



The Rev. Alan Sutherland, Rector

March 9, 2008

### Lent 5, 2008

I am not a betting man but I will make you a gentlemen's bet that in a couple of weeks time you are going to come to church and possibly find a stranger sitting in your seat. There is also a good chance that when you come to church you will find it even more difficult to park, or get as close to the coffee pot as you normally do. The reason will be because of all those people you have never seen before in your life. Well you may have seen them at Christmas!

You see in 2 weeks it is the Sunday of the resurrection. Easter Sunday. And many people feel an obligation to come to church and that is good. The worship will be glorious and the atmosphere wonderful as once again we proclaim that Jesus the Christ has risen from the dead.

But you know as each Easter Sunday goes by I always feel that if Easter Sunday is the only time people come to church during holy week there is a lost sense of wonder and a lost sense of glory. The reason I feel this is because so much happens in the week before Easter that can only heighten the glory, stir the wonder, at what it is that God has really done for us in raising Jesus from the dead.

Next Sunday we call Palm Sunday. We will gather and bless the palms outside. It will be a joyful time as we relive our Lord's triumphant entry into Jerusalem. No sermon, only the congregational involvement in the reading of the passion narrative.

On each evening of the week we will gather for Eucharist and a meditation as we begin to try to understand what it was that changed people cries of Hosanna on Sunday to Crucify on Friday.

On Monday evening we hear about Jesus visit to the home of Simon the leper, on Tuesday the cleansing of the temple and on Wednesday the betrayal of Judas.

On Thursday we will gather for the Maundy Thursday service where Jesus shared the last Passover but the first Eucharist with his disciples. At that Passover Jesus washed the disciples' feet to show them that a life in him is one of servant hood. All will be invited to have their feet washed. At the end of that Eucharist all the stuff from the sanctuary will be removed, the lights will be dimmed; there is no recessional, no final prayer. It is a symbolic movement from the upper room of Eucharist to the garden of Gethsemane. There is a simple request from our Lord, ""Will you not wait with me one hour?"" The sacrament will be on the altar until midnight and people are free to come for private prayer and meditation to honor the request of our Lord, ""Will you not wait with me one hour while I pray?"" On Good Friday morning we begin with prayers and at noon we gather with our brothers and sisters of our larger community to share our community Good Friday service at Woodford community Christian.

At 3 pm we will gather in the garden to begin our stations of the cross and at 7 p.m. that night we gather for a powerful service called everyone's way of the cross.

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

*Established in 1847*

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We leave the church in silence and in darkness. Jesus is dead. There is a deep sense of loss - of death.

On Holy Saturday we begin with prayer and in the afternoon we gather with our children to flower the cross and hunt Easter eggs.

On Saturday evening we gather in church. On Friday evening we left in darkness. On Saturday evening we gather in darkness. We bless our new paschal candle, and as the congregational candles are lit by the light of that candle we are told the story of God's love for his children and what God is doing for his children on that night. It is the Great Vigil- the first Eucharist of Easter; the glorious alleluias and the splendor of the church as once more it comes back to life with color and flowers.

On Easter Sunday we celebrate what God has done. At 7, 8, 9 and 11 a.m. Holy week reaches its fulfillment on Easter Sunday.

Now some will say we do too much in Holy week.

Some say they do not see the point.

Some say we do it for show.

I say we do it because the more fully we enter into holy week, the deeper we understand that Jesus did not just die for the fun of it. Nor because his father wanted him to. Jesus died for every single one of us so that we are forgiven of our sins.

So I invite you to enter Holy Week and to spend some time sharing in those events that deepen the meaning of Easter.

Amen

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