Hi,

Another beautiful day . . . let’s keep this up.

Here are today’s updates:

* **Maundy Thursday** | **April 9, 7:00 p.m. Click** [**here**](https://www.standrewumc.org/live) **or** [**here**](https://www.facebook.com/StAndrewUnitedMethodistChurch/?__tn__=kC-R&eid=ARB5pbKbxPa_6XIU8YaPERugMBtWXi_tDkY1W4byzbhZQdyXOPi9cSTdg0XOoH99mQHPWUf7st6tA8P5&hc_ref=ARQu4f8XrJk3E8FkXmB9bEmw23d9uxIRt3JR1p92Zmg1DCXNfec43LGLyxYjtdLZbwU&fref=nf) **to participate.**
  + We will participate in Holy Communion together as a church family during this service, even as we are physically separated from each another. To prepare for Holy Communion, please **make sure you have some form of bread and juice to serve to one another.**
  + Please be aware of your own health and safety needs along with the needs of others and use your best judgment as you prepare for this service. We know the Holy Spirit surpasses all human limitations to be present with us in every circumstance, and we are thankful we can share in this Sacrament from our homes on Maundy Thursday. Your pastors will provide instructions for serving Communion to each other during the Maundy Thursday service.
* The links to my on-line classes, the video recordings of the classes, the class audio podcasts, and the archive of these daily emails can all be found at [www.scottengle.org](http://www.scottengle.org/). This week’s recordings will all posted.
* If you have any movie or book recommendations you’d like to share with everyone, please send them along.
* I’ve attached the Weekly Bible for Easter weekend. Christ is risen!!

On Thursday evening of Holy Week, Jesus joined his closest disciples for a Passover meal, the last one they would share. He invited them to join him in a New Exodus, a flight from bondage to sin, in a New Covenant, written on hearts, not tablets of stone. We may be separated one from another, but we are still walking together toward the cross and the empty tomb. Maundy Thursday is this evening.

***Jeremiah 31:31-34 (NRSV)***

**The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, “Know the Lord ,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord ; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.**

***Luke 22:14-20 (NRSV)***

**When the hour came, he [Jesus] took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. He said to them, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.” Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, “Take this and divide it among yourselves; for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.” Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.**

We’ve all seen the cartoon. A lone figure with bushy hair, a scraggly beard, dressed in rags standing on a street corner holding a sign reading, “Repent! The end is near!” Every political season, we hear more than a few speeches referred to as “jeremiads” meaning a list of woes and complaints often delivered in a tirade. And yes, it is a reference to Jeremiah. It isn’t really unfair because Jeremiah was given the weighty task of telling God’s people that the end was upon them, that they were headed over the cliff. They had passed the point of return; there was nothing that would forestall the looming disaster. And it all came to be. The Babylonians rolled over Jerusalem and destroyed the temple in 586BC.

But sadly, all we hear about is Jeremiah, the so-called prophet of doom and gloom; never, Jeremiah the prophet of hope.

In the depth of Israel’s despair, as they anticipated rebuilding shattered lives a thousand miles from home, as they tried to hang on to one another and to the Lord God, Jeremiah brought them a message of hope, or promises kept, of a new covenant. And do we live in a time, this Time of Virus, that needs true hope.

*The New Covenant*

God had made a covenant with his chosen people after saving them from slavery in Egypt and that the Ten Commandments, written on stone tablets, lay at the heart of God’s instruction for his people. Though the Israelites cherished God’s law and kept the stone tablets in the Ark of the Covenant, they proved unable to live as God had taught them. They proved unable to live in right relationship, truly loving God and loving neighbor.

The consequences of the people’s endless abandonment of God and God’s ways culminate in the death of Jerusalem at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar. Nonetheless, God, through his prophet Jeremiah, promised his people that the day would come when his law, his instruction to them, would no longer be written on the tablets of stone given to Moses, but on the very hearts of his people. God’s people would no longer even have to teach other about God, for they would all know God. God would forgive their faithlessness and not even remember their sin. This would be God’s new covenant with his people.

*The Last Supper and the New Covenant*

Symbols can be emotionally powerful, sometimes enormously so. In his ministry, Jesus’ actions were often powerfully symbolic. He ate with the oppressed and despised to demonstrate that all persons were welcome in the coming of God’s kingdom. He healed the sick to demonstrate that in God’s kingdom the lame would walk and the blind would see. When Jesus came to Jerusalem for Passover Festival in the days before his death, he went to the temple overturning tables and invoking, in words and action, Jeremiah’s judgment on the temple system. In sharing the Passover meal with his disciples, Jesus would reshape cherished Jewish symbols and hopes, applying them to himself and his ministry.

Jesus had come to Jerusalem a few days before, entering the city as a returning king, to waving palms and chanting crowds. Because of the large crowds in Jerusalem for festival, Jesus and his disciples stayed in Bethany, a “suburb.” Now, after sundown on Thursday, the evening of his arrest and trial, Jesus gathered his disciples together so they could share the Passover meal within the city walls.

The Passover meal was eaten as a family. Here, Jesus and the twelve disciples make up the family. The head of the household would offer thanks for the “bread of affliction,” (Deut. 16:3). But Jesus identifies the bread with himself – with his suffering for his disciples. The Passover lamb was the seal of the covenant between God and his people, a covenant that had been written on tablets of stone. Jesus reminds his disciples of the new covenant, to be written on hearts, which had been promised centuries before in the scroll of Jeremiah. Jesus is the “mediator of a better covenant . . . enacted through better promises” (Hebrew 8:6), a covenant sealed with Jesus’ own blood. Is it any wonder that early Christians came to embrace the sacredness of the Lord’s Supper?

We are people of this new covenant. God has put within us a new heart and a new Spirit (Jeremiah 31:33; Ezekiel 36:26). We may not always feel this way or act like it, but we are not alone. God is with us. Jesus has ushered in the new covenant foreseen centuries before by Jeremiah.

*Living as New Covenant people*

Who are we? We are people of this new covenant. What does such a life look like? What does it really mean to live as Jesus has challenged us to live? Much of Jesus’ ministry was devoted to answering these questions. The centerpiece of these teachings is Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount from Matthew 5-7.

The Sermon on the Mount is a picture of the kingdom of God, a world turned upside-down. It was profoundly counter-cultural 2,000 years ago and it is no less so now. Jesus challenges us to surrender our anger, to pray for those who persecute us, to be faithful to our spouses in our thoughts as well as our actions. Does it not seem profoundly naïve to suggest that the meek (the gentle) will inherit the earth? When Jesus says, “turn the other cheek,” is it an invitation to be a doormat? We certainly don’t have the space here to address all the questions that these teachings raise, but we don’t really need to right now. What we *do* need to do is to see that Jesus’ challenge is far more radical than we might think. It is about much more than being nice.

Jesus’ Galilean listeners ached to hear a call for revolution, violent if need be. But Jesus quickly and firmly turned their world upside-down. They wanted vengeance on the Romans and Jesus instead taught them about forgiveness and mercy. If a Roman ordered a disciple to carry his pack one mile, the disciple was to carry it two. Jesus called them all to a new way of being God’s people, or at least it was new to them. Jesus challenged Israel to *be* Israel. In the same way, it is a challenge to Christians to *be* Christians, even if being Christian means something radically different from what we thought, even if being Christian demands a price we thought we’d never be willing to pay.

Jesus cannot be tamed. He does not allow us to stay in our comfort zones, waiting for others to step forward. He calls for us all to rise to the challenge . . . just as did Jeremiah.

*A movie recommendation*

*Winter’s Bone* introduced movie audiences to Jennifer Lawrence. What a performance she gave in this tale of a teenaged girl trying to hold her family together in the meth world of the Ozark mountains. Sounds grim, I know. But such a powerful and haunting movie. It stayed with me for a long time. Jesus came to save a broken world and it is on full display in this story. You can rent it for a few dollars on Amazon.

*A book recommendation*

Another Philip Yancey book; *The Jesus I Never Knew*, in which Yancey sets aside his life-long preconceptions and strives to encounter the Jesus of the gospels. Like all of his books, this one is outstanding.

‘til tomorrow, grace and peace,

Scott