



SAINT LUKE'S

WHAT IS LEFT TO BE SAID?

PALM SUNDAY
YEAR B

ISAIAH 50:4-9A
PSALM 31:9-16
PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11
MARK 14:1-47

A SERMON BY THE REV. BO REYNOLDS

MARCH 25, 2018

Palm Sunday is, in our observance, an exercise in contrasts. No sooner have the cries of ‘Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!’ stopped ringing in our ears before we are swept away as the multitude calls out for the release of Barabbas and the crucifixion of Jesus. We have just enough time to bless the coming kingdom of our ancestor David before a full throated proclamation “We have no king but Caesar” by the crowds as recounted in John’s gospel.

We will choose, over the next week, to reflect again, in greater detail, on that which we have just heard: Our Lord gathered round the table with his disciples, their supper, his agony in the garden and betrayal, his trial and torturous death. It comes upon us with a frightening speed, the holiest week of our year; but this, **this**, is the moment of silence before the great plunge.

And in this silence, I want to sit, and recall how quickly the cries of the crowd changed. I spent a good deal of this week struck by the breakneck speed of it all as I read the texts before us. This is as a moment of unveiled clarity for Jesus in his public ministry, an unparalleled declaration of his Messianic mission, and the crowds of Jerusalem clearly recognized this...and yet, within a matter of days, they publicly demanded his execution for the sake of political expediency. Lest we easily distinguish ourselves from the mixed crowd, look at the disciples: The very men granted unparalleled access to Christ’s divinity and majesty are the same ones to forsake, betray, and deny him. These actions exemplify in the clearest manner the nature of what we mean by

the word 'transgression': To look that which is **Good** directly in the eye, and to knowingly turn away.

I hope that through the course of Lent, we have developed enough self-reflection to recognize the capacity for this fickle, self-allegiance within ourselves. How often have we clearly seen the Good that God has intended for our lives and chosen to walk in the other direction? How quickly have we discarded the palm branches of our allegiance to Christ's work in the people and world around us and run towards a more expedient option?

Yet the longer I focus on the fickle crowd, on my fickle heart, the more my gaze is drawn to something else. The thought begins to creep in to my mind, a growing realization voiced by the prophet Isaiah: "... therefore I have set my face like flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame; he who vindicates me is near." Change your focus now; look not at the crowd, but at the man riding towards us.

He who is **Goodness** itself looks us directly in the eye, and knowingly rides forward.

Christ knew how quickly this crowd would turn on him, how fast his disciples would run given the chance. And yet he rode forward.

He knew the betrayal and excruciating pain which awaited him, and yet "he gave his back to those who struck him, and his cheeks to those who

pulled out his beard; he did not hide his face from insult and spitting.”

And yet, in spite of this, broken, he says “Take, this is my body; this is my blood of the new covenant.”

This is **tenacious Love**, God’s Love, which pursues us in spite of how quickly we turn away, pursues us when, knowing the damage we intend to inflict, offers itself to be broken. As clearly as the crowds and disciples saw Christ for who he was in that moment, Christ clearly sees us, with all of our complexity and brokenness, our fears and our wounds, and still he sets his face like a flint and rides toward us. As Shusaku Endo wrote in his novel *Silence*, “Christ did not die for the good and beautiful. It is easy enough to die for the good and beautiful; the hard thing is to die for the miserable and corrupt.”

This is tenacious Love that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

This reminder is not a sort of back-door brow-beating (“How fortunate that God deigns to love a wretch like you”) but rather the most hopeful of proclamations: No matter the darkness we find in our own hearts, no matter the emotional or mental or physical wounds which ail us, no matter the pain, no matter the rejection, Christ sees you clearly and continues to choose, there on that cross, here on this altar, to offer Himself in brokenness, for your brokenness. Christ willingly, for the joy set before him, sets his face continually to enter into the place of our brokenness, to suffer brokenness himself in the deepest act of solidarity

with human existence that we might know the healing touch of God's love. He chooses the rejection, so that you can find home within the wide expanse of his embrace.

As we draw nearer to the cross this next week, cling to this Hope; do not let it go. For it is this broken vulnerability which will destroy the gates of Death...but not yet. Between now and Easter, the light of this tenacious Love will be what guides us through the darkness of the days ahead...bringing us into the wholeness of Resurrected Life.

AMEN

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