**Holy Week 2020**

Sunday, April 5th is Palm Sunday, the beginning of Holy Week. Holy Week is arguable the most important time in the Christian Church (Christmas?) as it culminates with Easter Sunday and Jesus’ resurrection. The resurrection is the foundation of our faith, as it proves God’s power over everything—including death. It also proves that Jesus is who he said he was—God’s son—and that all his teachings and prophecies were true. They are still true today.

Over the last 2000 years, many have lost track of what Holy Week means. Easter has become more about bunnies, colored eggs, jelly beans, and chocolate than about the Resurrection. This year, as we face a global pandemic, all the candy and decorations seem to be in jeopardy, and in the scheme of things as hollow as most of the chocolate eggs and bunnies. Now is a good time to look at the significance of Holy Week, the first disciples’ actions and attitudes and see if we have anything in common with them today.

I’m sure the disciples were bursting with pride on the first Palm Sunday. They had left their businesses and even their families behind to follow Jesus. They turned their backs on the establishment and conventional wisdom and risked everything to follow one man who preached love, mercy and forgiveness. They struggled to understand his teachings at times but were amazed at his power to heal and the way that he was able to reach people with his words. They watched as all of Jerusalem turned out to wave palm branches and place cloaks in the road. The crowd chanted and sang, praising the Messiah (the chosen one). All the doubts and fears of the disciples must have been removed. They were right! They followed Jesus when others doubted, and now that Jesus was going to be king, they would have power too!

The doubts and fears returned on Maundy Thursday. The joyous occasion of a Passover celebration turned into something else. What did Jesus mean that someone would betray him? That where he was going, no one could follow? What’s happening here? Good Friday arrives and things only get worse. Jesus has been arrested, convicted and crucified! The disciples distance themselves from Jesus—they lie about knowing Him, they hide from the authorities, and they wonder about their choices—past, present, and future. Could the Son of God be executed like a criminal? Were they fooled into following Him? What were they going to do with their lives? How can they escape from the Romans and the Jewish religious establishment?

We celebrate Easter now, but the first disciples seemed more afraid and confused than anything. The women think someone has stolen His body. The men doubt that it happened at all—until they see the empty tomb, and eventually Jesus himself. Some don’t recognize him, until the Holy Spirit opens their eyes. In fact, Jesus led his disciples for about three years. He appeared to them several times during a forty-day period after rising from the dead. The disciples learned and grew in faith little by little, but they doubted, they quarreled, they judged. They didn’t fully understand what Jesus meant and what he wanted them to do until Pentecost, when God sent his Holy Spirit down on them. Of course, we know that they “got it” then. That each of the twelve would preach the Gospel until they were executed for their faith. That no doubts or fears could stand in the way of spreading their faith.

They shared their faith so effectively that we still believe today. And that brings us to Holy Week 2020, the Covid-19 edition. It doesn’t look like things will be “back to normal” by Easter Sunday. We will still probably be in some sort of quarantine—like the disciples hiding out after Jesus died. Like the disciples, we have doubts and fears. How are our relatives, friends, and coworkers doing? Will we get sick? Die? If we lose our jobs, what will we do? What will our future hold? When will this be over? When can we go back to church? All of these questions are valid. But God sent us his Holy Spirit also. That gives us faith. Faith allows us to believe in a virgin birth and resurrection of the dead. It also gives us the strength and courage to face the unknown. Faith allows us to show love, mercy, and forgiveness. It helps us to love our neighbors as ourselves and reminds us that God is with us always—in good times and bad. Jesus’ disciples today aren’t much different than his first disciples. We just need to be reminded and encouraged!