

Alleluiah! Christ is Risen! How wonderful those words sound. We have come to the end of another Lenten season and are reminded about how Jesus died on the cross so that our sins could be forgiven. We are reminded about how we are reborn through his sacrifice. We are reminded about how God loves us so much that he gave his only child so that we could have eternal rest.

Through Holy Week, we always walk Jesus' final path. We start on Palm Sunday and ride with him on the donkeys as he enters Jerusalem. We are with him in the temple when he overturns the tables and expels the den of thieves. On Thursday, we are with him and his disciples at the Last Supper and trial. And on Friday we stand with him on the crucifix.

This year's journey, however, started long before Palm Sunday. It even started before Ash Wednesday. In fact we started this journey with Matthew back in January. We have spent the last four months walking with Jesus from baptism to resurrection, seeing his life through Matthew's eyes.

We joined Jesus with his baptism and wandering through the wilderness. We spent a month studying the Sermon on the Mount. We examined his parables, teaching us how to pray, about the kingdom of heaven being upside down, and remembering the significance of the spirit over the body. And especially learning about his love for us through communion and his prayer of forgiveness and sacrament for us. Our journey has finally come full circle.

Matthew has spent a great amount of time painting the picture of how much Jesus loves us. And during that time, he has also shown us how common everyone was that Jesus chose to surround himself with. He didn't surround himself with priests or royalty. He surrounded himself with fishermen and a tax collector. A tax collector of all people, the one person that even his own family didn't want to be with. But Jesus invited him to not only have dinner with him, but to join him on his journey.

On Thursday, I spoke about how meaningful the Last Supper was. How significant eating together is, especially for a holiday. I'm sure that most of you will leave here today and go and eat with friends and family. That is how important the Last Supper was for Jesus. They weren't simply grabbing a quick bite in between seasons, they were celebrating a holiday. And that makes Judas' betrayal that much more significant.

Judas didn't simply betray him. He insulted everything that Jesus stood for. Judas not only turned on his teacher. But he did after receiving communion, and he did it during a feast. A holiday meant to share love and rejoice in God's presence turned to a betrayal. Leading Jesus to be arrested and taken through a farce and biased trial.

But before the crucifixion and death, Jesus forgave them all. He forgave the disciples for turning their back on him and denying him out of fear. He forgave Judas, realizing that he couldn't help himself from being who he was. And he forgave us, knowing that one day that time would end and he would separate his sheep to be chosen by God.

And today, we are at the tomb. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary go to the tomb to pray for Jesus and they see the angel. They hear the thunderous sound as the rock moves from the tomb and hear the voice of the angel telling them that Jesus has risen.

The guards panic and are so scared they remain still, almost as though they were dead. The women were scared as well. But instead they ran and rejoiced. Matthew shows so many opposite symbols in this brief passage.

To start, we have the cold dark tomb being separated by a massive rock from the warm rising sun of the new day. The old ways are giving way to the new. The rebirth and transformation begins.

Next we see Matthew and the guards. He doesn't go into much description, but we can presume that they represent the old guard. Men that have fought and try to protect the old way by not allowing change and guidance from the new.

But he shows how much stronger the women are than the men. Women are symbols of new life and birth. The Mary's are not only strong enough to hear God's word, but they are charged with being the ones to spread the word of Jesus' return. The new rebirth is shared through them.

And now we get to hear those words shared across time...He has risen and we were there through his journey.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Receive our unending love and devotion as we celebrate today the undeserved gift of your love. We pray these things in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.