The Week That Ended Death

1. As we celebrate Palm Sunday today, let's remember that our celebrations were canceled last year…and if ever a year needed to have Easter in it, it was last year. This year needs Easter and, to be honest, every day needs some Easter in it for it was on Easter than death was killed by God. (let's not worry about the word "Easter" for the detritus of millennia)

2. Let's look over the last week of Jesus' life. This is no random series of events but a planned, intentional week. There is gold to be mined here if we take time to read and think about these 8 days (yes, I'm cheating and doing 8, not just 7)

3. I wanted to cheat because I have to include the Saturday before the triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Remember: the next day would be the day of palms and hosannas. What did Jesus do the day before? He went to the house of a leper (Matthew 26:6,7). Well, there are a jam packed set of two verses!

4. Was Simon a leper at this point? Almost certainly not. It could be that Jesus had healed Simon. Jesus did that a lot and there were a lot of people named Simon so there have been many guesses as to who this was…but that is beside the point. Jesus fellowships him. And then a woman comes in and opens up a jar of very expensive fragrance (a year's wage for a common laborer). Things like this were used as currency, rather like jewelry was and is. No central banks existed so people had to invest in things that were usable for currency and ointment like this was one option.

5. When he was criticized for allowing this "waste" of money, Jesus lets the assembly know that something is coming; his own burial. He said this the day before the entry into Jerusalem. Let that sink in a bit.

6. On Sunday, we have the triumphant entry. I used to wonder what was all that special about entering Jerusalem on a donkey. I'd seen many movies about triumphal entries but they were on horses or in chariots – or tanks! So, why a donkey? In Zechariah 9:9, we see that it was prophesied that he would do so but that doesn't answer our question. The real answer? In ancient times, when a king rode into a city to

take the throne, if he was at war with the city, he was on a horse. If he was coming in peace to peacefully take control, he came on a donkey. Jesus came in peace.

7. But that peace was not absolute – Jesus cleared the temple for the second time. Those who wanted to profit from those forced to buy after their long journey had changed a celebration into a burden. God did not intend for His people to be burdened by their faith and obedience. As Jesus said, his yoke is easy and his burden is light. How dare we make it hard? It's supposed to be Good News.

8. Sometime in this time frame, he cursed a fig tree that wasn't bearing fruit. A lot of lessons have been pulled from this but I want to just say that salt and light are either welcomed or not welcomed; people are not neutral toward either. If we live as Jesus calls us to live, we will either be loved or hated but there won't be a lot of shrugged shoulders or "don't care" among those near us. Fruit can be pretty or ugly but it is still fruit.

9. We don't know for sure what happened on Wednesday. That may have been the day he spoke to the people about their religious leaders and gave them parables (Matthew 24). It was on that day that he told his followers that he would be killed at Passover, just two days away. They really didn't get it because they weren't listening for that.

10. On Thursday, Jesus celebrated Passover with his friends and instituted what we call the Eucharist or Lord's Supper. It is really a very sweet thing that Jesus did. It would help them deal with their grief and give them a way to remember him in good times, at a table with friends, rather than the chaos of the coming days.

11. Early, early in the morning, while his best friends slept, Jesus walked down the mountain to the mob and was arrested. He was shuttled from one court to another, shamefully treated every step of the way, and crucified. Later than same day, he was buried in the tomb. God turned off the lights and ripped the curtain in the temple to the Holy of Holies.

12. The week before Jesus died…he fellowshipped a leper, showed grace and love to a woman whom others were scorning, rode

to shouts of praise and adoration but didn't stop working. He cleared out those who were mistreating the faithful and taking advantage of their helplessness. He warned us that living for him would bring fruit of one kind or another. He spent time with his closest friends and showed them grace and kindness. He protected his friends by walking away from them, drawing the mob away as he was being arrested.

13. He stayed faithful and truthful during all the mistreatment he received. He died with words of forgiveness on his lips.

14. And then he arose. He showed us his scars and told us that the last enemy, death, was now defeated. We are immortals through faith in him. Easter is the day death died. Fear was banished. Hope was reborn and is reborn every time we take the bread and the cup and celebrate our Lord.