

APRIL 12, 2026

Marion weekly update

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

SERMON "Four People" Matthew 22:39, Matthew 5:43-48

This Easter as we look at the resurrection, I'd like to do so in contrast to the way we considered Palm Sunday last week.

Last week we honed in on Jesus' humanity. That sense that while fully divine He was also fully human. We noted how His humanity was on full display during what we call Holy Week and through the crucifixion. We saw how much of what Jesus did in His ministry and even that last week of life people who are and were simply 100% human have also done. And that in order for Jesus to fulfill the roles of perfect sacrifice and perfect mediator between God and man he actually had to experience the fullness of what it is to be human. He experienced it, and the drama and passion in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before the cross is the humanity flooding out.

I also suggested that perhaps if in Holy Week and to the cross we see Jesus in all of His humanity, that it is on the resurrection that the divinity comes roaring to the surface.

Once He overcame the world, the divinity then displays things that no one has ever pulled off merely in our 100% humanity and absent divinity.

The resurrection itself is exhibit A. People in scripture raised others from the dead. No one raised themselves, except Jesus. This is divinity on full display. Even the pictures depicting the resurrection portray Him different than most pictures in His life before. He is portrayed bold, majestic, and almost glowing.

This is the Jesus fully revealed in glory and power. The term for this is Christos Victor. The victorious Christ. The events with His disciples reflect this divinity. He appears out of nowhere in a locked room where no one could have gotten in, Divinity on display.

He offers somehow, in order to persuade the disciples' doubts, to let them put their fingers in his hands to see the wounds are real and a hand in His side where He was stabbed with a spear. Again, this is divinity. This is nothing humanity can do.

As He walks with some of His followers on the road to Emmaus He conceals His identity. People who knew Him, walking and talking intimately for hours don't recognize Him. This is a supernatural feat and occurrence.

The Jesus of the resurrection is the divine breaking powerfully through.

The resurrection is not only His return, it is hope, promise, and gives us language to describe our own lives of faith if we are truly following His example and witness.

Jesus is called the "firstborn from the grave". His resurrection is the promise of our own. That death doesn't have hold on us and life carries on more wonderfully and gloriously than before apart from this world. Scripture says "where oh death is your victory, where is your sting? But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." This moment for Him is the promise of a similar moment for each of us.

He is confirming the statement He makes in John 14. Jesus tells the disciples that He is going to fix a place for them and that He will return to bring them where He is residing. The resurrection is the proof that these were not idle words. He can and will make good on the promise.

Our language is crucifixion and resurrection language when we talk about the beauty and calling of our faith. We have scriptural phrases like "take up your cross", and "die to yourself daily." We are "crucified and buried with Jesus" and raised with Him as well. We are "dead to sin but alive to Christ."

All of this is pointing us in the direction of Jesus who lived His life in the fullness of relationship with God, the perfect completion of His God-given mission to redeem creation, and offering the hope of an eternal future in the presence of God.

Taking up our cross is to directly imitate Jesus' devotion and commitment. He lived fully in God's path even when it cost Him dearly. It did. It cost Him His life. We are called to that same devotion in living out our own faith.

Fortunately it's unlikely that we will ever be called to give up our literal life for our faith. But we will be called to sacrifice. This gets to the heart of death and resurrection.

Am I willing to follow Jesus even when it's hard. Even when I have to deny myself in order to live fully for God. Dying to ourselves daily is about surrendering the worldly plans and desires that take us away from God and God's purposes. It is about instead embracing all that God calls us to be and becoming more like Christ.

The process of this becoming is a cycle of death and resurrection.

We ourselves aren't perfect. We won't greet perfection until we move from this life to the next. While we are here, the journey is an ongoing adventure of growing, learning, and getting our words, hearts, and deeds in line with the example of Jesus.

One thing at a time we uncover something that needs changing. When we grasp what the next thing is, the work begins to consistently be faithful to God as opposed to faithful to the desires that pull us away from God.

What we die to is different in different phases of life. What is always the same is the call and drive to become better, to grow, and to invite others into the journey with us. The goal is to keep becoming every step of the way.

I believe it was Muhammed Ali who said "If I'm the same man now I was 20 years ago, then I've wasted 20 years."

What do I need to sacrifice? What do I need to overcome or give up? It might be an overarching behavior or value.

Some need to sacrifice alcohol, drugs, an overwhelming desire for money, or perhaps a continually lustful heart. Others it might be letting go of "isms" learned along the way. Sexism, racism, agism, or any of the many others. For still others it might be giving up selfish priorities in favor of putting the things of God first rather than last. It may be getting work and family in the right spot of importance.

These are long time long term battles. Things that seem innate or that have been part of us for a long time take a long time to battle. That's why we have prayer. It's also why we have support groups of others overcoming the same thing who can act as guides to keep us on an ever growing path.

Sometimes it's sacrificing something momentarily. I sacrifice my selfishness in the moment where I've made a commitment and I'm faced with the "something better came along" temptation. In the moment I have to overcome to fulfill my obligation.

I sacrifice my pride when I've been wronged so I can find the heart and head space to talk to the one I'm mad at. I sacrifice my stubbornness when I'm finding myself the obstacle to a relationship or a group's progress. I do it so that conversation is at least an option.

If I'm wearing a new shirt that makes me look really good and a server trips and spills a drink on it I sacrifice my vanity to realize it's just a shirt and my anger to realize it's just an accident. I do this to make way for grace and not doing unnecessary harm because of my temper.

Some sacrifice we revisit for a lifetime. Others it's momentary and passing. All of it has the same goal.

To be resurrected a better person that I was beforehand. We fine these parts of us and die to them. The other side of that death is where the glory comes, where the growth comes. Where faith is built stronger and lived more deeply. Where we feel the power of God alive in our lives and hearts.

The dying part is difficult. Ask Jesus. It can be frightening and painful. Yet that is the pathway, the only pathway to living more powerfully in the light and example of God.

Resurrection is about so much in our faith and lives. It is promise and hope. It is example and calling. It is an action plan for a life that doesn't just passively acknowledge God in a cliché or statement of faith. It builds a life that others can see in real time and relationship brings the example of Christ into the world over and over again. The title of this message is actually a movie quote. The character that says it is named Blind Al. She's trying to comfort a friend who's just had a terrible tragedy. He says that he's hurting so bad it feels like he's dying. She says to him that "we can't really live until we die a little."

This is the Christian experience. It is the truth that transforms us throughout our lives through lots of smaller deaths until we meet that final death that propels us from this world to the next. All of it is reason to celebrate. Because Christ has taught us that it isn't the death that has the final say. It's the resurrection. When that resurrection is in the power of God the other side of death is welcomed, not feared. It's why we aren't called crucifixion people. Followers of Christ are Resurrection people.

BIBLE STUDY

Zechariah Chapter 12

Chapter 12 and 13 of Zechariah link together. Through this we continue to have vague references that make fully interpreting the historical specifics difficult. What we do see is that there is still a cycle of ups and downs for Judah/Jerusalem/Israel as the book winds out.

Once again Jerusalem is attacked. Here God again sides with Jerusalem. There I reference to a not unusual situation through the Old Testament. God will strike the enemy with panic. In other times and situations this happens and the enemy turns on themselves and does the work of doing themselves in. The point and lesson? Remember the God is not just "a" God but is their God. The God.

The tribe of Judah will be the instrument of God's might. One of the illustrations that I love is that "the feeblest

among them will be like David". Even their weakest will be mightier than the mightiest of the enemy. Then comes this reference that is confusing. Often people assume it refers to Christ. There is someone they will mourn whose side they have pierced. They will grieve for someone they themselves kill. The image is the mourning of all Israel. It will be intense. Every tribe and clan will grieve. The references by name indicate it will be poor and rich, governors and religious men alike. The reference to the place in Megiddo isn't related to Revelation. It is referencing the place where the beloved King Josiah was killed. More than likely it is referencing a king who would be an obstacle to elevating the House of David. We can easily see it as Jesus because of the "piercing". The trouble here is that when Jesus was pierced all Israel didn't grieve or mourn for Him. Many were glad or indifferent at His death. If nothing else, this reminds us that relationship between God and God's people is complex. Sometimes we will be incredibly successful. Sometimes we'll make regrettable mistakes and grieve them. Whatever the case we are assured that God is present in the mix with us. Protection can look like many things. Sometimes it may be confusing those against us. Other times it might be granting us insight into the circumstances. Still others it might be allowing us to feel the heavy weight of our mistakes as a lesson to not repeat them. All of it still points to a present God in our lives both personal and corporate.

Chapter 13

Once the mourning commences in the prophecy of chapter 12, there will be a "cleansing". This seems to have somewhat clear senses and is understandable given the track record that had led to two exiles. First, the people will destroy all idols. That's pretty simple and clear. The next involves the prophets. This is telling the people that the office of the prophet will be wiped out. If someone is in that office when this happens, they won't even acknowledge their status. They won't display any symbols of being a prophet. If questioned they will deny it. When it says they will claim being "a farmer" preferable to being a prophet this is significant. This is likely a throwback to Cain, as in Cain and Abel Cain. The murderer. The outcast. And...the farmer. They would rather be associated with Cain than with a prophet. Parents will be more than ashamed if their child claims this office. They are called upon or projected to kill their own child.

Why?

The prophets in the Old Testament were just as responsible for the people's falling away as the kings. It was prophets who advised the kings. It was prophets who told lies about what "God was speaking" to appease leaders and gain status for themselves. The leaders listened to these voices and led the people down a path of faithlessness. This is what brought punishment on punishment for Israel and Judah.

We often associate the term prophet with the good ones that made the cut to be in scripture. They weren't the only ones. In fact often they were the outcasts and outliers. They stood against the lying prophets gathered around the kings. That's why we read about prophets being jailed, stoned, and killed. They didn't flatter the leaders. They spoke the truth. Many times unflattering truth led to their punishment while the lying prophets were elevated and embraced.

It makes perfect sense that when you can't trust an office to strike that very office from existence. It might leave a void of the good voices but more importantly it eliminates the bad ones.

Then comes text that is written like a hymn or a poem. Once again, for some reason, it is following this prophecy of God's great protection with another passage of judgement. There will be a bad "shepherd" that will be struck down. 2/3 of the people will be struck down as well. Only 1/3 remains and they will be tested, and pass. Those people will claim God and God will claim them.

This is a very honest notion of how things tend to pan out. When bad circumstances fall on a people it falls on the whole of the people. Some of those people will fall by the wayside and even be wiped out because of it. Then there will be those who also endure the hard times but come out having learned something. They learn the mistakes that brought the calamity and live into a better way to prevent it from happening again.

This is the ups and downs of not just Israel, but of all humanity. We have cycles of abundance and loss and need. The generation that suffers and survives tries to carve out a world where things don't repeat themselves. After generations the lessons are lost and people revert to selfishness and faithlessness. Just like in the Old Testament. The result is calamity.

The cycle repeats itself.

More and more we see this when we recount history. More and more we should be confused at why we don't learn the collective lesson. Which means more and more we are called to live the life of those prophets who endured hardship. We are called to stand out against the excessive, abusive, and harsh ways of the world around us to demonstrate what it looks like to live faithful before God and good before one another.