

Christian Perspectives ? Lent and Easter, our family story

There was an early morning telephone call last Sunday: the Grand River had breached its banks. The street was flooded and closed in front of Knox Presbyterian Church in Grand Valley. There would be no Palm Sunday service. There will be a gap in our re-enactment of our church family's central story this year.

Each Sunday during the previous five weeks of the season of Lent we have placed a symbol of that week's part of the story on the communion table. The first week there was a collection of stones representing the time Jesus spent in the wilderness at the beginning of his public ministry. Jesus was tempted there in ways that we also are tempted ? by the promise of material comforts, by access to power and influence, and by the temptation to try to become our own divinity. We always begin the season of Lent with this story.

The next Sunday, we added a wind chime to represent the Spirit. It was our symbol for the story of Jesus' conversation with a leader in his own Jewish community. Jesus reminded Nicodemus that since God is Spirit, we are ?born into Spirit? when we recognize that God is in us and all around us. Jesus said something like this: ?It's a bit like the wind, blowing here and there. You don't know where it comes from or where it is going, but you hear it and see what it does.? The realm of God is like that: you can't see where it starts or where it will end but you can know you are part of it.

The third Sunday in Lent a pitcher of water became part of our collection as we remembered Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well. Jesus talked with her about ?living water? ? God's presence revealed through the loving, justice seeking person of Jesus. When we have this living water we will no longer thirst for and crave all those things that give fleeting satisfaction. (Those who achieve sobriety through 12 Step Programs learn this ?living water? lesson well.)

The fourth Sunday we explored the meaning of ?messiah? ? the Hebrew word for anointed one or someone chosen by God for a special purpose, a son of God, a God-bearer, sometimes a king. The Greek translation is ?christ.? Our ?anointed one? is Jesus. We read the story about Jesus healing a man who had been blind since birth. The point of this long story was summed up by the formerly blind man who said, ? We know that God . . . listens to the godly person who does his will. . . If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.? The image we chose to place on the communion table is a picture of the Good Shepherd. This God-bearer, Jesus, came teaching compassion and that those on the margins are important. He gave loving service, liberation and healing.

The fifth Sunday, the story about Jesus raising Lazarus from death to new life reminded us that death does not have the final word. No matter how hopeless or devastated a life seems, the One who created us is always willing to give new life. The symbol chosen was a piece of white cloth to represent a burial shroud which needed to be removed for Lazarus to begin his new life. We thought about impediments we could remove to begin our new lives.

Our Lenten story has walked us with Jesus from his private life in Galilee to Jerusalem. On Palm Sunday, each year we parade into the Holy City with him shouting ?hosanna,? (meaning ?save us?). We wash one another's hands remembering that Jesus washed his friends' feet and told them that they should serve one another and love one another as he had loved and served them. And we share our Communion Feast. Jesus asked his friends to remember him and remember what he had taught them each time they shared a meal. We break bread, pour wine or grape juice; we share these in community and we remember.

Good Friday's community service will be a sombre re-enactment of Jesus arrest, trial, walk to the cross, crucifixion and burial. Loss, pain and death are all part of being human so we know how to do this. We grieve annually the death of a good man whose only sin was to challenge the existing order as he healed while preaching compassion and justice. We have this annual opportunity to carry our own accumulated griefs and losses to the cross to ask for healing.

The climax of our story happens on Easter Sunday morning when we discover again that the tomb where Jesus had been buried is empty. Death does not win. There is new life after death. We will hear again the stories of peoples' encounters with the ?post Easter Jesus.? We too may catch glimpses of the great Mystery that lies beyond the birth and death bookends of what we know.

This is our Christian story and some of the rituals that help us to remember our story. Both story and ritual help us to make sense of

our lives. They help us to process and to communicate the essential truths and meanings that resonate deeply with experience. This holy journey through Lent and Easter has the power to heal what is wrong in our lives and lead us into new life. Be blessed this Easter.

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