



Monday, March 25, 2024 - House of Prayer

Mark 11:15-17

15 And they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. 16 And he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. 17 And he was teaching them and saying to them, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers."

This week we will be looking at a short selection of events that took place on the corresponding days during the Passion Week. I would also like to personally invite you to join us from noon to 1pm today through Wednesday for our Brown Bag Bible Study with Dr. David Strawn. Bring your own lunch and learn more about the last week of Jesus' life on earth.

On Monday, Jesus makes a declaration of declarations regarding the Temple, the House of the Lord. As He enters the Temple courts, as He had many times before, He observes that what's taking place is not what should be taking place. The place of worship has become a place of commerce. Jesus clears everyone out and prevented others from carrying anything through the Temple courts. He does this to make a very distinctive point - My Father's house shall be a house of prayer for all the nations. We must take time to reflect upon what Jesus says and what it means for us today.

Jesus was outraged at what was taking place in the Temple, the Jewish place of worship. There were things taking place there that brought no glory to God and only benefit to men. In essence, Jesus is reclaiming what is rightfully His. We see a very different side of Jesus here. What we need to understand is that Jesus is passionate about the activities that take place in His Father's house. Jesus' statement serves as a word of caution to us today. May we not reclaim the sacred places of God for anything other than sacred practices unto the Lord.

Take some time to consider the sacred places in your heart, your home, and our church. In what ways are you utilizing those sacred spaces for their intended purpose (prayer, worship, study, etc)? What steps do you need to take to redeem those sacred spaces in order to restore them to the Lord? Take some time today to pray and seek the Lord, to get your 'house' in order so that it might be used for the Lord's glory.

Tuesday, March 26, 2024 - The Great Commandment

Mark 12:28-34

28 And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, "Which commandment is the most important of all?" 29 Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 30 And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and

with all your mind and with all your strength.’ 31 The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” 32 And the scribe said to him, “You are right, Teacher. You have truly said that he is one, and there is no other besides him. 33 And to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one’s neighbor as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.” 34 And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And after that no one dared to ask him any more questions.

During the final days of Jesus’ life on earth, He was tested many times and many ways. There were theological and biblical traps that the Pharisees, Sadducees, and scribes tried to set for Him. This account is no different. Seeking to trap Jesus with an impossible question regarding the law, those who were gathered around learned a quick and timely lesson regarding the heart of the law.

Jesus is asked about which of the 613 commandments was the greatest. Without hesitation, Jesus responded with the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4-5), which speaks of the way we are to fully love the Lord with everything within us. Notice that He did not stop there, but continued. The second most important one is like the first. He quotes from Leviticus 19:18 to love one’s neighbor as one’s self. Love God. Love people. The scribe affirms Jesus’ answer. Mark notes for us that Jesus saw that the scribe’s response was wise prompting Him to remark - you are not far from the kingdom of God. The scribe had the understanding of what Jesus said, but was missing the application of it. He had the knowledge of the word, but the word of God had not inclined his heart more toward the Lord. There are many who are like the scribe - they have knowledge of the Bible, but the Bible has not gotten into them to the point that it brings forth transformation. To love the Lord is to be loved by Him. To love the Lord is to love those whom the Lord loves. There is a major difference between knowing what the Bible says and doing what the Bible says. As followers of Jesus, we are called to be doers of the word and not hearers only (James 1:22).

Take some time today and evaluate your life against the Great Commandment. How are you loving the Lord with all of your heart? All of your soul? All of your mind? All of your strength? How are you loving yourself? How are you loving your neighbor? Remember to give thanks to the Lord for His love, mercy, grace, and forgiveness.

Wednesday, March 27, 2024 - Betrayer

Luke 22:3-6

3 Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was of the number of the twelve. 4 He went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers how he might betray him to them. 5 And they were glad, and agreed to give him money. 6 So he consented and sought an opportunity to betray him to them in the absence of a crowd.

Today’s reading is among some of the most difficult to understand. How could one of Jesus’ most trusted disciples turn on Him? Betray Him? Maybe you, too, know the pain of betrayal. It is a wound that is not too quick to heal. As we consider the turning point in Judas Iscariot’s life as well as the

fatal turn in Jesus' life, may we remember the role the enemy plays in all of this.

Satan entered Judas. Read those words again. The enemy will stop at nothing to undo Jesus. If he could not get to Jesus by tempting Him, then the enemy will go after those closest to Jesus. Keep in mind that this is still within the confines of God's plan for redemption. Judas began to grow more and more disgruntled with the way Jesus was doing things. His personal greed grew all the more. Slowly, step by step, he was opening the door for the enemy to come in. Judas secretly meets with those who desire Jesus' demise. They were glad to see Judas who consented to their plan and agreed to betray Jesus and surrender Him into the hands of the authorities at an opportune time. The heart is deceitful, who can understand it (Jeremiah 17:9). The more Judas' heart was disconnected from Jesus, the more inclined it became toward himself until he made a decision that would forever shape his future. May his life serve as a warning to guard your heart and mind against the schemes of the enemy.

Take some time today to pray for the protection of your heart. A heart does not grow cold nor harden overnight. It takes a long sequence of events to bring that about. If you notice your heart growing cold or hard against the direction and instruction of the Lord, pause and pray. Ask the Lord to soften your heart and give you strength and courage to persevere in obedience to Him.

Thursday, March 28, 2024 - The Body and the Blood

Mark 14:22-25

22 And as they were eating, he took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." 23 And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. 24 And he said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. 25 Truly, I say to you, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."

Today is Maundy Thursday. This evening we will gather together as a church family at 7pm to remember what Jesus establishes here. May you not enter into this time lightly, but fully prepared to receive the bread and the cup that symbolize Jesus' body and blood.

As Jesus gathers for His final Passover meal with His disciples, He takes a sidebar and introduces what we know to be the Lord's Supper. Bread and wine were normal aspects of the Passover meal. Jesus takes elements that were familiar to His disciples and fellow Jews, and introduces the fuller meaning to them. He takes the bread and declares that it is His body. When you look at a piece of matzah, you will see that it has holes in it and is striped from cooking. May this bring to mind that Jesus was pierced for our iniquities and that by His stripes we are healed. Jesus held up the cup to signify the establishment of the new covenant, the one referenced in Jeremiah 31:31-34. It was a covenant that was sealed by His blood, which would soon be poured out for the sins of many. Jesus reminds His disciples to recreate this commemoration in remembrance of Him.

Take some time today to pray and prepare your heart for our time of communion this evening. If there be any offensive way in you, confess it to the

Lord and repent. Give time throughout the day today to prepare your heart for worship and the receiving of the elements.

Friday, March 29, 2024 - Denied

Mark 14:66-72

66 And as Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came, 67 and seeing Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said, "You also were with the Nazarene, Jesus." 68 But he denied it, saying, "I neither know nor understand what you mean." And he went out into the gateway and the rooster crowed. 69 And the servant girl saw him and began again to say to the bystanders, "This man is one of them." 70 But again he denied it. And after a little while the bystanders again said to Peter, "Certainly you are one of them, for you are a Galilean." 71 But he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, "I do not know this man of whom you speak." 72 And immediately the rooster crowed a second time. And Peter remembered how Jesus had said to him, "Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times." And he broke down and wept.

Today is the day, the day Jesus died. We will be remembering His suffering on the cross during a Good Friday event from noon - 2pm today in the Worship Center. This is a come and go, self-guided, interactive experience. I would strongly encourage you to come and be a part of this special time of reflection and remembrance. In total, the event should take about 20 minutes to complete. I hope you will join us.

After Jesus' trial and before His crucifixion, we read about this interaction with Peter and some others in the courtyard around Caiaphas' house, where Jesus was being tried. Three times Peter is confronted by those in the courtyard. The first time he is accused of being with the Nazarene. Again, he is identified as being 'one of them.' A third time, he is accused of being from among them because of his Galilean accent. Each time he denies it. Each time more vehemently than before. As his third denial crossed his lips, he heard the rooster crow and the words of Jesus flashed through his mind - you will deny me. What Peter thought an impossibility is now his reality. There was no denying he had been with Jesus, as would be the case later on (see Acts 4:13). Horrified at what he had done, and broken in heart and spirit, Peter wept. There are times when we find ourselves in places or situations that were unimaginable to us at some time prior, much like Peter. There is more to the story. Read John 21 to see how Jesus goes about bringing redemption, reconciliation, and restoration to Peter.

Take some time today and reflect upon the events surrounding Peter's denial. If you were in the same place, how would you respond? If there have been times when you have denied being a Christ follower, read John 21 and experience the restoration of Christ for yourself. Consider ways that you can be bold and take a stand for your faith in Christ and put those into action today.

It's Friday, but Sunday's Coming!

*This week's devotions were prepared for you by Troy Allen.