

## Holiness and Holy Week

Holiness is not exactly a new concept for people who are open to God's presence. In fact, holiness is a quality that enables us to recognize what is sacred, real and good in all of God's people. It keeps us humble when we recognize how difficult it is to keep the door to our hearts open.

That open door requires humility, courage and selflessness that, lacking God's grace, none of us could ever hope to develop. Holiness is based in part, on self-awareness and on our awareness of God's will for us. As much as we might imagine that we would like to be the next Mother Theresa of Calcutta or the next Albert Schweitzer of Lambarene, the reality is that most of us are not willing to make the sacrifices that they made in serving "the least of these brothers and sisters of (Jesus)." ([Matthew 25:40 CEB](#)). Still, we are called to love as Jesus loves.

Love was the center of Jesus life, and some of us overlook that the call to holiness is the heart of Jesus greatest commandment to his disciples: "Love one another as I have loved you." ([John 15:12 CEB](#)) Holy Week is the week in which we are reminded of how much was required of Jesus as he completed the task that God set for Him. However, some of us do not like to be reminded that it is everyone's duty to announce the coming of God's realm in our midst. We aren't always willing to share our faith in God by letting others see in our lives how important Jesus is to us.

Once we recognize God's Word as God speaking to the Church and to us individually, far more is required of us. We can begin by erasing the bumper sticker slogan that reduces God's expectations of us to "Practice random acts of kindness." Jesus didn't die so that we could perform random acts of kindness. Jesus died to free us to love, to be our brothers' and sisters' keepers and to show the enormity of God's love for all. Being holy is far more than being nice to people randomly.

It always begins with knowing that God loves us. We hear it in the story of the burning bush from which God called to Moses. God had an important task for Moses. However, God also wanted to raise Moses' awareness of Who was addressing him. God said to Moses, "Moses, . . .do not come any closer. . . Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." ([Exodus 3:4-5 NIV](#)). God can cause any location to be holy whether it's a particular piece of land, a Gothic cathedral, a baby's crib, the shack in which a saint lived or the top of a mountain.

The word "Holy" is also important even when not applied to a specific location. Here are five more quotes from the Bible that support the experience of many that "The Holy" (i.e. God) is real. We see examples of diverse meanings of what "Holy" can encompass.

"Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy." ([Genesis 2:3](#))

"And they (the angels) were calling to one another: Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of (God's) glory." ([Isaiah 6:3](#))

We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God." ([John 6:69](#))

"And so, Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood." ([Hebrews 13:12](#))

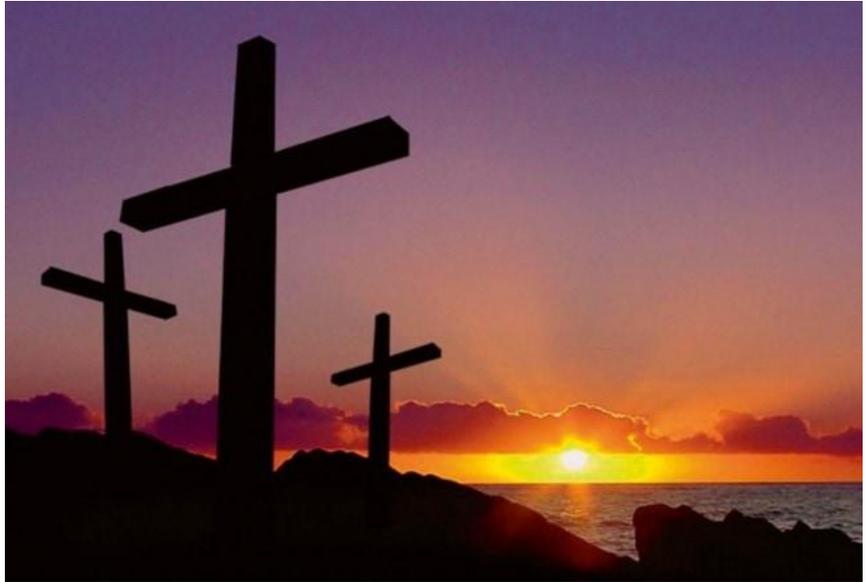
"For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life." ([1 Thessalonians 4:7](#))

"But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all that you do; for it is written, 'Be holy, because I am holy.'" ([1 Peter 1:15-16](#))

The Bible uses the word “Holy” over five hundred times.<sup>1</sup> What they have in common is a connection with God. Holy Week is an opportunity to connect or reconnect with God. To do so requires that we trust God people. To be holy is to commit ourselves to put God and our neighbors ahead of ourselves. Sharing worship, or at least deciding to be in prayer with a prayer partner each day during Holy Week is a good starting point.

We also use the word “holy” to describe the very essence of God—not just places or people who have a connection with God. What does it mean to describe God as “holy?” We mean that God is utterly unique, special and beyond us. We are made in God’s image. Yet, we all too easily remake God into a reduced version of ourselves.

The only way that we know about God is through God’s disclosure in the Bible and in the life, death and resurrection of



Jesus. Holy Week is holy because it bears witness to the events of the last week of Jesus life as he surrendered it for us. We begin with the excitement of Palm Sunday as we imagine the people throwing palm leaves on the road to honor Jesus as he enters the city of Jerusalem.

Sadly, many of us 21<sup>st</sup> century Christians avoid the opportunities to prepare for the events of Holy Week. Many of us stay home from the Maundy Thursday and Good Friday worship services. Why? My experience points to the discomfort we feel as we hear of the very human suffering of Jesus. Yet there is so much more to his story.

The Gospels also tell the story of Jesus washing his disciples’ feet. Some churches do that every year during Holy Week. Other churches have a service of Tenebrae in which a series of candles are extinguished in sequence to remind us of the darkness of the world creeping in if we ignore the light of God’s love. Others do a Seder meal to remind us of the Passover meal Jesus shared as he neared the end of his life. Some churches remind us of the starkness of Jesus death by taking every possible reminder of God off of the altar and out of the church. Still others share a service of Holy Communion on the Thursday of Holy Week. If we love Jesus as He loves us, we will find time to remember the suffering before the resurrection.

May you be blessed by an ever-deepening awareness of these spiritual realities!

As always, I welcome your [responses](#).

Rev. Larry LaPierre

12 April 2019

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<sup>1</sup> Zondervan NIV Exhaustive Concordance (Edward W. Goodrick, John Kohlenberger III, Editors, & James A. Swanson, Assoc. Ed. (Grand Rapids, MI 1999)