

Sunday Message
February 19, 2023
Rev. Ann Eichhorn

Readings

First Reading

John 2: 13-16 from Revised Standard Version Bible [The confrontation]

The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found those who were selling oxen, and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers at their business. And making a whip of cords, he drove them all, with the sheep and oxen out of the temple; and he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. "Take these things away you shall not make my Father's house a house of trade." (Or den of thieves)

Second Reading

Matthew: 26-31-35, 57-58, 69 [The denial]

Then Jesus told them, "You will all fall away because of me this night; for it is written, I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered. But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee." Peter declared to him, "Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away. Jesus said to him, "Truly, I say to you this very night, before the cock crows, you will deny me three times." Peter said to him, "Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you." And so said all the disciples. Then those who had seized Jesus led him to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders had gathered. But Peter followed him at a distance, as far as the courtyard and sat with the guards to see the end.

Third Reading

Luke 22:56 [The Look]

While Peter sat among them, a servant girl. Seeing him, looked closely and said, "This man also was with him." But he denied it saying, "Woman, I do not know him". A little later someone else saw him and said, "You also are one of them," But Peter said, "Man, I am not." And about an hour later still another insisted, saying, "Certainly this man also was with him, for he too is a Galilean," but Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about." And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. AND THE LORD TURNED AND LOOKED AT PETER. Peter remembered what he had said to him, and went out and wept bitterly.

Fourth Reading

John 20:24-29 [The doubts]

Now Thomas, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe". Eight days later, his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. The doors were shut, but Jesus came and stood among them, and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."

Note: Today's service was comprised mostly of discussions among small groups with community sharing afterwards. The discussions were based on the four readings, with each group discussing one of the readings. The following from Ann led us into the discussion time.

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The Church is one of the few places outside of seminaries or retreats and workshops where one might have the opportunity to participate in a little "Biblical text talk," which is what I would like us to do this morning. This is in advance of Ash Wednesday, coming up this week. Ash Wednesday is the beginning of the 40-day period (6 ½ weeks) before Easter known as Lent.

The liturgical season of Advent is when we spend time preparing for and celebrating the birth of Jesus. Epiphany explores the way Jesus communicated living in the presence of God, and what kind of people we are called to be if we choose to follow his example. Lent, then, introduces us to difficult realities connected to that way of living and to death and whatever comes after death. These seasons are filled with interfaith religious traditions and practices, some still current and appropriate, and others that are no longer have any importance for us.

Traditionally, Lent has represented a time period which is the same length as Jesus's journey into the wilderness after his baptism, during which he fasted and prayed before beginning his public ministry. Traditions emerged based on this time frame that included preparing people to join the Faith by being baptized, going through a period of penitence (reflecting on how one is living one's life, ridding oneself of grievous past actions, sorrows, or regrets). It was a time marked by doing such things as wearing a sackcloth (goatskin-like material) that was sprinkled with ashes. A spot of ash on the forehead is still a symbol connected to this traditional practice. One Lenten practice involves giving up some pleasure or unwanted behavior, or fasting by eating only one meal a day, or no meat, fish, eggs, butter, wine, oil or dairy products. Or the time may be used to start something new with the hope that in 6 ½ weeks it could begin to feel normal, comfortable, sustainable.

This morning we are going to look at several of the important parts of the Lenten story that are identified in all four of the Gospels. These scriptural passages help us understand what happened in the last week of Jesus' life and ministry. I have called on several folks this morning to be the readers of the four texts and to tell us what they understand them to mean. Following the reading of the texts, we will take time for you to discuss in small groups why you think these stories are important for us to understand today. At the end of fifteen minutes, we will come back together and ask for one response from each of the groups. These will be the first of several conversations we'll have as we enter this season of Lent.



Jesus in the Desert
Tim Wade