

Welcome. It is good to see you here for this time of fellowship and worship. May our time together strengthen our faith and reinforce our belief in Jesus. Former world heavyweight boxing champ, Muhammad Ali, was known for often bragging, “I’m the greatest.” Just before take-off on an airline flight, the stewardess reminded Ali to fasten his seatbelt. “Superman don’t need no seatbelt,” Ali told her. The stewardess quickly retorted, “Superman don’t need no airplane, either.”

No one would mistake Muhammad Ali’s habit of bragging as a Christian virtue. Humility, selflessness, bowing and childlikeness, are traits of the believer in Jesus Christ. I thought this Maundy Thursday we would focus the symbolism of various Easter events, tied into bowing. I was surprised that after a half hour of looking on the web, I could not find much that came close to what I thought we should focus on this day. For example – I found all kinds of things about Easter eggs, bunnies, dogwood trees, Easter lilies, hot cross buns, purple veils on statues, Easter baskets and on and on.

I thought with attention on Ukraine and Russia, and the shocking actions of tyrants around the world, it would be good to remind ourselves of Easter week symbols, events, and teachings that point to bending, and kneeling. It is easy to overlook them because we are so familiar with them, and they go against our natural tendencies. If we only had the story of Jesus’ last week on earth – we would learn how different, challenging, and wonderful Jesus’ example is for us to follow. This will be a time of interspersed scripture, some comments, a meal, and communion. Let’s worship together.

Hymn 1: HWB #239 Ride on, ride on in majesty (v. 1,2,4)

Let’s continue with reading about **Palm Sunday** – Read **John 12:12-18** The Voice Version

The next day, a great crowd of people who had come to the festival heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem; ¹³ so they gathered branches of palm trees to wave as they celebrated His arrival.

Crowds (shouting): *Hosanna! He who comes in the name of the Lord is truly blessed^[b] and is King of all Israel.*

¹⁴ *Jesus found a young donkey, sat on it, and rode through the crowds mounted on this small beast. The Scriptures foretold of this day: ¹⁵ Daughter of Zion, do not be afraid. Watch! Your King is coming. You will find Him seated on the colt of a donkey.^[c]*

¹⁶ *The disciples did not understand any of this at the time; these truths did not sink in until Jesus had been glorified. As they reflected on their memories of Jesus, they realized these things happened just as they were written. ¹⁷ Those who witnessed the resurrection of Lazarus enthusiastically spoke of Jesus to all who would listen, ¹⁸ and that is why the crowd went out to meet Him. They had heard of the miraculous sign He had done.*

Comments - What are the symbols that jump out from this event? **Jesus rode a donkey – not a horse**, and definitely not a war horse. Tyrants and leaders of all kinds should become familiar with this scripture. Jesus very specifically chose a donkey for his historic ride into Jerusalem. The donkey symbolizes humility and peace. He was modeling something different than the Roman Caesars did. This action fulfilled the prophet Zechariah’s promise of a peacemaking king for Israel – not a king who violently overthrows earthly powers. Jesus’ first followers might have suspected during their time with Jesus that he was more than just a man. But to understand him as Jesus wanted to be understood, and as he teaches us, is a real challenge. Jesus was submitting, bowing to his Father’s will as he came to earth and faced a cruel death for our sakes.

Another symbol is palm branches. The palm branch is a symbol of victory, triumph, peace, & eternal life originating in the ancient Near East and Mediterranean world. A palm frond or the tree itself is one of the most common attributes of Victory personified in ancient Rome. We know victorious athletes in ancient Greece received some type of garland. They are a way to demonstrate honor and worship and welcome. We could stretch the meaning to say, the palm branches were a demonstration of the desire to be a follower of the person they were laying out branches for. This is an example of the Bible taking a cultural symbol of victory and power and turning it in to a godly focused symbol.

Plus, it is easy to imagine people stooped over to lay down their branches as Jesus passed by. They wanted the Messiah to reveal himself. They wanted to worship and adore a Savior – but on their own terms. And we can imagine that some people knelt, and even prostrated themselves during this event.

Hymn 2: HWB #241 ‘Tis midnight, and on Olive’s brow

Prayer for the meal. 1 Corinthians 10:16-18 (NLT – New Living Translation)

When we bless the cup at the Lord’s Table, aren’t we sharing in the blood of Christ? And when we break the bread, aren’t we sharing in the body of Christ? And though we are many, we all eat from one loaf of bread, showing that we are one body. Think about the people of Israel. Weren’t they united by eating the sacrifices at the altar?

1 Peter 2:22-25 (NLT) *He never sinned, nor ever deceived anyone. Jesus did not retaliate when he was insulted, nor threaten revenge when he suffered. He left his case in the hands of God, who always judges fairly. He personally carried our sins in his body on the cross so that we can be dead to sin and live for what is right. By his wounds you are healed. Once you were like sheep who wandered away. But now you have turned to your Shepherd, the Guardian of your souls.*

Jesus, we thank you for this time together. May we please you as we worship and fellowship and partake of communion. We cannot repay you for all the blessings we have received from you. Help us grow in you and may our communion together give more knowledge, wisdom, and strength to follow you fully. Prepare us for partaking of your body, with this body. Help us to continue to bow before your will and your values. May we grow in imitating your humility in every part of our beings. Amen.

Eat the meal. (Instructions)

Then on Monday of Passion Week, Jesus cleaned out the Temple Matthew 21:12-17

¹² *Jesus came to the temple. He drove out all those who were buying and selling. He upended the moneychangers’ tables and the dove-sellers’ benches.*

Jesus: ¹³ *It is written, “My house will be a house of prayer for all people,” but you have turned this house of prayer into a den of robbers.*^[c]

¹⁴ *Then the blind and the lame came to the temple, and Jesus healed them. ¹⁵ Rings of children circled round and sang, “Hosanna to the Son of David.” But the priests and scribes didn’t understand. When they saw the upturned tables, the walking paralytics, and the singing children, they were shocked, indignant, and angry, and they did not understand.*

Priests and Scribes: ¹⁶ *Do you hear what these children are saying?*

Jesus: Yes. Haven't you read your own psalter? "From the mouths and souls of infants and toddlers, the most innocent, You have decreed praises for Yourself."^[d]

¹⁷ At that, Jesus left Jerusalem. He went to Bethany, where He spent the night.

Comments - In this symbol, Jesus makes a statement about what a worship space should be about. The Gospel of John has this event at the beginning of his ministry. The other Gospels place it here. I like to think, it occurred at both times. Why? Jesus was saying, change your worship priorities. He was saying, I am the new temple for following God. You do not need all this corrupt ritual or this special place. You just need to follow, worship, and bow before me.

Can anyone be surprised at this other side to Jesus? When he walks into the temple, he becomes enraged. God's house of worship, plus people's greed and attitudes are not as they should be! He turns out to be not just a kindly teacher; instead, He is the Anointed One, not to be taken lightly. Amid this scene filled with joy and chaos, there are extremes. Some are beginning to understand who this man from Galilee is - the Anointed. But the religious rulers were having great difficulty with the disruption to their orderly traditional world. It doesn't matter if the cleaning of the temple occurred once or twice. The point is – Jesus is now the focus of godly worship. And it is a warning we can easily corrupt worship and organized religion for profit.

Worship spaces of most if not all religions have some activities of abasement – especially in sacred spaces. I grew up seeing Buddhists bowing in their temples. I know it becomes harder as we age, but the act of kneeling is a great physical action that represents the heart attitude of humility that Jesus often taught, and he clearly modeled. I grew up kneeling at family devotions every night. This is in total contrast to the Temple money making system as well as the Pharisees “crushing people with unbearable religious demands and never lift a finger to ease the burden.” (Mt. 24:9) Worship practices are simply different ways to bow, express honor, respect, and to ask for help to become more obedient to God the Father, Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit in daily life.

Hymn 3: HWB #247 Jesus, remember me (Sing through twice)

Comments - On Tuesday of passion week, by one calculation, a variety of events occurred. **Jesus did a lot of teaching in the Temple.** During this time and in his travel to and from Bethany - He passed a fig tree he cursed that had withered and taught about faith. Jesus was questioned about paying Caesar's tax – a trap to see who had the ultimate honor and power. His authority was questioned and challenged. The widow's offering was highlighted – with Jesus showing again that we are not to bow before wealth but instead honor real generosity. He had a long talk about the end times, including the destruction of the Temple, and tells us, no one knows the hour or the day. Jesus warned about the pride of the teachers of the law, in contrast to his own actions of humility, along with other teachings. (Mk 11:20 – 13:37)

And Jesus offered the **parable of the tenants**, who mistreated the owners' servants and then killed the owner's son, instead of bowing, honoring, and respecting. This story can be seen as a prophecy and a warning. The tenants decided they were the owners, so they did not need to listen or bow to anyone. They had a distorted posture and attitude that led to violence. This is so different than what Jesus models and requires of us.

Also on Tuesday, Jesus was asked what is the **most important commandment.** He responded: “It is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.” (Mark 12:29-31)

Loving God and loving each other requires an attitude of bowing. Placing others first in our lives. May we grow in the same mindset that Jesus has – humility, tenderness, compassion, and obedience.

Comment - Then on Wednesday of Passion Week, it seems Jesus rested in Bethany. It makes sense that Jesus took time to prepare himself for the Last Supper, his arrest, trial, and crucifixion. It is the day of Jesus being anointed – a kneeling symbol of his coming death as his feet are dried by hair.

John 12:1–8 *Six days before the Passover, possibly Wednesday of Passion Week, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus, (who was raised from the dead,) was among those reclining at the table with him. Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages." He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it. "Leave her alone," Jesus replied. "It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me."*

Comments - The anointings of Jesus's head or feet are recorded in all four gospels. Three of the accounts take place on Holy Wednesday of Holy Week at the house of Simon the Leper in Bethany, where Mary, Martha and Lazarus lived. The event in Luke features an unknown sinful woman. This gesture with perfume is an action frequently mentioned in other literature from the time, as one way to honor someone. But using hair to dry Jesus's feet, is not recorded elsewhere. It should be regarded as an exceptional gesture. It involves stooping, bowing and kneeling; not just physically but in our hearts, attitudes and habits.

On Thursday was the Passover and the Last Supper and arrest of Jesus. Matthew 26: 17-19

¹⁷ *On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Where do you want us to make preparations for you to eat the Passover?"*

¹⁸ *He replied, "Go into the city to a certain man and tell him, 'The Teacher says: My appointed time is near. I am going to celebrate the Passover with my disciples at your house.'"* ¹⁹ *So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them and prepared the Passover.*

Luke 22:24-30 ²⁴ *A dispute also arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. ²⁵ Jesus said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. ²⁶ But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. ²⁷ For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves. ²⁸ You are those who have stood by me in my trials. ²⁹ And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, ³⁰ so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*

Comments: The disciples had this conversation several times. They clearly wanted power with Jesus and power over others. They wanted to be special in Jesus' kingdom. So, Jesus had to teach them and

explain to them and model for them, that their idea of greatness was hog wash. Instead of directly accusing them of pride and a lack of humility, Jesus instead kept pointing to himself. We are called to service and servanthood for Jesus. And let's remember Jesus asked us to be like little children.

One of the great and revealing lessons from Covid is the importance and great need of necessary workers – and their plight in the human ranking of greatness and wealth. We can only be great people, because of what other people provide for us. Education. Jobs. Legal systems. Government systems like Health Care, Infrastructure and so on. We are interdependent. Jesus kept telling the disciples that greatness comes with discipleship, bowing to others in various ways, respecting all, and helping each other to be great. And we are told – to not lord it over people and to not desire to boss people around. Status in the Kingdom of God comes with serving others and especially serving Jesus.

And this is not just the desire for titles. The push to be the “greatest” is not always in an outward display. It can also be in the quietness of our hearts because we would be embarrassed to say out loud the kinds of things we think. Things like, “*I am doing a better job than so and so because I . . .*” “*I am more spiritual than so and so because I . . .*” “*I please God more than so and so because I . . .*” “*I am more important to God's kingdom than so and so because I . . .*” You can fill in the blanks. We can be essentially no different from the disciples for pride and conceit are natural to the human condition. So, we are continually urged to adapt real attitudes and habits of humility and servanthood. As God stooped to come to earth, we are to stoop, bow, kneel, respect, and honor all of those we interact with.

Do you want to be truly great? Then avoid the world's definition and quest for greatness. We do not have to have superior skills and abilities or win the contests or even achieve success. Those things are unimportant in God's eyes. The truly great are the Almighty's humble servants who serve wherever doing whatever He desires whether that gains the attention and acclaim of people or not. Ranking in God's kingdom is dependent on being a good servant, and like a child – as Jesus so often points out.

John 13:1-17 *It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. ² The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. ³ Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; ⁴ so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. ⁵ After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.*

⁶ *He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, “Lord, are you going to wash my feet?”*

⁷ *Jesus replied, “You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand.”*

⁸ *“No,” said Peter, “you shall never wash my feet.”*

Jesus answered, “Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.”

⁹ *“Then, Lord,” Simon Peter replied, “not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!”*

¹⁰ *Jesus answered, “Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you.” ¹¹ For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not everyone was clean.*

¹² *When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. “Do you understand what I have done for you?” he asked them. ¹³ “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and*

rightly so, for that is what I am. ¹⁴ Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. ¹⁶ Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷ Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

Comments – Judas is very much part of the story. He and many others wanted to force Jesus to be the type of Messiah they wanted. To go against God's plan for Jesus and the world. To not allow Jesus to bow and obey God's purpose of sending him to earth. And Judas and others did not want to bow to the Almighty's purpose for Jesus.

And let us carefully examine this foot washing, kneeling, bowing, the towel and the basin. There have been many Christian symbols over the years for various purposes, at different times and places - a fish, dove, Alpha and Omega, an anchor, the Good Shepherd, peacock, shamrock, a rock, a Lamb, and of course the cross – in different configurations.

But maybe for our time we need to emphasize the **towel and basin and water** as our symbol. They are needed reminders of what it means to be followers of Jesus Christ. They are important reminders of what this world needs. There is an element of vulnerability when we kneel. It is an action of anti-greatness, as the world defines greatness. The basin, towel and water are reminders that we are servants as well as the kind of servants Jesus calls us to be. Jesus made another attempt to teach the disciples about humility.

Typically, the person that was doing the washing was a lowly and nameless slave to those gathered around the table for dinner. That is why Jesus shocks his disciples when he takes a towel, kneels, and starts washing the feet of his disciples. Peter can't understand it because Jesus was mirroring the work of an insignificant slave. He says something like this: "Are you kidding my Lord, are you going to wash my feet? You cannot do that, this is the work of slaves, of servers, of someone from a different class than us."

But Jesus insists and says: "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." Here is another way to understand Jesus' words: "Unless you take the position of a servant, you cannot see me, claim you know me, or understand what the gospel is all about."

Matthew 26:20-30 ²⁰ *When evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the Twelve. ²¹ And while they were eating, he said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me."*

²² *They were very sad and began to say to him one after the other, "Surely you don't mean me, Lord?"*

²³ *Jesus replied, "The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. ²⁴ The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born."*

²⁵ *Then Judas, the one who would betray him, said, "Surely you don't mean me, Rabbi?"*

Jesus answered, "You have said so."

²⁶ *While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body."*

27 Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. 28 This is my blood of the^[b] covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. 29 I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

30 When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Hymn 4: HWB #240 Go to dark Gethsemane

Comment - Symbols from this event are the cup – blood of the covenant and bread.

The bread and the wine are symbols that represent Jesus. They are symbols of Almighty God stooping to come to earth for our benefit. Jesus ties the cup to the covenant God made with Israel. God come down to live with us, to commit himself to lead and guide a people to be a light to the nations.

The broken pieces of bread reminds us of His body which was broken when He was nailed to the cross. The wine reminds us of Jesus' blood that He shed for us on the cross. Jesus loved us so much that He gave His body and blood for us, so we could be forgiven when we sin. That is a lot of love for each and every one of us, all over the world. Jesus became the sacrificial lamb of God.

When we take the Lord's Supper, Communion, it is important to remember Jesus' sacrifice for us. It isn't something we should just do without thinking about what it truly represents. It was given to us by Jesus Himself, so we wouldn't forget His great love for all of us. These are key symbols about what it means to follow Jesus and they stand for the wonderful God Jesus, who stooped to come to earth, who teaches us how to live, who died for us and forgives our sins.

Instructions on how to partake.

Communion Prayer 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

23 For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, 24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." 25 In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." 26 For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Jesus, we cannot thank you enough for what you have done for us and in us and for what you will do among us in the future. Thank you for this wonderful way to remind us of your amazing love. Be with us as we honor you at this time. Unite us together wholly in you. We bow in humility and gratefulness. Touch us as we each need to be touched. Thank you for coming to earth to show us how to live.

Show each of us anything that is not pleasing to You. Reveal any secret pride, any unconfessed sin, any rebellion or unforgiveness that may be hindering our relationship with You. We know that we are Your beloved children, having received You into our hearts and lives and having accepted Your death as penalty for our sinfulness. The price You paid covered us for all time, and our desire is to live for You. This is why we bow before you and call you Lord. Thank you for your victory over death, so we are free from the penalty for our sins. Thank you that you offer us life now and forever.

Hear our silent prayers before we partake of these symbols of pain and of victory. Amen.

Partake at Tables - instructions

Easter is about taking away our sins as the new Lamb, the cross, and empty tomb. Lambs are seen as fairly meek and helpless and who need protection. But let us not forget the symbols of the **towel, basin, and water**. The world and the church needs this message as it always has. We are called to model it and to live it. For the follower of Jesus, it serves as an example of a servant attitude, of the act of bowing, kneeling and stooping. It magnifies the worth of an individual, and it reminds us of the need for spiritual renewal, as the disciples had to learn.

Hymn 5: HWB #250 Beneath the cross of Jesus