

**Weekly Devotions
South Holburn Church
30th March 2021**

READINGS

For the past few weeks, I have been painting stones with scenes from the story of Holy Week. This idea of a stone hunt for children and families in Duthie Park is a bit more complicated than I imagined at first! There are lots of people that use that park! I found a few stones missing after putting the first set down, so I painted some more. Then I heard from a person hunting for rocks that two were missing, so I once again painted a new set. When I went to place them down, four were missing! I will be painting rocks all week as it is only Tuesday of Holy Week!

You might think I sound a wee bit frustrated. You would be correct! I never imagined painting so many stones! But then as I walked around the park placing new stones and contemplating coming back each day during Holy Week to check on them, my thinking about it changed. I realized I had a great opportunity before me. I always look for a way to mark Holy Week and set aside time with the Lord. Walking around beautiful Duthie Park and praying for people who might see the stones and think of the story of Holy Week excited me. The fact that some of them are missing excites me too because perhaps some have been taken home by children because they were enjoyed. Even if they were broken (we found a few that were) or thrown away at least they were seen! I do not know what difference the stones will make, but I do know that I have had a few parents tell me they wanted to take their children around to look for the stones and tell them the story of Easter. I am encouraged! Often, we never see the results of the work we do in our lives, but with perseverance and determination we give God our best efforts.

²⁴ Do you not know that in a race the runners all compete, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win it. ²⁵ Athletes exercise self-control in all things; they do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable one. ²⁶ So I do not run aimlessly, nor do I box as though beating the air; ²⁷ but I punish my body and enslave it, so that after proclaiming to others I myself should not be disqualified.

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians about his determined spirit. He would do whatever it took to share the gospel in ways that were relevant to others. He knew that he was fighting for things that made an impact on the world and that were eternally significant. Each of us has this opportunity to persevere and develop discipline in our spiritual lives.

We are all in a battle with our flesh to walk closely with the Lord. It is easy to become flabby spiritually and give in to filling our lives with fluff. Watching television rather than talking to God or reading scripture might fill our evenings. We might spend our days in anxiety rather than trusting God is with us in our trials. We might focus on the silence of God and wonder why he has given up on us rather than remembering he never leaves our side and that he is all around us even when we do not feel his presence.

There are many questions and doubts that get thrown at us from the world. Yet, Holy Week is a time to learn a bit of self-discipline and walk with Jesus through his last week of life. We are in a race to become spiritually mature. No, we are not pitted against each other and are not in comparison with anyone but ourselves, yet we are in training. We

are training to be stretched and to grow deeper in our walk with Jesus and more in love with our God. We can be easily distracted, so Holy Week becomes like an exercise "boot camp"! We can use this opportunity to become spiritually toned and to join with other Christians who are wanting to do the same. If you want to join a group of faithful Christians seeking to get spiritually fit this week come out to our worship services at 7pm each night (Saturday's service will be recorded). We are meeting over Zoom and the codes are on the website. It will also be recorded and livestreamed if you prefer to watch it that way. It promises to be an insightful time to think through the implications of Holy Week and grow closer to the Lord.

Painting these stones (and preparing our Easter Assembly for the schools) has been an opportunity to simplify the story in very specific and tangible ways. We do not need to meditate on complicated themes to grow in our faith. You are likely familiar with these topics from Holy Week but why not reflect on them anew? I would like to invite you to read the scriptures below and consider the topics throughout the remainder of this week. That is what I plan to do! If you decide to hunt for the stones check out our website for the list of clues!

Here, are the stories and themes represented in the painted stones:

*Jesus is King, he was in a parade going into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday; Matthew 21:1-9
Jesus washed his friends' feet and asks us to be a servant as well; Matthew 26:20-29
Jesus had a meal with his friends at the Last Supper, as part of the Passover meal; John 13
Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane & submitted to God's will; Matthew 26:36-46
Jesus died on a cross making a way for our sins to be forgiven; Matthew 27:27-56
Jesus rose from the dead and made a way for us to be friends with God! Matthew 28:1-10*

REFLECTION

We need to take time to connect with the poor, resist our unceasing cravings, and pray. But we also need to gather with friends and family, share in God's good provision, eat delicious food, tell stories that encourage us all, and celebrate the risen Lord.

~ Chris Seay

These special holidays give rise to various liturgical calendars that suggest we should mark our days not only with the cycles of the moon and seasons, but also with occasions to tell our children the stories of our faith community's past so that this past will have a future, and so that our ancient way and its practices will be rediscovered and renewed every year.

~ Brian D. McLaren

We have an opportunity during Holy Week to set aside this week for reflection, renewal and contemplation, in community with our brothers and sisters in the faith. We have an opportunity to mark the seasons that are passing and to tell the story again afresh. As you see in the above quotes from Christian leaders we are not alone in setting this week apart as special. There are many ways we can mark it and I would encourage you to find an opportunity to reconnect with it. We know it is not about bunnies and chocolate eggs, so why not go deeper into discovering the meaning of this week?

By the end of this sad and serious week we come to celebration and Easter hope! God has triumphed over evil, and death has not had the final word. We will have a recorded Easter time of worship available over the weekend and are planning a family friendly livestream from Ferryhill Parish Church on Easter morning at 11 am. We are looking forward to celebrating our risen Lord with you!

I hope you will find an opportunity during this Holy Week to step outside of your regular routine and reflect on all God has done through Jesus and in all we have been offered as children within the family of God. Details of all of the opportunities mentioned above can be found on our website www.southholburn.org.

I am looking forward to our nightly worship, painting rocks, praying as I walk around Duthie Park and finding time to reflect on all that Jesus has done for us on the cross.

PRAYER

Holy God,

Thank you for coming to earth to make a way for us to know and love you.

Thank you for suffering on a cross that we might have a relationship with the living God.

Thank you for your grace and mercy poured out on us so abundantly.

Thank you that you did not stay in the grave but are alive forevermore!

Grant us creativity and perseverance this week as we seek to grow deeper in our faith and delve further into the stories we have heard of your life, death and resurrection.

Thank you for this amazing opportunity and beautiful week!

In Jesus name we pray,

Amen.

