

January 22 Adult Spiritual Growth Class Synopsis

Let There Be Light: A Study of FPC Stained-Glass Windows – Christ on the cross

First Presbyterian Church has been blessed with parishioner memorial gifts of 15 beautiful stained-glass windows over the years, as summarized in the wonderful guide put together by Virginia Wiley in 1990, as part of the 175 year anniversary celebration of the church. The window of focus is the crucifixion of Jesus, located in the second window from the right back side of the sanctuary, facing the pulpit, and framed in the upper medallion.

The window is filled with many symbolic features: golden oak leaves representing God's unending and sufficient strength; garlands of green laurel leaves symbolizing God's eternal Word and triumph over sin through salvation in and through Christ Jesus; fern leaves that signify the humility of Jesus, "who emptied himself, taking the form of a servant in the likeness of men, humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:7-8). The upper medallion is framed in a circle, which symbolizes the everlasting life that God has given us in Christ Jesus through His birth, life, death, and resurrection. On top rests an angel, robed in red on a half shell, who is God's messenger of the Good News of God's sacrificial love, saving grace and presence throughout our life's faith journey.

At the foot of the cross, we see Mary, mother of Jesus, robed in a blue cloak and cowl, signifying her hope, sincerity, and piety as a bond-servant of God. The beloved disciple John is seen in a brown and scarlet tunic and cloak, representing a humble, faithful and sacrificial servant. Jesus is shown in a red cloth, symbolizing the suffering and sacrifice endured out of great love - a ransom paid for all. Above Christ's head is the sign, KING OF THE JEWS, meant to be a statement of ridicule by the Romans and a sign adamantly rejected by the chief priests, although proclaimed in Revelation 17:14 as *KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS*. The cross is green in color as was the Huguenot stake in the previous window, representing the eternal life that God gives through His Son, the Way, the Truth, and the Life. We see Jerusalem in the background from the height of Golgotha (Calvary). The portrayal of the city may be symbolic of the New Jerusalem that is to come in Revelation 21:2: *And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.*

Interestingly we see two white swans at the top of the mandala. Swans are often a symbol of love and fidelity because of their long-lasting and monogamous relationships. They possibly represent the pure and eternal fidelity of Christ's (Bridegroom's) love for His Church (bride). Christ has sacrificially and lovingly chosen the Church to be His bride (Ephesians 5:24-27). Revelation 19:7-9 and 21:1-2 speak of the eventual and eternal union of the Church with Christ.

The crucifixion story is told in all of the Synoptic Gospels in addition to John (Matthew 27:27-56, Mark 15:16-41, Luke 23:26-49, and John 19:16-37). Matthew, Mark and Luke are largely similar in sequence and sometimes identical in wording. John, while similar in some cases, is unique in his emphasis on the fulfillment of Scripture, i.e., his use of "*so that Scripture would be fulfilled.*"

The crucifixion story reflects the prophetic words of Isaiah 700 years prior in Isaiah 53:1-12, speaking of the Suffering Servant, and of David 1000 years prior in Psalm 22, speaking of Christ's suffering and His glory. The Synoptic Gospels speak of Jesus being mocked, reviled and spit on by the crowd as conveyed in Psalm 22:6-7: *But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by everyone, despised by the people. All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads.*

All four Gospels tell of the charge made against Jesus and the sign fastened to the cross, *THIS IS JESUS, KING OF THE JEWS*. John includes the dialogue between Pilate and the chief priests, who protested the sign. We are reminded that just weeks prior, the blind beggar Bartimaeus who was healed sees Jesus for who He is, "Son of David", the King of King. In John 9:39, Jesus says, *"For judgment I came into this world, so that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind."*

Each of the Gospels fulfill the words of Psalm 22:18: "They divide my clothes among them and cast lot for my garment. We are told in Matthew and Luke that a man from Cyrene, named Simon is forced to carry Jesus' cross. It is likely that Simon was in Jerusalem for the Jewish Passover traveling from Cyrene, which was a Greco-Egyptian city in eastern Libya with a large Jewish community that became an early center of Christianity. Mark further identifies Simon as the father of Alexander and Rufus. Tradition states that they became missionaries. It has also been suggested that the Rufus, mentioned by Paul in Romans 16:13, was the son of Simon of Cyrene. Some also have linked Simon himself with the "men of Cyrene" who preached the Gospel to the Greeks in Acts 11:20. A burial cave discovered in 1941 in the Kidron Valley, just outside the Old City of Jerusalem, belonging to Cyrenian Jews and dating before AD 70, was found to have an ossuary inscribed twice in Greek, "Alexander son of Simon".

Each of the Gospels speak of the two men that were crucified beside Jesus. The Synoptic Gospels identify them as rebels or criminals. Luke provides the detailed exchange amongst themselves. One of the rebels hurls insults at Jesus, *"Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!"*; the other defends Jesus, *"This man has done nothing wrong ... Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."* *Jesus answered him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."* Saint Augustine noted the significance of this scene: "The very cross was the tribunal of Christ; for the Judge was placed in the middle; one thief, who believed, was set free; the other, who reviled, was condemned; which signified what he was already about to do with the quick and dead; being about to set some on his right hand, but others on his left." *For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son* (John 5:22).

Matthew and Mark tell of Jesus being given wine with myrrh (gall), which Jesus refuses and later given wine vinegar on a hyssop-sponge staff, which Jesus accepts. Myrrh, one of the gifts of the Magi, was culturally significant to the region and was used along with vinegar and wine to make the water potable. Myrrh also served as an excellent antiseptic and a mild narcotic. The first drink offered to Jesus was a cheap Roman vinegar wine mixed with myrrh to dull the senses. It was the custom of the Romans to offer a man being crucified drugged wine so that he might more easily endure his cross. Jesus refused the wine, however, apparently so that He could go through his suffering with a clear mind. Later John writes, *'knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty."* The psalmist declares in Psalm 22:15: *My mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death.* Jesus accepts the vinegar wine to quench his last thirst.

The Synoptic Gospels speak the fulfillment of prophecy of Amos 8:9-10: *"In that day," declares the Sovereign Lord, "I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight. I will turn your religious festivals into mourning and all your singing into weeping. I will make that time like mourning for an only son and the end of it like a bitter day."* It is written that *from noon until three in the afternoon a darkness came over all the land.*

Matthew and Mark speak of Jesus crying out, fulfilling Psalm 22:1-2: *About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?"* (which means *"My God, my God, why have you*

forsaken me?)” The psalmist writes, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish? My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, but I find no rest.”

It is then that all four Gospels speak of Jesus giving up His Spirit with Luke recording that *Jesus called out with a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit”* and John recording that *Jesus said, “It is finished. With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit”*

The Synoptic Gospels speak of the temple curtain being torn at the moment of Jesus giving Himself up. Matthew writes: *At that moment the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth quaked and the rocks were split.* The Book of Hebrews identifies the torn curtain as the one at the entrance to the temple's Most Holy Place that was only accessible to the High Priest on the Day of Atonement to make sacrifices for the people. The curtain is symbolic of Jesus' torn body, where the tearing of the curtain points to a key consequence of Jesus' sacrificial death: Christians, no longer cut off from God, can come freely before God's throne of grace in heaven (Hebrews 4:14-16). We have such a high priest, *one who is seated* at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven. (Hebrews 8:1)

Afterwards, the Synoptic Gospels speak of the conversion of the centurion exclaiming, *“Surely this man was the Son of God!”* All four Gospels identify those who were present. Matthew, Mark and Luke speak of many women watching from a distance who had followed Jesus from Galilee to care for his needs. Included were Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of James the younger and Joseph and Salome, the mother of the disciples James and John. John writes that near the cross stood His mother Mary, his mother's sister Mary, wife of Clopas, Mary Magdalene and the disciple whom he loved (John). Here John writes: *he said to her “Woman, here is your son,” and to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.*

John concludes the story noting the fulfillment of scripture: *But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water.* From Psalm 34:20: *He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken.* From Zechariah 12:10: *And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn.*

Thank you for this love, Lord
Thank you for the nail pierced hands
Washed me in Your cleansing flow
Now all I know
Your forgiveness and embrace (Worthy is the Lamb)

A song to reflect and pray on:

[\(17\) WORTHY IS THE LAMB, by Darlene Zschech - YouTube](#)

Looking ahead – Sunday January 29

Second window from rear on right side facing altar (Lower Medallion) – William Carey – Father of Modern Missions