

Let us pray... Eternal God, gather your Spirit in this place, and open our hearts to love.... Guide our journey together, with you at the center. Amen.

Receiving difficult news is never easy... Even when we might be prepared for it... Even when we might be expecting it... Even when we have endured difficult news in the past...

Because receiving difficult news is never easy...

And our gospel tonight starts with some very difficult news, sparing no details, Jesus foretells of his horrific death...

"Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death, and deliver him to the Gentiles; and they will mock him, and spit upon him, and scourge him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise."

This is a lot to take in... However, this wasn't the first time the disciples heard this in Mark's Gospel, this was the third time Jesus felt the need to share this difficult news with his disciples.

And I can't imagine how hard this must have been to hear, even though they heard it before... Even though they were trying to prepare for what must take place...

And yet, despite this difficult discourse, filled with mockery, spit, hate, and death... There is hope... Hope, that after three days, Jesus will rise.

And this hope, was rooted in the disciple's faith and trust in Jesus...

Without faith and trust, hope would soon become hopeless.

Which is why many people continue to place faith and trust in Christ today. As we live in a world that is in desperate need of hope.

And God knows this... Which is why God sent God's only son... To give us hope in something beyond ourselves, something we can always cling to...

Especially when we have reached our limits, when there is nothing more we can do to find relief...

Or when we are overwhelmed by guilt or shame...

Or when we are confronted with death...

In those moments the only thing we can do, is to rely on God... We place our faith and trust in God's promises...

And we hope, beyond hope, that we will find ourselves in the company of Jesus...

As Jesus is our community even when all else fails.

This is where our faith begins... In Christ...

Nothing you will ever endure, not even death, will be alone...

There is always a community in Christ... A community you are a part of... A community that was birthed from God's very being...

Through the Holy Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit...

A community that at times can seem mysterious and intangible, since we don't physically see Jesus' walking around in the flesh...

And yet... Jesus has provided a way for God to be tangible with us...

As Jesus said in our gospel, "The cup that I drink you will drink; and the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized."

Both communion and baptism are a place we encounter God in tangible ways...

We can see, touch, smell, and taste the bread and the wine.

And we can see, touch, and hear the water when it is poured into the baptismal font.

These two sacraments engage all of our senses. They are part of the human experience, just like Christ experienced when he was human.

And while Christ was human, he asked us to do these things...

So, we could remember him, and know in our very bodies that God's promises are true.

Promises of unconditional love, of forgiveness, of grace, mercy, peace, and everlasting life.

Those promises are the good news of Jesus Christ... Promises that were lived out in the flesh so they could be felt in our flesh.

We experience those promises over and over not just because God loves us, but because Christ intimately knows all of the horrific and difficult news that permeates our world.

And so, God has given us the good news of Jesus to triumph over all that is hard...

Which may not take away your pain or your heartache completely... But this allows Christ to be present with you in those difficult spaces...

Filling your places of brokenness with God's grace, peace, and love.

Because Jesus is your community, even when all else fails.

May this good news prepare your hearts and minds as we enter Holy Week.

May God refresh your faith... May the Spirit deepen your trust... And may the joy of Christ's resurrection fill all that is broken. Providing a way forward in hope... Amen.