

A Grace Gathering
2 April 2023

A Week that Changed the World Forever,
Ancient Promises Fulfilled,
Life Made Certainty through Death

The word, Lent, comes from an old English word that means “Spring.” It culminates forty days of preparation anticipating a focus upon the Lord Jesus and His redemptive sacrifice attested by the resurrection of Sunday morning, 5 April 33 AD, having been crucified and placed in a rich man’s tomb on April 3rd. In Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions, much less in our Protestant heritage, it is preceded by a season of repentance and abstinence, symbolically emulating the fasting of our Lord in His temptations (40 days) prior to His public ministry (a tradition found in the churches quite early but universalized in the fourth century triumph of Christianity in the empire).

Only in the 17th century France do you find the Lenten season preceded by reverie, called “Fat [“mardi”] Tuesday [“gras”],” a letting the passions explode in eating, and otherwise, before a season of abstinence, before “Ash Wednesday.” The tradition was brought to French New Orleans in 1699 as a day of gorging on unhealthy foods. It has mutated into a carnival with parades, questionable behavior, and colorful beads (purple [justice], green [faith], gold [power]).

While our tradition has not focused on these things, it has upon the most life-changing week in all human history. It is an eight-day celebration commencing with Palm Sunday, focused upon our Lord’s death as the true and ultimate Passover Lamb, and culminates in His triumph over death in the resurrection. This Palm Sunday we are not gathering in a triumphal process as they did in the first century, but we are celebrating that great week around a remembrance table that symbolically defines its meaning.

THE GREATEST of ALL WEEKS

As we come to our Lord’s Table, I want to rehearse for us each day of our Easter Celebration. What is intriguing to me is that the four gospel writers selected different events to help us understand Jesus’ claims and accomplishments throughout His ministry, yet in the final week they recorded events with striking similarity, Thursday to Sunday even more so.

Sunday: The Triumphal Entry, The Presentation of the King to the Nation

On this day, as pilgrims, celebrating Israel’s ancient deliverance from bondage through blood and miracle, made their ascent to Jerusalem for the Passover, a celebration accentuated by Jesus’ raising of Lazarus (John 11) previously and Jesus’ entry on the back of a donkey into Jerusalem along the Kidron Valley and the Mount of Olives.

“The next day...the large...crowd took branches of the Palm trees... shouting,

‘Hosanna, Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord’ (John 12:12-13).”

Significance: The waving of palm branches and cries of “Lord, save us” is the declaration of the people (John 12:13) that Jesus is the deliverer though the leadership sought to kill him. Palm branches symbolized victory! The week began as the new one; eight days later it announced an eternal triumph!!

Monday: The Cursing of the fig Tree, the Cleansing of the Temple, Controversy

Jesus in returning to the Temple observed a fig tree that professed fruit because of its leaves, howbeit bitter. Observing no fruit, He cursed it as a symbol of the nation’s rejection and later judgment (Mark 11:12-25). In the Temple, he found a “den of robbers” and cleansed it as he had at the beginning of His ministry at another Passover celebration (John 2:13-22). There He healed many and instigated controversy with the religious leadership challenging His authority. (Mark places these events on Tuesday, Matthew (21:17-18) on Monday [“He left and went to Bethany.... Now early in the morning when He as returning to the city...”]. He replied to the religious leaders with parabolic instruction (two sons, the vineyard and the landowner, a marriage feast, a tax question, and a marriage issue [Matt. 21:28-22:45]).

“And seeing a lone fig tree by the road, He came to it and found noting on it be leaves.... [he said], ‘... no longer shall there be any fruit from you’ (Matt.21:18-19).”

“It is written (Isa. 56:7), ‘And My house will be a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of robbers’ (Luke 19:46).”

Tuesday-Wednesday: Conflict and Controversy with the nation’s leadership.

Jesus spent these days seemingly in the Temple area renouncing the claims of the leadership and pronouncing judgment upon them.

“...woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites... [your disciple are] sons of hell as yourselves.... You fools and blind men.... You blind guides.... whitewashed tombs.... You snakes, you offspring of vipers, how will you escape the sentence of hell? (Matt. 23).”

Maudy Thursday:

Events rapidly multiply on this and the following day. Called “maudy,” in Latin Mandatum, meaning a command or instruction. On Thursday before the Passover meal Jesus washed the disciples’ feet (John 13) and gave them instruction to emulate his servanthood (“I give you an example... (v. 34). See John 13:1:18-19:15.

The Passover Meal and reinvention to a memorial until Jesus returns.

Instruction in consequence of His departure.

Prayer for the disciples.

Gethsemane Agony.

Arrest.

Two trials (Annas and before the Sanhedrin under Joseph Caiaphas).

Peter's denials.

Good Friday (sometimes designated Holy or Black) (John 18:12-20:42)

Another Sanhedrin trial.

Three Roman trials (Pilate, Herod Antipas, Pilate).

Flagellation.

Crucifixion.

Entombment.

Silent Saturday: "Lo in the grave he lay, Jesus, my savior, waiting the coming day, Jesus my Lord"

Resurrection Sunday: "He has Risen" (John 20:1-23)

The fear of Mary Magdalene (vv. 1-2)

John and Peter's discovery

"...he stooped and looked in and saw the wrappings... (v. 5)."

"...he entered the tomb...look at the linen wrappings... and the facecloth, which had been on his head, folded up in a place by itself (vv. 6-7)."

"The first disciple who had come first entered then, and he saw and believed (v. 8)"

The disclosure to Mary by Jesus

"When she had said this, she turned and saw Jesus standing there... (v. 14)"

"Jesus said to her, 'Mary...! (v. 16).

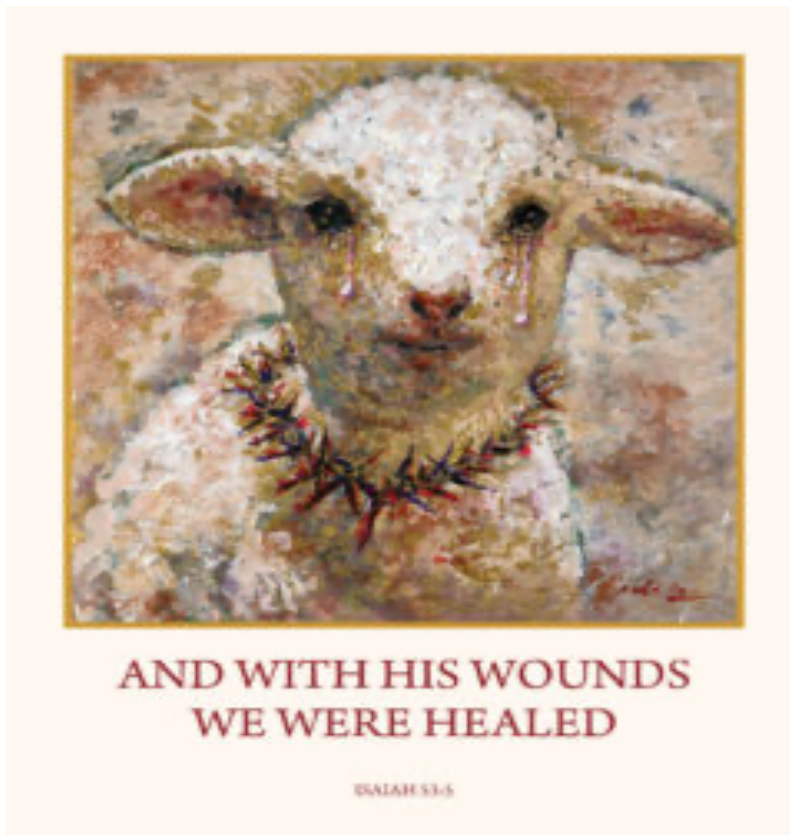
Appearance to the disciples

"And it was evening of the first day of the week, Jesus came and appeared in their midst...Peace be to you" (v.19)."

THE GREATEST of ALL WEEKS, The GREATEST of ALL PERSONS:
A CALL to REMENBRANCE

"...do this in remembrance of Me (I Cor. 11: 24)."

"...you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes (I Cor. 11:26)."



(The painting above is by a Jewish friend in Jerusalem, Udi, who has a shop in the Jewish Quarter of the city.)

Congregational Song: "Alas, and Did My Savior Bleed" (Isaac Watts, 1707)"

The Service of the Bread

“...this is My body (Matt 26:26).”

Solo: “I Love You Lord” (Laurie Klein, 1978).
(soloists: Sandi Altstaetter)

The Service of the Cup

“...this cup my blood of the covenant... (Matt. 26:28).”

Congregational Song: “He Arose” (Robert Lawry, 1874).



Concluding Prayer