

Passion / Palm Sunday

April 5, 2020

Rev. Ken Wratten at St. Luke's

Matt 21:1-11

Triumphal entry into Jerusalem

Isaiah 50:4-9a

It is the Lord God who helps me; who will declare me guilty?.

Psalms 31:9-16

My times are in your hand.

Philippians 2:5-11

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.

Matthew 27:11-54

Passion narrative

Our older daughter Candace was two months old before she finally weighed six pounds so we could bring her home from the hospital. The following summer she was still a very little girl. We decided to go to a lake near Syracuse, NY, and have a picnic. As Ruth walked along, carrying Candace in her arms, as she took a step, her foot hit against a block of concrete, something that looked like the edge of an old abandon sidewalk, almost completely covered in the sand. She went flying toward the cement, with Candace's head leading the way. Ruth pushed out her elbow, and took the full force of her fall on her elbow. She took a huge gash out of her arm-she still has the scar.

Ruth knew what price Candace would have paid if she hadn't done something to stop what was going to happen. **Think back to sacrificial giving you have done** for people you love.

- Plans for a vacation put aside in order to buy a special birthday gift or Christmas present for your children;
- Wanting to buy that new car; set aside to pay for your child's tuition to college;
- Years caring for a parent or child who is not able to care for themselves;"

In the Covid-time where we find ourselves now – this sacrifice might be sharing paper products or sanitizing supplies, or eggs with an elderly neighbor who shouldn't be in public places to buy them.

These are only a few examples of a life of servanthood; a life that Jesus taught is at the heart of God's personality, and that we are asked to live into.

And so we hear the stories in Scripture of Holy Week. In two short passages in the Bible, life has turned upside down:

Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, being treated like an arriving king;
People shouting: Hosanna in the highest.

Then suddenly the conditions are changed; the bottom falls out;

There are no more lake-side, spiritually lifting, motivational teachings by this gentle rabbi, Jesus. The disciples and Jesus arrive in Jerusalem, where he is arrested, sentenced on false charges-to die, endures suffering that wrenches at our hearts just to read about, followed by brutal crucifixion, and then death.

We know that resurrection happens, but not today.

The clock stops today, mid-stroke, for us to zoom in on the meaning of these 5 days in Jerusalem (what we call Palm Sunday through Maundy Thursday).

Jesus had predicted his passion 3 times; and yet he never veered from the course that took him to Jerusalem; and Golgotha. What would make a man do that?

In *Mere Christianity*, C S Lewis wrote: “You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.”

The reality that strikes us in the events of this week is how **out of control** everything seems to have gone. Imagine how chaotic things felt to **Peter (who denied** the very person he had called the Messiah), to **Mary his mother**, to **Simon of Cyrene** (imagine how his life was changed forever). **But through what we see as chaos, God’s plan was being fulfilled. God took this chaos to bring transformation.**

Jesus knew months earlier (maybe more), that this time was coming; three times saying, (Luke 9:22) “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.”

He had lots of chances to stay in Galilee, to keep clear of Jerusalem, but he kept directing his travel to Jerusalem.

He could have pleaded his innocence to the Sanhedrin, and to Pilate, but he never said a word in his own defense.

He had the power to step down off the cross, if he would only set aside his humanity.

What would make Jesus turn down these chances to be safe and go home?

Paul answered this question (Romans 5:7): “Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But **God demonstrated his own love for us in this:** While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” **Through the chaos, God’s love could be revealed to us. Is our chaos now a time to see God more clearly?**

John 10:17,18: Jesus said, “The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life, only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.”

When we read Jesus’ own words, we see that he knew exactly what he was doing.

Jesus knowingly came to Jerusalem, and offered himself up.

What would make a man (or a woman) do that?

Ruth willingly drove her arm into a concrete slab to protect Candace from head or brain damage.

In our lives of ‘shelter in place’, you and I can watch every movie on Prime Video, or we can **form a phone list** of people on our heart, and call 2 or 3 of them every day, going through the list once a week, just to let them know that we are thinking of them.

We can send **‘thank you’ notes to the hospitals;**
say ‘thank you’ to the **grocery clerks** who are restocking shelves every night;
and to the **bank tellers, and restaurant take-out people** – that we appreciate what they are doing for us.

We can **set aside a space in our home during this coming week** to serve as a small altar, to show our family, and to remind ourselves, that **God’s plan for us is NOT going to be overtaken by COVID-19.**

Jesus knew why he was here, what role he had to play in order to teach us to be in a relationship with God that produces fulfillment, purpose, and **setting one more piece of this broken world back in place.**

Maybe this time we are in offers us the important, God-honoring role we can play...

As we fight our way through this pandemic, **it can be our time** – if we choose to make GOOD USE of it – **to serve in creative ways, to reject any feelings of agitation or irritability** from being stuck indoors,
but to use our time engaged in writing notes,
making phone calls,
talking through this time with our family and best friends,
staying connected, keeping healthy habits.

You and I give honor to what Jesus did every time we give of ourselves.

If your sacrifice in this pandemic is wearing you down, I pray that this Holy Week **will build you up.**

If your sacrifice feels like it happens in a vacuum, that no one seems to care, I pray that this Holy Week **confirms God's pride in you.**

If the sacrifices you are making are causing you to lose sight of where God is in it all, I pray that God's Spirit **will re-charge your spirit.**

Remember the instructions from our Scriptures: "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus."

I pray that you may have a blessed, and safe, and healthy Holy Week.
Amen.