

APRIL 5, 2026

Marion weekly update

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

SERMON "The Humanity of It All" Luke 2:51-52, Mark 11:1-11

Each year we take time to celebrate Palm Sunday. Often Bibles that have headings breaking up the scripture refer to this moment as His Triumphant Entry into Jerusalem. We focus heavily on His divinity as He goes through this last week before going to the cross. This makes sense as it is this sense of His divinity that propels us in hope through the events of the week to the resurrection. This year I would like us to look a little differently. In doing so I think we will find ourselves in a deeper connection and relatability to the story. Ultimately I trust it will build our hope, particularly when circumstances are difficult.

Today we are going to consider this moment and what we call Holy Week through the sense of Jesus' humanity. This is important and I believe too often gets the short end of the stick. We say that He is both fully human and fully divine. No one really knows what this means or how it works. These are two very different states of being and identity resting in the same person. Since we are all only fully human, the best we have is guesswork. We have to concede that whatever we think is going to fall short of the reality of Jesus' unique situation.

Some of you might disagree with how I'm going to weight things this morning. That's fine. As I said, all of us are just doing our best to comprehend the incomprehensible. All I ask is to give me a little indulgence and come with me on the journey for a few minutes today.

Jesus' humanity is more important than we often consider. Part of our theology is that Jesus is the perfect and really only qualified go-between, or mediator, between us and God. What makes Him uniquely qualified? That He has the fullness of the human experience that relates to us. Jesus is the person in the Trinity that truly understands what it is to experience all of what we do. We talk about how he had to contend with all of the temptations, emotions, and other struggles that we do.

To diminish His humanity is to destroy His ability to be the perfect mediator. Our statement that He went through all of what we do suddenly falls flat when we use His divinity willy nilly to explain some of His life and circumstances.

Somehow, Divinity existed in a form that had limitations. The infinite became temporary. The all knowing became uncertain and had limited knowledge. The all powerful chose to back off the power and live just a powerless as we are.

Otherwise He didn't experience what it is to be human.

I would suggest that certainly there are aptitudes and aspects of His life that the Divinity may have intruded upon. His calling and mission was the only one of it's kind in history. This was innated to Him. He is the only one ever called to be the redeemer of all humanity. And where the fully human works hand in hand with the Divine through the Holy Spirit, Jesus had that Divinity inherent in His very person.

Keep in mind though, that most of what He did you and I or others through history also participate in. And we are only fully human.

His miracles aren't unique to Him. Prophets, disciples, and apostles all healed, cast out demons, even raised the dead. Being fully human didn't prevent that.

We often chalk Jesus "knowing people's hearts" up to His Divinity. Yet the only fully human knows people's hearts. Most all of us have experienced that moment where someone greets us with a handshake or hug, a smile, and it seems like everything is going well. They make like all is fine. Yet in your gut you knew that this was a show. You knew that soon, maybe within a few minutes, they were going to trash you, gossip about you, stab you in the back. The surface looked good but you knew their heart.

This is a lot of this last week of Jesus' ministry. Time and again He is confronted with religious folks pretending to be curious or seeking His wisdom. Yet He knew what they were really up to. They were trying to trip Him up so they could find a reason to charge Him.

I would suggest that perhaps the common idea that He knew every detail down to the minute, people and places might be overstating things. A large part of humanity is wrapped up precisely in not knowing. This creates fear, anxiety, and confusion that often leads to temptation. If Jesus experienced all of what we do, this had to be part of the equation.

Luke tells us that Jesus grew in wisdom. You can't grow in something that is already complete. Part of wisdom is knowledge. Learning is a huge part of being human. Why would Jesus not have shared in this?

The events of Holy Week we can relate to. He knew His mission and perhaps even planned out how things would happen.

Once again, we all can relate to this. We have a purpose and we make a plan to accomplish it. We have the known things. What we are going to do. We often have a goal or deadline so we have a pretty good idea when things are going to occur. We can predict to some degree how others might react. These are the knowns. And this is just us in our fullness of humanity with no Divinity.

Jesus flips the tables on Monday. He knew He was going to do this. He had to. Romans didn't crucify on a whim. They needed a reason. A man stirring up trouble at a time when a notoriously rebellious people ballooned the population of their city for a festival of deliverance from oppression fits the bill. Particularly if His words are matched with some kind of action.

Monday set the ball rolling. Of course He knew this would poke the bear of the religious leaders fiercely. In the gospel of Mark there is a passage where He is confronted by some representative of every faction of religious leadership. He knows what He's doing.

At the same time while He knew that trajectory of the week, perhaps the fine details He didn't. As a result He experiences the same uncertainty, questions, and fear that we might in a similar situation.

What no one can know for sure is what the agony of a crucifixion feels like until they go through it. He may not have known how badly He would be beaten and tortured. Yet He handled it all with dignity and grace.

Even after He'd set the ball in motion, He chose over and over again each day to go back through the gate and return to the city where He knew He would go to an agonizing death.

We know the emotion built up in Him. In what I think is one of His most human moments he breaks down in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before He goes to the cross. He is crying, sweating, and asking to not have to go through with the plan. Despite all of this heaviness, fear, and anxiety He chooses to do what needs done. This is a good lesson for us. In all of His humanity He has to deal with those feelings and fears. Rather than bottle up He vents to in His situation the only One who could possibly relate. God. He lets it out and as a result has the resolve to do the difficult thing.

We are no different. When there is something painful, difficult, or heartbreaking that we have to go through the fear and feelings threaten to tempt us away from doing what we know we need to do. Sharing those feelings with another takes their power away. They aren't silently stewing and tempting. They are confronted, handled, and that lightens our burden enough to do the hard thing.

Here we are getting at the heart of why honoring Jesus' humanity is so important on Palm Sunday.

Whatever the unknowns, Jesus rode into the city with all of the weight of what He DID KNOW on His shoulders. Everyone is excited. They are praising Him. The disciples must have been getting swept up in the celebration. None of them have the first clue what is about to occur.

Jesus does.

He is carrying the stress of knowing the path before Him. He knew the horror was coming soon. He also knew that what was on the other side of that horror was a tremendous and wonderful gift. He knew His mission. He knew who it was for. He'd done the math and the treasure was worth the trial.

So while things are unfolding and everyone else is slow on the uptake of what's about to happen, Jesus is shouldering it on His own. He is doing what needs done despite the stress, the fear, the frustration, and the anger around Him.

This is the human experience. All of us have had those times when we know something hard is coming. We have to sort out how we're going to deal with whatever feelings are rising up so that we can do what needs to be done. We have to summon courage and resolve. Jesus WAS Divine. We look to the Divine and ask for help. I want you to know that whatever gate you might be looking to ride through in your life when it's painful and hard, you're not alone. You are in the company of Jesus on Palm Sunday. He gets it. He knows. And He shows us that it can be done. In all of our humanity, partnered with God and one another we can make the hard choices, endure the hurt and heartache to fulfill the calling God has for us both as individuals and as a community of faith.

Most of us grasp that the things worth having are worth fighting for. Many times the benefit to ourselves and those we love requires journeying through times that are difficult and even painful. We might be tempted to take the easy way out. To let our fear win and overcome us.

When we know we are called. When we know our God given mission. When we know the blessing waiting for us is better than what we're enduring now we remember Jesus riding through the gate. Even when others aren't clued in, we face our mission with courage and faith. When it's "go time" and that last temptation rears up telling us to run we let it out. We find the voice that will encourage us to carry on.

And like Jesus, we face the challenge with the wonderful hope that the other side will be glorious.

Keep in mind, and we'll get to this next week, the best thing came after the hard thing. Jesus couldn't be raised in power and glory if He first hadn't gone through the heaviness of Holy Week and the agony of the crucifixion. Perhaps, just perhaps, it was in overcoming the frailty in His humanity that the Divinity of Christ finally came

roaring forward in the resurrection. Perhaps it's in overcoming our human frailties that one victory at a time the fullness of who we are and were created to be comes roaring to the surface of our own lives. And just as Jesus modeled in this last week, we do it by staying in partnership with God and walking through it with others seeking the same thing as we are. Walking through it with God and each other.

BIBLE STUDY Zechariah 10

This prophetic word is rich in symbolism. It goes back and forth between accountability for those who are misleading God's people and God strengthening the faithful for blessing and prosperity.

There is an initial note to God's providence and provision. Then the punch comes condemning those who mislead the people. They do this with lies, falsehoods, and phony comfort tickling the ears of the people. The result is that people have no direction or faith compass.

These are the "shepherds" that are to be punished. Who is included? It seems to be vague. Who fits the bill? Any false prophet or priest. Any ungodly king. Any nation or ruler over Judah or Israel that draws them away from God.

We haven't come terribly far over the last thousands of years. Zechariah speaks against those who would draw the people of God away from genuine faithfulness by their lies. This happens today. Leaders of all stripes play on the whims and desires of professing Christians. They use those things to draw them away from a genuine love of Christ and discipleship to His teaching and desires. The people are lost without even knowing they are lost.

Judah is the tribe returning. God is promising to make them mighty against any enemies that might rise up. This is interesting language as up to this point God is the primary actor in any good that will happen to the people. It isn't clear if this is a promise to stand by them in battle or more of a metaphor of God's hand strengthening them for a battle they themselves will never have to fight.

Then Joseph is mentioned, as well as Ephraim. These are synonyms for the Kingdom of Israel. It is a promise to bring them back to a place of prominence and success. They will again be God's people. Egypt, Assyria, and other nations/lands are mentioned as touchpoints for God overthrowing Israel's enemies. Keep in mind that while we might not have an immediate reference point for these places and people, the ones hearing and reading this would. They understood what had happened in their relatively recent past and they recognized how God's favor would deliver them from any future harm.

Gilead and Lebanon not being able to contain the people and the "scattering" are related. Often when we see "scatter" we think exile. This is natural as Judah is returning from exile and the mention of Assyria brings to mind the exile of Israel. The people were scattered across the nations. This is what we refer to as the diaspora.

In this instance it's different. The people are scattered to other nations not as a consequence. They have to go beyond the borders of their nation because the borders can't contain their numbers and prosperity. This is a good thing. The last chapters talked about other nations actually coming to them seeking benefit. Their reputation for wealth and prosperity would draw others to them.

The message here is of absolute abundance in every way. The people who were decimated would return and God would be by their side granting them victory and blessing.

This message is one of tremendous hope for a returning and returned people. They'd experienced need and want whether eeking out a living at home or in exile. The promise of God being at their side would be a joy. We'll see in the next chapter, however, that things are contingent. Obedience is always part of the equation and agreement.

Maundy Thursday

The day before Good Friday was fraught with drama. The Last Supper, the prayer in the Garden, the Arrest, the disciples abandoning Jesus, Peter's three denials, and Jesus being taken to a runaway railroad trial.

I want us to focus on John's sense of the last supper. More than anything Jesus is giving instructions for how the disciples should carry on when He is gone. It is all about His hope, and in their earthly duties carrying on in His love, mercy, and compassion. More than the bread and wine John focuses on the foot washing.

Jesus telling His disciples to have and hold a servant's heart in all that they do.

The drama was temporary. The mistakes made would be forgiven. Peter would be restored. What needed to endure was following Jesus' example. That is how His ministry and message would live on.

Remember that drama is often temporary. What lasts is how we get through it living into the servant image of the Christ who loved His disciples and cared for them even when His heart was heavy preparing to go to His own execution.

Good Friday

Good Friday wasn't very "good" for Jesus. It was a day of horror, terror, pain and loneliness. As His followers would understand that act afterwards, His death was a sacrifice. He died FOR the penalty of our sins. The price of redemption is high.

This is true even in our lives. If Jesus died FOR our sins we are called to die TO our sin. We are called to not only be redeemed but live a life in gratitude by doing our utmost to not continue on in the mistakes for which we need forgiveness.

When we are redeemed the price is also high, though not as high as Christ's. The price is giving up parts of our life that we might enjoy. That we might even carry as part of our identity. We have to sacrifice them so that we can live in a way that is in keeping with the example and love of the One who died for us.

Even in His death Jesus is an example that faith and faithfulness is not an easy road. Yet it is worth walking. For Him He walked it to the end not for His own benefit, but for ours.

A Dark Saturday

Not much is said about the Saturday between Good Friday and Easter. We understand it to be a day of worry, fear, and darkness as the disciples contemplate and mourn the death of Jesus. They didn't understand that the following day their perspective would change wildly. There would be an unspeakable joy and their lives would take on purpose, mission, and an earth shaking fulfillment.

This is how it is for us oftentimes. The hard thing happens. In its aftermath we are left puzzled, afraid, uncertain, and feeling incredibly low. For the disciples this season was a day, for us sometimes it's much longer.

Our hope is the same as theirs. Often if we hold on and endure something amazing may be waiting on the other side of that darkness. Feeling that darkness isn't wrong. It's normal.

In truth feeling that darkness helps us appreciate the good thing that follows even more. Our joy seems greater. Our hope brighter. Our gratitude deeper.

Don't be afraid to feel loss, grief and mourning. Just always keep the door open for the hope, goodness, and great purpose that might follow!