



## What's Happening This April?

### Youth Events:

Easer Egg Hunt  
April 6th – starts at 10:00 AM  
Lunch will be provided

Hanging Rock Hike  
April 20th

### Holy Week Services:

Maundy Thursday  
Pinto Bean Supper and Communion  
April 18th – 6:30 PM

Good Friday  
Tenebrae Service  
April 19th – 7:30 PM

Easter Sunrise Service  
Followed by Breakfast  
April 21st – 7:00 AM

## Is Lent Still Here?

What a season... Finally we have gotten a break from short days and endless rain, but it's not all smooth sailing yet. The fruit trees and daffodils are beautiful and they do signal the eminent return of green, but they also bring pollen. Lots and lots of pollen. It seems like everyone is sick, with either lingering illness from the winter or allergies and sinus problems. And on top of all this, we are still in Lent, the season of somber and sober reflection before Lent. It has been a month now of being serious and I just want to ask you, in the midst of all this, how are you? If you have chosen a discipline, and I hope many of you have, are you still doing it? Is it getting annoying?

Seasons like this can be hard, especially when they keep going and going, but I want to encourage you not to give up on Lent.

In our Thursday bible study we have seen that Easter is not about feeling bad or being overly serious. Like Christmas, Easter is about gifts! Yes they are gifts for us, but also for the rest of creation. Even though Lent is serious, it is a movement towards celebration. Similarly, on Sunday mornings we have been talking about personal struggles – to learn to desire again with all our hearts, to be honest with God and confess our sins, and

to see if we are living in faith for God's provision or not – but we are soon turning a corner.

Lent is all about getting us outside of ourselves. One of the best ways I've heard sinfulness described is navel-gazing. When we spend all our time looking at ourselves, our own narrow world, needs, frustrations, etc. we miss God's movement in our lives and the world around us. This is the very definition of wickedness! Lent is designed to help pull our gaze away from ourselves and up to God. This is why we choose disciplines, like fasting. And when we get our eyes up we can see the world in a new way – we can see with God's eyes and not just our own. We will begin to explore this new world in our Sunday morning worship. After pulling us out of ourselves Lent can become less about unpleasant spring cleaning and more about anticipation and excitement.

Yes, it is still Lent and I encourage you to hang in there. Please do not give up on your sober reflection. Please do not give up on your disciplines (I am still trying to keep my prayer journal and it is killing me). Even now the tone is already beginning to change. It is only when we can come to the end of ourselves that we can truly receive the gifts God wants to give us at Easter. It may mean a rough start for us to begin that journey, but the road does even out eventually and the vista becomes more and more enticing. So hang in there, because Easter is coming!

## Easter is Coming!

I have a deep conviction that, for the most part, the church really doesn't understand Easter. I don't mean Kalam Grove only, I mean the whole entire church in this country. And that is too bad, because it is the end to which God is moving all creation. And it is the end to which we are moving if we have placed our trust in Him. Easter is the beginning of God's plans for fixing creation. These plans are hinted at throughout the Old Testament, but they find their greatest expression in the prophets. There God reveals His intentions to create a new heaven and a new earth, centered around the holy city, Jerusalem. It will be a place of peace and prosperity, because God himself will rule directly over the hearts of women and men and He will judge fairly between peoples and nations. It will also be a place of peace because it will not be affected by the ancient curse. Human's relationship with nature will no longer be strained. The ground will not be uncooperative and animals will not be wild. Human work will not be meaningless and human life will not be tormented by pain and sickness. This creation will belong to those God judges as righteous, or those who have sought after Him faithfully. And it won't just be for those alive at the time of its arrival – God promises to raise from the dead those righteous people who have already passed away. They too will enjoy life as God intended it in new heavens and new earth in the age which is yet to come. This age is not just for the enjoyment of people. Yes, we will be freed from the mockery of being subjected to meaningless life, but so will the rest of creation – the animals, the plants, the earth herself.

Easter is the beginning of all this. Jesus' resurrection is the first – Paul calls Jesus the first fruits of the new creation. When God raised Jesus to new life and gave him a resurrection body He put these plans into motion. In Jesus, God forgave sins, yes. But God also appointed a judge to oversee the end of all things. God appointed a king, who has proved his ability to rule perfectly. God proved that the visions of the prophets were not the ravings of lunatics. God can and will raise the righteous to new, everlasting, physical, material life. Behold, the old is passing away and God is making everything new! The beginning, the down payment, on what is to come.

Too often we come to church on Easter to hear the story of how Jesus died for our sins. This is true, but it is not the message of Easter – that belongs to another day, to which I will turn shortly. The symbol of Easter is not the cross, but the empty tomb. So, let's have no talk of death on the 21st when Easter finally comes this year – let's see past the elementary teachings about Jesus' death for the forgiveness of our sins and our reconciliation with God and begin to explore, to delight in, to yearn for the promises which are even bigger than that gift. Let us become so taken by the scope of God's intentions for you, me, and the rest of this creation that we give ourselves completely over to God and to His vision. The manger is cause for deep celebration, but how much more the empty tomb! Let's have a good celebration this year!

The week before Easter is the most important week of the whole Christian year. We call it Holy week. It begins on Palm Sunday and ends on Easter. It was on Palm Sunday that Jesus arrived in Jerusalem for his final showdown with Satan. He arrived to the cheers of a hopeful crowd. Speculation about him had been growing. It seems like everyone had heard about his ministry. They knew of his power to heal and perform miracles. They knew of his satisfying, and yet also challenging teaching. He was a man worthy to be called God's anointed king (in Hebrew, Messiah, and in Greek, Christ). Moreover, it was Passover. As the entire nation converged on Jerusalem they were meditating on the time God had brought his people out a slavery in Egypt long ago. In those days one didn't need much faith to believe in the LORD because the LORD was visibly bringing a nation to its knees! Was it finally time for God to bear his strong right arm for his people again? Would Jesus be not just a new David, but even a new Moses?

Amazingly, only a week later that same crowd would be calling for Jesus' blood. Disappointed and egged on by their corrupt leaders, those very same people said they would rather have a terrorist, Jesus Barabbas, released than the innocent rabbi that had such good-looking prospects. We know Jesus went willingly to the cross - he told his friends, "no one takes my life from me; I lay it down of my own accord" (John 10:18) – but it is still with sadness and horror that we watch the story unfold.

Earlier in the newsletter I said that Easter is not the day to talk about Jesus' death for our sins. I believe that with all my heart. To talk about death on Easter is to miss the greater gift given in Jesus' resurrection. It is to tell God that forgiveness is enough and we don't want the rest of the gifts he has to give us. It is like a child who would rather keep the wrapping paper than the gift it contains. I also said there is another time to talk about death. This is it.

## Maundy Thursday

On Maundy Thursday we relive the Last Supper Jesus shared with his disciples before his resurrection. After the meal, Jesus went with his friends to the garden at Gethsemene and prayed that God would take his cup away. Jesus did not want to suffer and die, but he prayed for resolve to be faithful in what he knew was necessary – "still, not what I want, Father, your will be done." There at the garden he would be betrayed by one of his closest followers – one of the special twelve – Judas. These events make me sad.

But Maundy Thursday is not just about Jesus' betrayal and arrest. Before that he shared a special meal with his

special twelve. There he washed their feet. Unthinkable! A rabbi of Jesus' stature doing the work of a slave!!! Peter was right, "Never Lord!" But by doing the work of a slave for his students, Jesus gave a powerful lesson. First, he showed the depths of God's love for his creatures. Though God is holy and sin cannot exist in God's presence, God humbled himself even to serve his creatures like a slave. Second, Jesus exalted his disciples. It was at this meal that he said, "I no longer call you servants – instead I call you my friends." Friends with God in the flesh! Third, Jesus showed us how to truly please God. Jesus said to his friends, "I no longer call you servants, *because servants don't know their master's business*. Now I call you friends, *because everything I've learned from my Father I have made known to you*." If we want to acknowledge Jesus' sacrifice on our behalf, this is how we do it. We seek to love one another just as he loved us – that is by being slaves for one another.

At that last supper, Jesus gave his disciples all of knowledge of God he possessed, acted out in the simple act of washing their feet. But that wasn't all Jesus gave them. He also gave them communion. After the meal he took the bread and broke it and told them, "this is my body, given for you, do this in remembrance of me," and "this is the cup of the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you." At the time it seemed like a simple command to remember Jesus and his sacrifice, but after his resurrection his friends found there was so much more... As they sat and broke the bread and shared the cup in Jesus' name he began showing up! For forty days this happened. Those early followers who became the church found out that the Lord's supper wasn't one sided. They remembered Jesus, but Jesus came to be present with them. This is a mystery, but we still proclaim today that in the breaking of the bread and sharing of the cup Jesus is present in a special way. For me this is not sad. It makes me want to cry and sing!

We are celebrating Maundy Thursday a new way this year. In celebration of the simple, but profound, meal Jesus shared with his disciples, we will have a pinto bean supper. Nothing fancy, just good beans with all the fixins and corn bread. Following the meal we will celebrate communion together. My only regret with communion is that no one ever walks away full. We call it a supper, but it isn't. It's only a mouthful. Maybe that's okay, because communion is supposed to be a tease for the real feast that will happen when Jesus returns, but I still feel like tiny pieces of bread send a funny message. Not so tonight. I pray you will come and eat and enjoy and leave full in the warmth of Jesus' deep, deep love for you. We will start serving food at 6:30.

## Good Friday

This is my least favorite day of the year. It is dark. It is the day I feel the Devil's hatred more than any other. Maundy Thursday is warm and intimate. Good Friday is cold and sad. This is the day to talk about Jesus' death. This is the day to talk about forgiveness. This is the day to confront the reality that Jesus was beat half to death and nailed through his hands a feet to a piece of wood and hung up to die because of my sin. The rights I so jealously guard – the guilty pleasures I feel entitled to – my skepticism over God's provision for my life and rules for living. All of these forced Jesus into that horrible place. I cannot imagine doing to any living creature, much less a person, what they did to Jesus. I can judge them for their cruelty. I can curse those crooked leaders. I can be angry about what happened to Jesus, because it wasn't fair. But the reality is it was my fault as much as theirs.

There are many things I do not understand in this life. One of them is this, "without the shedding of blood there

is no forgiveness.” Why does it have to be this way? Why should any other creature have to lose its blood so I can live? I don’t know. But Jesus did. And Jesus laid himself down to end the carnage. No blood is owed for me anymore. Not mine, not some innocent animal’s. It is an unfathomable act of love. As Paul reflects, “only very rarely would someone die in place of a righteous person; but God shows his love for us in this, while we were still sinners Christ died for us.”

It is with great thanksgiving that we come to the cross, but also with great sadness. For this reason our Good Friday service is not like Maundy Thursday. We will have our traditional Tenebrae service again this year. Tenebrae is a Latin word meaning, “darkness.” We will read the story of Jesus’ suffering again together, from his arrest and trials to his death and burial. As we read we will extinguish candles on our cross until we are left quiet in the twilight. We leave our Tenebrae service in silence, in darkness, and in the cold of the tomb. Service begins at 7:30.

## Easter Morning

From the darkness of the tomb on Good Friday we come back together again in the bright light of Easter morning! Again as usual we will begin our Easter celebrations with a sunrise service. It won’t actually be at sunrise, don’t worry, but it will be early, 7:00 AM. We will sing a song or two and hear again the story of how the women found an empty tomb. After the service we will all retire to the fellowship hall for a good warm breakfast. Service begins at 7:00.

- Looking Ahead -

Save the Date on your calendar:  
Saturday, May 4th  
Youth Auction