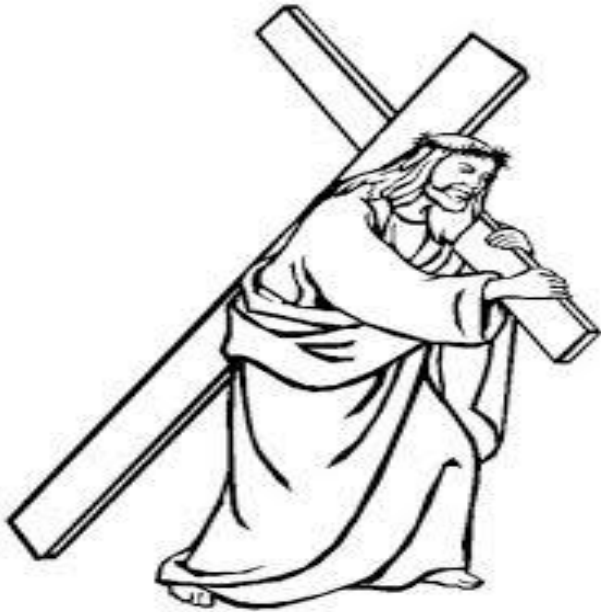


GOOD SHEPHERD UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
GOOD FRIDAY
MARCH 29, 2024
NOON – 3:00PM

Meditation on the Cross

This “Cross” came from a highly unusual piece of wood ~ as unusual as the individuals that make up this community of faith. Each ring that is reflected in the wood of this cross tells a story of the life of the tree from which it is made. These rings reveal seasons when there was little rain and not much growth for the life of this tree. These rings also tell of years when there was large amounts of rain and the tree boomed with growth. Our community of faith is made up of many members ~ some who have known great spiritual growth at times as well as times of spiritual wanderings and doubts ~ a common story for each one of us. But the rings hide their story until the tree is cut down and turned into something serviceable, a cross. Our lives often hide our gifts until in service we offer ourselves to others in Christ. Look at the “face” of the cross. Its surface has an overall consistent thickness ~ however it is heavily valleyed from a century of wind - ice - snow - rain - heat leaving their “autograph.” Our congregation too is heavily valleyed with those who have weathered the years of service to God. I’ve never seen a piece of wood as beautiful, as strong, as telling as this wood of the cross ~ I don’t believe I have ever seen a congregation more beautiful, strong, and caring as Good Shepherd in their service of Christ.

~ inspired by a Deacon of Consistory



HOLY WEEK JOURNEY

THE WORD

Entry into Jerusalem - Luke 19:28-40

Palm branches

Word was spreading...people were talking...the news of Jesus spread far and wide! Just as Jesus had said, he and his disciples were headed up to the city, to Jerusalem. Just before they arrived Jesus told his disciples to go into the next village and bring a colt that had never been ridden. Never been ridden? What would the owners say? Just as Jesus had said, the owners asked the disciples why they were taking their colt. "Because the Lord needs it," they answered. The disciples threw their cloaks on the colt's back before they set Jesus upon it. As Jesus rode upon the tiny animal people gathered round, laying their cloaks upon the ground before them! They were waving palm branches while shouting and singing, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of God! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest heaven!" Glory in the highest heaven? Blessed is the king? On a roadway paved with cloaks and palm branches? What kind of king was this? Word was spreading and some of the people in charge were not happy. Some of them in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, order your disciples to stop!" Jesus answered, "I tell you, if they were silent, the stones would shout aloud!" Word was spreading...people were talking. The news of Jesus echoed through all creation.

Jesus cleanses the temple - Luke 19:45-47

Coins

Word was spreading...people were talking... the news grew and grew. Jesus went to the temple to drive out everyone who was selling things. "My house should be a house of prayer but you have made it into a den of robbers!" he cried. He then began to teach in the temple and the people gathered from near and far to hear his words. The people in charge were afraid. If the people listened to Jesus, who would listen to them? They had to figure out a way to get rid of him...soon...

The Last Supper - Luke 22:7-14

Bread and Chalice

Word was spreading... people were talking...Jesus drew his friends close to him. The time of the Passover feast drew near and Jesus so much wanted to share it with his closest friends. They would celebrate with special food: songs, prayers and stories to remember the time that God helped the children of Israel escape from Egypt. Jesus sent Peter and John to find the guestroom where he could eat with his disciples. So they went and found everything and prepared for the special meal. Together they gathered around a table. Yes, word was spreading...good news was growing...but how could Jesus get his friends through the next few days, through the time until he saw them again? Full of love, he took a loaf of bread, broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." Full of love, he took a cup of wine as he said, "This cup is poured out for you showing you a new way and God's promise in me." Full of awe and wonder the friends ate the bread and shared the cup. They had been fed with stories and

prayers, words and deeds, and now this most special bread and wine. Word was spreading... Then Jesus said a most frightening thing. “One of you gathered here with us is not my friend. One of you will turn me over to those who want to hurt me.”

Warning of things to come - Luke 22:31-34

Rooster

For a moment it was if time stood still...they could not believe the words that rushed and poured over them! Someone would betray him... Jesus looked at Peter full of deep love and deeper sadness. “These are uncertain times. Our friendship will be tested. For a while we will be scattered. You, Peter, will turn away from me. I have prayed that you will turn back again and help your brothers and sisters.” “What do you mean?” cried Peter. “I will go with you now even to prison and to death.” Jesus sighed, “I tell you Peter, before the rooster crows to end this night, you will have pretended three times that you do not know me.”

Praying in the garden - Luke 22:39-46

Flowering branch

Word was spreading...people were whispering...Jesus and his friends went to the Mount of Olives. Jesus looked at them lovingly saying, “pray that you do not come into the time of trial.” And moving away from them, about a stone’s throw, he knelt down and he prayed. “O Father, if it were down to me, I wish it didn’t have to be this way.” Full of despair he prayed. And then it was as if he could feel the arms of God around him, giving him hope and strength to go on. When he stood up, he saw that his friends had fallen asleep.

Arrest - Luke 22:47-53

Lantern/candle

Word was spreading...in secrets and whispers... Suddenly a crowd came, led by Judas, one of Jesus’ friends. He kissed Jesus, as a sign to tell the crowd that this was the one they wanted. “Judas,” said Jesus, “You would turn away from me with a kiss?” The crowd had come to arrest Jesus. The disciples wanted to fight back. But Jesus said, “No.” Then Jesus said to the crowd, “You saw me every day. Why didn’t you arrest me in the temple? Why do you come in the dark of night and treat me like a bandit?” The soldiers didn’t say anything. Judas didn’t say anything. They took Jesus away. And all of the disciples ran away. Even Peter...

Peter’s denial - Luke 22:54-62

Feather

Word was spreading...whispers, whispers...fingers pointing... Peter followed Jesus from a distance. “You were with him,” one said, squinting her eyes. “You are one of them,” another said, pointing a finger. And another said, “I’m sure he was one of them.” “I do not know him... I am not.. I don’t know what you are talking about,” Peter shouted. And a rooster crowed. Peter, full of shame, went out and cried.

Trial - Luke 22:63 – 23:25

Crown of thorns, purple cloth, whip

Word was spreading...name calling, angry shouts, a howling mob! Jesus was beaten and dragged from one place to the next. From prison to the high priests, to the governor Pontius Pilate, to King Herod and back again. Word was spreading: Who are you? What have you done? What is your crime? Dressed in a royal robe, crowned with thorns, everyone made fun of him. Joyous shouts of “blessed is the king” gave way to angry snarls of “Crucify him! Crucify him!” and so Pilate handed Jesus over to them.

Crucifixion - Luke 23:26-42

Rough-hewn cross

Word of Jesus was spreading...people were gathering, following Jesus as he dragged a huge wooden cross. Through the streets...people laughing, leaders mocking, women weeping, friends crying... Jesus said, “Father forgive them.” Jesus was crucified between two other criminals. On his one side he heard, “Why don’t you save yourself and us?” On the other he heard, “Jesus remember me...”

Jesus’ death - Luke 23:44-49

Black cloth draped on cross

The WORD was coming to an end...it seemed... It was as if earth and heaven were torn from their loving embrace. All was lost. Even though Jesus’ friends watched from a distance they heard his voice echoing in their hearts as he said, “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.”

Burial - Luke 23:50-56

Hand-sized rock

There was no WORD. A good man, named Joseph, asked for the body of Jesus. Full of love and care, he wrapped it in a linen cloth. Ever so gently he laid Jesus in a tomb, hollowed out of a rock. The women followers came too, helping to prepare the body. But time was running out. When the sun went down there could be no more work for the day. The job of blessing Jesus’ body would have to wait.

Looking to Resurrection

There was no WORD. Or was there? There was weeping. There was sighing ~ oh, what might have been. Was it all over? It was so quiet we could hear our hearts beat...his heart beat? We would wait through this dark night and the next day and at sunrise on the third day we would be ready to make the journey with him and to him. We would carry our perfumes and spices, and see him again...