



*Dear Friends,*

As I write this, the snow is falling – in quantities far greater than predicted. The world is once again blanketed in that absolute stillness that only deep winter can provide. It is the kind of quiet that forces your attention to your breathing, the only sound you hear, and to the tendrils of breath that escape as steam, should you peer your head outside. This Holy Week is the earliest it can be on the calendar, and snow is to be expected I suppose; but the stillness that comes with it is a gift.

And as I sit with all five(!) bulletins for Holy Week in front of me, the stillness is a reminder of that first, Holiest, Week 2,000 years ago. The joy of Palm Sunday can be captured, I believe, with the familiar sounds of celebration – cheers and shouts, songs and fanfare. Maundy (Commandment) Thursday is re-created with a meal, the lively chatter, the clinking of spoons and the smell of bread (3/28, 6pm). Easter morning is the awakening dawn over the lake (3/31, 6:30am), and the chaotic shouts of children, hopped up on sugar and an excitement they do not yet understand (3/31, 10am).

But Maundy Thursday, during the Tenebrae service (3/28, 7pm), there is a pregnant kind of silence, filled with our own complicity – the sound of chairs scraping as we each make our exits, home to comfort and to rest. I imagine the interrupted silence in the garden at Gethsemane – birdsong, the snoring of the disciples, the buzzing hum of Jesus' own thoughts and tears (*Vigil hours observed 3/28-29*). And Good Friday (3/29, 6:30pm)? – that moment when Jesus declared it finished, and gave up his last breath? As they took down his body, and placed it in the cave? Holy Saturday, as they waited, bound to inaction by Sabbath customs? What sound *could* there be, when God takes their last breath, blasts through the Temple curtain, and disappears?

Many of us prefer to skip this part. (Probably we all do.) It's easier to go from *hosannah* to *hallelujah*, without all the heartbreak in between. But the magic is here, in the middle. Magic, as the specific, concrete encounter of God and Human that was the person of Jesus, is set free, dispersed, to drench the world – drench us – in Christ. Those days, I believe, were full of this snowy kind of silence – where each sound is muted, hushed into nothingness, absorbed by the world like Christ himself. These are the days that make it possible for us to truly understand Easter; it is not that Christ changes in those days of silence, but *us*.

On Palm Sunday, we read the story of Mary, who anoints Jesus for his burial while he is still alive. We will be asked to do the same thing with our lives – offer ourselves to this story. We will be asked to make space for these services this week, that we might make space for true stillness to emerge. We will be asked to make space for beauty – offering our own gifts to make the sanctuary beautiful with flowers for Easter. Funds over and above those used for worship will be given to our Easter Offering. This offering supports the work of this church, with a tithe offered to our missional partners – The Vermont Racial Justice Alliance, and the Vermont Conference UCC Hope Fund. The

one advocates for justice, and the other to make sure the church is still trying new things. Both, offered like perfume over Jesus' condemned body, serve to make the world more beautiful.

The opportunities of this week only come once a year. But the possibilities of transformation last a lifetime. Take advantage, friends. The realities of this week are not just for the church – they are mostly for you.

In faith,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Elissa".

[The Rev. Elissa Johnk](#), Lead Minister