
Holy Week is a Holy Walk

**An article for *The Cathedral Times*
by the Very Rev. Sam Candler, *Dean of the Cathedral***

This coming week of the year, Holy Week, invites us for a walk that takes several days. It is not just one sermon that makes Holy Week holy. It is not just one prayer. It is not just one piece of music. Rather, it is the entire drama of Jesus's walk that is re-lived at the Cathedral Parish of St. Philip, and in faithful parishes around the world, in our Holy Week. We will walk this week. And something happens when we walk, whether we are people of faith or of no faith. Something holy and inspiring occurs when we walk.

Join the Church this entire week, not just for one service, but for several! On March 29, Palm Sunday, also called "The Sunday of the Passion," we will start both the 8:45 and 11:15 services on the Lanier House lawn, on the labyrinth. After blessing palm branches, we will walk down Andrews Drive, around the front of the Cathedral, and then back up Peachtree Road, waving the branches and remembering Jesus's walk into the holy city of Jerusalem. Yes, we treat it like a parade, welcoming and celebrating. Plus, it's actually great fun to walk together around the church (and around our glorious construction site)! Wear your walking shoes!

But the Palm Sunday walk always takes a sheer turn once we hear the gospel. On that Sunday, the entire passion story of Jesus is read as the gospel; this year, that story will be dramatized again by members of our Cathedral youth. Typically, we – the congregation, all of us—play the part of the crowd who shout out "Crucify him!" with respect to Jesus. Yes, we –the crowd, the congregation—we are the ones who both welcome Jesus wildly and suddenly speak against him. Thus, we actually experience the betrayal of Jesus; we do not just hear about it.

Thursday, April 2 is Maundy Thursday. The word "Maundy" is derived from a Latin word, "mandatum," meaning "commandment." This is the night, at the Last Supper, when Jesus gives his disciples a "new commandment," that we love one another. As Jesus stooped to wash the feet of his disciples on that night, so we, too, will take the time to wash another person's feet. At the Cathedral, we do not merely stage this re-enactment. We invite people, voluntarily, during the service, to ask another person if they might wash his or her feet; then, both people walk forward. We don't come up to have our own feet washed; we ask a neighbor if we might wash their feet.

Then, the beautiful and mysterious Maundy Thursday liturgy continues with a Eucharist that commemorates the Last Supper. Finally, as the lights are dimmed, clergy and altar guild strip the altar, clearing the way for Good Friday. We walk from the altar in silence, after one of the most moving services of the year.

On Good Friday, of course, we remember the crucifixion itself. Once again, we hear the passion story read in its entirety. Good Friday is one of the only days of the year that we do not celebrate the Eucharist. Instead, the service is highlighted by the passion, by our prayers and petitions, and by the entrance of a large wooden cross. We sing, "Were you there?" The cross is walked in. Thus, we all remember the walk of Jesus with the cross. Walking the way of Christ takes us through every facet of life, even death. In silence and in the word, in music and in prayers, we venerate the cross on that day.

Holy Saturday is another day that we do not celebrate the Eucharist. The body of Jesus is in the tomb on that day. But the activity around the Cathedral has become almost like a mini-Easter for the parish community! I am in awe of the great gifts and talents that show up to rehearse and prepare for Easter Day. Musicians, flower guild folks, altar guild folks, acolytes, lectors, vergers, bonfire preparers, and all sorts gather on Saturday for the great rehearsal. The preparation for Easter can be just as exciting as Easter itself!

Finally, of course, comes Easter Day. Every service is tremendous and overflowing with Easter energy; and we

have a service going on at almost any time you arrive! But surely the grandest service, and the most dramatic, is the one that begins very early on Easter morning, during the dark, and before sunrise.

At 6:00 am, on Easter morning, we light the first Easter fire on the lawn at the Horseshoe Drive, through which we walked a week earlier. This time, we are completing the drama. We process the Paschal Candle into the dark nave (walking again!), we sing the ancient and lovely Exultet, we hear the old stories of Creation, of the Red Sea Exodus, and of the Valley of Dry Bones. Then we baptize new Christians into this ancient mystery of creation, redemption, and new life. We walk one more time, in a baptismal procession around the nave, splashing ourselves with holy baptismal water of new life, and singing "I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light!"

Finally on Easter morning, we celebrate the Eucharist itself. The service is beautiful and life-giving, for sure. But Easter morning is really the last leg of a walk that takes an entire week to complete. I hope you can participate fully in this Holy Week! As you walk you will be moved! When you have lived through Palm Sunday and Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, you might know Easter in a way you have never known Easter before.

Thus, Holy Week is a Holy Walk. It is the entire Christian story, played out in prayer and procession, word and song, cross and sacrament, water and fire. Holy Week is a Holy Walk! "Walk in love, as Christ loved us, and gave himself for us, an offering and sacrifice to God" (Ephesians 5:2).

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sam Candler". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

The Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip