or is it?

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This Thursday evening, at 6:15pm, I don’t know where you will be, or what you will be doing, but I would invite you to be here, to celebrate the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, on Maundy Thursday. He invites us to His table of grace.

On Good Friday, we gather in the chapel at noon to reflect on the seven sayings of Jesus on the cross, and on God’s love, poured out for us in Christ.

And then on Sunday morning at 6:45 a.m., we gather for sunrise at Hunter Valley Farm to proclaim the message of resurrection and hope, followed by our regular worship services here at church.

And so begins “A Holy Week.”

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Congregation: Amen