

Living out your faith

It's been over a month since I returned from Israel. Honestly, I had no clue how much this trip would impact my spiritual life, my understanding of the biblical text, and the life and times of Jesus. The entire Overseas Study Cohort process was a huge discovery process for everyone involved.

The experience of seeing the Middle East firsthand, seeing the land, experiencing the culture, the people, the history, and the archeology was formative for me. The knowledge yielded from this life-changing trip continues to inform my preaching and my living. Hardly a Sabbath passes without something I learned finding its way into the sermon.

Over the weekend, terrible storms dotted the southern states. Mississippi suffered a devastating EF-4 tornado over ¾ mile across. It was on the ground for 59 miles, for one hour and ten minutes. Twenty-five persons lost their lives. Rolling Fork MS is particularly hard hit.

Today some volunteers are gathering the donations provided by you to offer some relief to those most affected. Southern Hardware is shipping your donations to the storm's epicenter, providing desperately needed relief for those devastated residents. UMCOR is always an excellent way to help people in the wake of natural disasters.

This natural disaster feels like a golden opportunity to live out our faith. When I purchased items at Dollar General, someone from the First Baptist Church sought bottled water to send as part of their relief efforts. These efforts remind us of our common call to be kingdom people who offer help in times of need. Our Children's Church members are learning what it means to think of others as part of their Lenten journey.

This week is the sixth week of Lent, culminating with Palm Sunday. Holy Week follows Palm Sunday in the run-up to Easter Sunday. Maundy Thursday will be an evening service preparing us for Good Friday. There is still plenty of time to do for others as we would have done for ourselves.

Let's take a moment to consider the opportunity we have during Holy Week and Easter. Easter is one of the Big Three (Easter, Mother's Day, and Christmas Eve). This celebration offers us a chance to invite people to join us in worship at a time when, traditionally, more people attend church than just other times in the spring. Begin to ask yourself, "Who will I invite to worship?"

As a pastor, I hope that this Lent is a meaningful way for you to grow closer to God and one another. Lent helps us make time and space for spiritual disciplines of scripture reading, prayers, fasting, acts of mercy, and acts of piety. Even if you haven't made a good start, there is still time to make an effort. Nothing you do to cultivate a deeper relationship with the Almighty is wasted.

Sunday's sermon showed us Jesus exercising authority over death, raising his very dead friend Lazarus to life. That single miraculous act sealed Jesus' fate. Between this resurrection moment and the Triumphal Entry, The 12th chapter of John shows us a dinner party where Jesus gathers at the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus with his disciples. Mary offers an extravagant act of devotion and generosity, pours a costly perfume on Jesus' feet, and wipes them with her hair.

This intimate act causes controversy within the disciples. Judas, it seems, is outraged at what he perceives as a waste of resources. Yet Jesus interprets her dedication in keeping with what lies before him. The shadow of the cross already looms large for Jesus in the final weeks of his earthly life. How ironic that an act of bigheartedness shines light into a heart's darkness. Greed binds Judas and blinds him to the ongoing work of God. Open hands are a distinct characteristic of a disciple of Christ.

*Meanwhile, a large crowd of Jews found out that Jesus was there and came, not only because of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. John 12:9* Pastor Kenny

Calendar for the Week

<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>Sunday</b>
9:00 a.m. Exercise	9:00 a.m. Marvell Sunday School
3:30 p.m. WOW	10:00 a.m. Marvell Worship
5:00 p.m. Youth	<b>Monday</b>
<b>Friday</b>	7:00 a.m. Holy Week Service – B.J. Chatman
9:00 a.m. Exercise	<b>Tuesday</b>
<b>Sunday</b>	7:00 a.m. Holy Week Service – Bill Heidelberger
8:45 a.m. Lexa Sunday School	

<b>STEWARDSHIP REPORT</b>	<b>ATTENDANCE</b>
2023 Budget	Lexa Worship 4
Needed each week	Marvell Sunday School 27
Received this week	Worship 49 + 100
Capital Improvements 25	
Easter Lilies 40	<b>Palm/Passion Sunday</b>
Newsletter 30	<b>Matthew 21:1-11 The Lord Needs Them</b>
MS Tornado 300	<b>Hymns 277, 278, 280</b>
Youth Meals 40	<b>Liturgist Penny Lee</b>
Blessing Boxes 100	
Handicap Rail 200	<b>We need the young people to carry the palm branches Sunday morning!</b>