

## Don't Skip the Hard Part

### April 2015

Holy Week is almost upon us once again. On Sunday, the 29th, we'll wave our palms and remember Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem. Attendance will be good. On Thursday, the 2nd, we'll gather to remember the Last Supper with a dramatic presentation. Attendance will be quite a bit smaller. On Friday, the 3rd, we'll read the story of Jesus' suffering and death, as the lights slowly dim. Attendance will be smaller yet. Finally on Easter Sunday, the 5th, we'll gather to proclaim, with trumpets and cymbals, the good news that "Christ is risen!". Attendance will be huge!

My point is this, a lot more of us want to celebrate resurrection than want to hear the awful story of Jesus' betrayal, suffering and death. It's always been this way.

Good Friday is sad and dark. Easter Sunday is bright and happy. Good Friday makes us cry. We smile all through the Easter service. Good Friday reminds us of our own sinfulness. Easter proclaims new life and forgiveness.

But let me ask you this, what good is a word of forgiveness if you've never acknowledged your sin? And what good is the word of hope when you've never acknowledged the hopelessness of our bondage to sin? How can celebrate the triumph of life over death, if you've never sat with death?

I love Easter as much as anybody. But I love Good Friday just as much. Good Friday is so honest, so raw, so real. Yes, this is who we are. We are the ones who shout "Crucify him!" We are the ones who run away when he needs us. We are the ones who say, "I don't know him". It's only when I can recognize and claim that truth, that the reality of Jesus' sacrificial death hits me. And it hits me hard. Every year. So that when I come to Easter morning, the joy of Jesus' resurrection - the triumph of life over death, light over darkness, goodness over evil – washes over me even more powerfully.

I'm not just making a pitch to attend Good Friday service. I'm also inviting you into a deeper appreciation of Easter. A more fully realized understanding of God's love in Jesus Christ. A more gut level experience of the height and breadth and depth of God's grace. And that only be accomplished through an acknowledgment of our neediness.

"Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." (John 12:24) Death precedes new life. Sacrifice is necessary for growth. Good Friday comes first. Then Easter.

Pastor Susan