



Holy Week

2018 DEVOTIONAL

Rev. Adam Phlegar

Worship Opportunities this week:

Maundy Thursday Service: Thursday, March 29th at 7:00pm

Easter Sunday Services: Sunday, April 1st at 8:45am & 11:00am



GOOCHLAND
BAPTIST CHURCH
EST. 1771

804-749-3522 | Goochlandchurch@gmail.com | www.goochlandchurch.org

REMEMBERING OR LET US NOT FORGET

MONDAY, MARCH 26, 2018

⁷ Then the Lord said, “I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings,⁸ and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey...I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them...”¹² He said, “I will be with you.” **Exodus 3:7-12 (NRSV)**

Through the most recent sermon series, we have been wandering in the wilderness, exploring how God has used the wilderness to shape his followers to be more like Him. But life in the wilderness is hard, it's chaotic, it's dangerous, it's terrifying. We often times put up blinders while in the wilderness to only focus on the here and now. We either ignore or forget what life was like and how God has provided even in the times of despair.

The Israelites were enslaved in Egypt. In Exodus 3, God says, “I have observed the misery of my people...I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings” (Exodus 3:7). Life is difficult in Egypt and God is ready to answer the call and show favor to the Israelites.

Then, the Israelites witnessed the power of God through a magnitude of plagues. As one of the plagues, they witnessed the saving of each Israelite's firstborn from the hands of death, in which we know as the Passover. They experienced the power of God as they fled to the banks of the Red Sea. They are freed from Egypt. Everything should be hunky dory. Everything should be songs of praise, worshiping God. But as Pharaoh's army was quickly closing in to recapture the Israelites on the banks of the Red Sea, the Israelites forget everything they had seen from the days,

weeks, months, and years before. They forget the hardships as an enslaved laborer of the Egyptian dynasty. They forget the plagues that God had casted out onto the Egyptians. They forget that their children and bloodlines, were spared from the hands of death during the Passover. They forget that they had been freed from their captors, and now they cry out, “What have you done to us, bringing us out of Egypt?... It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.”

And several more times, the Israelites forget. They forget that God parts the Red Sea and destroys the pursuing Egyptians and allows the Israelites to flee. As they wander in the wilderness in search of the Promised Land, they forget that God turns the bitter water to sweet water so they can quench their thirst. They forget that God delivers quail from the sky and bread from the morning dew to satisfy their hunger. They forget that God delivers water out of a rock to again quench their thirst. They grumble, they complain, they harden their hearts and they cry out, “Why did you bring us here to die?”

But like the Israelites that Moses led out of Egypt towards the Promised Land, we too forget. Yes, we forget where we set our keys down, or we forget what we had for dinner last night, or we even forget what the sermon was about this past Sunday (gasp). But, more

importantly, we forget that “Egypt” period in our own lives when we were “enslaved” to our darkest moments and how despairing that time was. Or we forget how God heard our cries and saw us as more than just a slave to the darkness. Or we forget how God sees us as more than a “no-body” and sends a “Moses” to sacrificially show us our significance and importance to God. Or we forget when God delivers us from the approaching army of our past by parting the barriers that are preventing us from moving towards our future. Or we grumble and complain about the lack of something, or the difficulty of life and we forget to give thanks for blessings that are or have

been bestowed upon us. And even today, we forget that yesterday, we shouted “Hosanna, Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord – the King of Israel!” as we celebrated the triumphant entry of Jesus into the streets of Jerusalem (Palm Sunday) and we return to “normal” life.

For this Holy Week, each day we will take a step back to remember and reflect. We will remember and give thanks for how God has delivered us from the “Egypt” moments, how God has provided either through others or our own understanding, and how people have walked alongside us demonstrating love on this journey called life. Remember.



REMEMBER YOUR BAPTISM

TUESDAY, MARCH 27, 2018

³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” **Romans 8:38-39**
(NRSV)

Water is chaotic, destructive, and unpredictable. Last summer, we witnessed the devastation of water in Houston and Southern Florida through Hurricane Harvey and Irma. Or we stood back in shock as the extensive rain water fell in California causing mudslides and massive destruction. One of the very first images that we read about in Scripture is how God, in the Genesis creation story, turns his attention to separating the water from the water, or in other words, the chaos.

But even with the chaos and destructive powers of water, water is still a basic necessity for life. Animals meet at the local watering hole in order to sustain life. Cities were built around

the massive waterways in order to not only survive but to thrive. Scientific studies have shown that people can survive approximately three weeks without food, but only a mere three to four days without water. We use water not only for consumption, but we use it daily for a number of jobs, such as cleaning the dishes, showering, flushing the toilets, laundry, washing our hands, and so much more.

So, the combination of chaos and the necessity for life is essential to understanding why we use water in order to show the significance of baptism. We, in nature, are chaotic and destructive. Take a look around our society and you will see the craziness of the world we live in. We are surrounded by it, we are

enslaved to it, we are divided by it, and we need something to release us from this bondage of chaos and unite us as one.

God then brings in more water into the equation. Think about how crazy that sounds. God brings chaos into an already chaotic situation. And then he uses the chaos in order to bring order to the chaos.

As chaotic and destructive as water can be, we can find peace in the waters of baptism. God meets us in the chaos and reminds us that “nothing can separate us from the love of Christ”. God’s dominion and power goes above and beyond any chaos, destructive situation, “watery” situations that we may find ourselves in the midst of.

Today, we remember our baptisms. You may not recall the exact time or date, as there are many different practices of baptism. But, we remember that baptism is not the means of salvation, but instead it is symbolic expression of salvation. It is an outward expression of an inward reality of how God is working in your life. Through the waters of baptism, we are united with people around the world, present, past, and future. But more importantly, our baptism is a symbol of the unification that is found only with Christ. Our chaos has been calmed, our lives have been restored, our spirits have been washed clean, and we are called to a new life. Remember your baptism.



REMEMBER COMMUNION

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 28, 2018

²⁷ Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval”...

³² Jesus said to them, “Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

³⁴ “Sir,” they said, “always give us this bread.” ³⁵ Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. **John 6:27, 32-35 (NIV)**

If you have ever been to a church on a communion Sunday, we have that moment where the pastor says: “This table is open to all those that profess that Jesus Christ is their Lord and Savior...the bread is the body, broken for you...the cup is Christ’s blood, which is poured out for you...do this in remembrance

of me.” We eat the bread and drink from the cup and then shuffle out the door without even batting an eye or thinking about what we just did. But what is the significance of Communion?

The method in which communion is taken will vary from church to church. Some churches have everybody comes forward to

receive communion from designated leader. Some churches pass around individual cups and bread for the congregation to serve each other. The method is not what matters. Instead, what matters is understanding the sacrifice that was made and the promise of everlasting life that communion reminds us about.

During the Passover celebration and remembrance, the Jewish custom is to celebrate the Israelites being delivered out of Egypt and how their lives had been spared by God. God established a covenant with the Israelites where he would send a plague that would kill every firstborn in the land of Egypt. However, the Israelites would mark their doorposts with the blood of a lamb. The houses that were marked would be “passed over” from the firstborn sons being killed. The sacrificial blood of a lamb was the sign that they belonged to God.

During one of these Passover celebrations, Jesus took a loaf of bread as he sat with his disciples, and he broke the bread and said that this bread represented his body, which will be broken. Whenever you eat this bread, you are to eat it in the remembrance of Christ. Why bread?

Throughout Scripture, we find numerous stories where bread is used to get a point across. The “tempter” offered to turn the rocks into bread so that Jesus could eat, but Jesus responded that “man cannot live on bread alone”. Or the time where Jesus took two fish and five loaves of bread and fed 5,000 people to show how God can use the ordinary for the extraordinary.

In John 6, Jesus is having a conversation with the disciples about “working for the food that spoils” vs. “the food that endures to eternal life which the Son of Man will give you.” The disciples surely must have been confused. They must have asked for clarification because Jesus reminded them of how God provided nourishment to the Israelites with bread as they searched for the Promised Land. As delicious as that first bite of bread can be, especially when you feel like you are starving, that bread does not compare to the “Bread of Life” offered by Jesus.

Then, Jesus took the cup and said: “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” Why the cup? Why a new covenant?

In John 1:29, John the Baptist sees Jesus coming and says, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” Later, we learn through the death on the cross, that Jesus, the Son of God, the lamb of God is becoming that one true sacrificial lamb for not only the Israelites, but for all humankind. There is no more need for a blood offering or sacrifice as a price to pay for sin, as Jesus has become that sacrifice.

So, when we eat that bread and drink from the cup during communion, we are symbolically ingesting the promise of eternal life and drinking from the cup of salvation. Whenever we eat the bread and drink from the cup, remember that we are united with Christ because of his sacrificial love, God-given grace, and undeserving mercy. Remember communion.



REMEMBER THE FOOT WASHING

THURSDAY, MARCH 29, 2018 (MAUNDY THURSDAY)

¹⁴ What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? ¹⁵ If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,” and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? ¹⁷ So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. **James 2:14-17 (NRSV)**

How crazy is this, Jesus gets down on his hands and knees and washed the dirty, disgusting, gross, smelly feet of somebody else. I don’t understand. It makes no sense. Questions race through our minds: Why did Jesus do something so lowly, so demeaning, so distasteful, when there was not expectation for him to do so? Why humble yourself and wash the feet of your own disciples? You are the Messiah, the Christ, the King of the Jews, the Alpha and Omega, the Son of God...this does not make any sense. This should be done by the servants, the least of these, the lower class, anybody but the Messiah, the greatest individual to ever walk this planet.

This is so hard for us to understand because this is not what we expected of the Messiah. This is certainly not how society teaches us to be. Jesus says to follow but there are some things that we don’t want any part of. We can agree on the whole “thou shalt not murder or steal or commit adultery” for the most part. But, I’m not sure that I can or want to bow at the feet of a friend, neighbor, or even worse, a stranger, and wash his or her feet. “Jesus, I’m willing to follow only if you take me places that are nice, neat, easy, and most importantly, comfortable,” we say. We want Jesus to look like us instead of us looking like him.

But Jesus flipped the ideals of society completely upside down. We live in a “me first” society but Jesus tells us to be a “others first”

society. Does the phrase, “the first will be last and the last will be first” ring a bell? Or how about “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.” (Mark 12:30-31) Or finally “And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’ (Matthew 25:40)

James 2 reminds us that faith, by itself, is dead, it’s nothing, it’s useless. However, “faith was brought to completion by the works” (James 2:22). Jesus didn’t say, “Come and listen to all of my teachings and stand on the steps of the church and shout ‘Look at my faith’ as loudly as you can”. But Jesus did say, “Come and Follow me.” That means, we follow his example. We do as he would have done. We do as he did. We make ourselves humble, and we stand up for those who are ignored, persecuted, and oppressed. We become servants to the least – the elderly, the homeless, the refugee, the child, the prisoner, the different, the lonely, the sick. We change our mentality from “Me first” to “Christ first,” which implies “Others first”.

Today, we remember that we are called to serve. We are called to kneel before the least of these and serve. We are called to follow Christ and put our faith into action. Remember to serve.

What in the world is good about today? The Friday before Easter is a day where we remember the painful, ruthless, degrading death of our Savior. But there were numerous other painful events that led up to the death on the cross that are often times overlooked.

with the way that we live our lives? Do we put our faith into action the rest of the week?

After Jesus was arrested, he is presented before the chief priest on the “crimes” of blasphemy that he had supposedly committed. They sentence him to death. While this is transpiring, Peter denies Jesus three times saying, “I’m not the one that was with Jesus,” or “You must have confused me with somebody else.” We sing praises and worship on Sunday, but do we deny Jesus Monday through Saturday

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the crowd and washes his hands. He washed his hands as a cleansing ritual, as if to say, “I had nothing to do with this.”

We find ourselves in Pilate’s shoes often. We see people being oppressed, being persecuted, being shunned because they are different, and when we step back and do nothing, we, too, wash our hands to say, “I’ve got nothing to do with this.” But doing nothing is still doing something.

When we have sinned, we try to make things right on our own. We decide that we don’t need God to cleanse and to heal. We wash our hands

of the matter. We cannot wash away our own sins. Our sins, our transgressions, our inabilities, our issues can only be cleansed through Christ and the redemptive love of God.

Today, we remember Good Friday. What makes Good Friday good? It’s good because “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

We don’t have the ability to cleanse ourselves from our own sins, but through Christ, we have the ability to be washed clean. Remember, you cannot wash away your own sins.



REFLECTION

SATURDAY, MARCH 31, 2018 (HOLY SATURDAY)

³⁴ He said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.” ³⁵ Jesus began to weep. ³⁶ So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!” **John 11:34-36 (NRSV)**

Today, we sit in silence. We remember Jesus’ battered body, bruised from the beatings, punctured by the spear, lacerated from the crown of thorns, dehydrated, wrapped in linens lying in the tomb. We are confused, grieving, anxious, tired, and weary.

We ask the question: “What’s next?” Or “What do we do now?” Can you imagine what is going on in the minds of the disciples and the people that walked alongside Jesus? The pain of losing a loved one is significant. The grief is real. The memories come rushing back. The stories, the life lessons, flood back like a raging river.

Grief is a difficult thing to overcome. Grief is real. Grief is brutal. Grief is honest. But we grieve because we love. We are not alone in our grief. In John 11, Jesus is consoling Mary and Martha over the death of their brother Lazarus,

who was also a good friend of Jesus. One of the most powerful scenes of this story that shows the true compassion and love of Jesus is found in verse 35. It says, “Jesus wept”. Jesus was distraught, hurting, grieving. But the story doesn’t end there, because Jesus went to the tomb of Lazarus and raised him from death. The power of death does not overcome the power of God.

So, today we grieve as we remember the body of Jesus lying in the tomb. Spend time remembering the loved ones of ours that have passed away. Allow the memories to flood your mind. But also remember that unlike the disciples not knowing what was going to happen next, realize that we are the lucky ones because we know what happens next. Remember.