

PALM SUNDAY 3/28/21

ISIAH 50:4-9a MARK 11:1-11; PSALM 31:9-16,

PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11; MARK 14:1-15:47

GOOD MORNING

I DO NOT NEED TO GIVE YOU A PROLOGUE TO TIE THE LESSONS TOGETHER – WE ARE HERE TO CELEBRATE AND TO MORN. IS THAT EVEN POSSIBLE? I HAVE ALWAYS THOUGHT THAT WE ARE CELEBRATING CHRIST’S RECOGNITION AS THE MESSIAH BUT YET WE GO DEEPLY INTO THE REST OF THE WEEKS’ PASSIONS. I CAN ONLY ADD A FEW THOUGHTS TO WHAT WE HAVE ALREADY HEARD ---

IN MY RESEARCH FOR THIS WEEK, I CAME ACROSS THE SENTENCE: (JESUS) IS THE STEEL BAND OF TRUTH THAT LASHES US ALL TOGETHER.” THE FIRST IMAGE THAT CAME INTO MY MIND WAS A LITERAL “STEEL BAND”, THE KIND YOU HEAR PLAYING IN THE CARIBBEAN ISLANDS. I THOUGHT ‘GREAT IMAGE!’ BUT THEN I REALIZED IT WAS REFERRING TO THE TYPE OF BAND THAT HOLDS BUNDLES OR BARRELS TOGETHER. BUT I LIKE MY FIRST THOUGHT BETTER – JESUS,

THE JOYFUL, ENGAGING, CAN'T-BE-IGNORED LEADER WHO BRINGS MUSIC, CREATIVITY AND SOMETHING DIFFERENT INTO OUR LIVES – A GIFT THAT BINDS US TOGETHER IN LOVE, AS THE HYMN CELEBRATES.

PALM SUNDAY: JESUS LEADS THE PARADE INTO JERUSALEM. A STEEL BAND WOULD HAVE BEEN A WONDERFUL ACCOMPANIMENT, SOMETHING NEW, A SOUND THAT WOULD ADD TO THE EXCITEMENT, THE CONFUSION OF ROBES AND PALM BRANCHES, THE SHOUTING OF HOSANNA! OUT OF MY MEMORY COMES AN ANCIENT PAINTING THAT DEPICTED A CROWD WITH TAMBORINES AND DRUMS AND THE LIKE, DANCING AND STREWING THE BRANCHES AND FLOWERS BEFORE HIM – AND JESUS ON A YOUNG DONKEY COLT.

TRY TO REMEMBER WHAT A DONKEY LOOKS LIKE – NOW THAT THERE ARE SO FEW OF THEM LEFT – MY IMAGE IS THE YOUNG BURROS IN OUR OWN SOUTHERN NEVADA. BUT THIS DONKEY IS NOT OLD, STUBBORN, OR VICIOUS THAT WOULD GIVE YOU A KICK WHEN YOU LEAST EXPECTED, BUT A YOUNG ONE WITH HIS EARS UP LIKE AN ANTENNAE. HE

LIVES ON A MEAGER DIET, IS HARDWORKING AND HAS A QUICK, CHEERFUL TROT. THERE ARE HUNDREDS OF ANIMALS MORE BEAUTIFUL, MORE DEFT AND STRONG. BUT IT WAS A DONKEY NOT A BEAUTIFUL WHITE ARABIAN STALLION, CHRIST CHOSE WHEN HE PRESENTED HIMSELF TO THE PEOPLE AS KING IN RESPONSE TO THEIR ACCLAMATION. FOR JESUS HAS NO TIME FOR CALCULATIONS, FOR SHREWDNESS, FOR THE CRUELTY OF COLD HEARTS, FOR ATTRACTIVE BUT EMPTY BEAUTY. WHAT HE LIKES IS THE CHEERFULNESS OF A YOUNG HEART, A SIMPLE STEP, A NATURAL VOICE, CLEAN EYES, AND ATTENTION TO HIS AFFECTIONATE WORD OF ADVICE. THAT IS HOW HE REIGNS IN THE SOUL

THE HYMN IN THE LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS EXPLAINS THAT BY EMPTYING HIMSELF TO EXPERIENCE A CRIMINAL'S DEATH ON A CROSS, JESUS WAS FULFILLING THE FATHER'S WILL THAT HIS DISHONORABLE DEATH BECAME A DEMONSTRATION OF THE GLORY OF GOD. BEING ONE WITH THE FATHER, JESUS MADE CLEAR THAT EQUALITY WITH GOD DOES NOT CONSIST OF GRASPING A PRIZE, BUT IN MAKING

GOD KNOWN TO US BY TAKING ON OUR HUMANITY. THUS EVERY KNEE SHOULD BOW AND EVERY TONGUE CONFESS THAT JESUS IS LORD, TO THE GLORY OF GOD THE FATHER.... THIS SUNDAY, AS IF HE SUDDENLY COMING TO HIS SENSES, JESUS ENTERS JERUSALEM, HAILED BY THE CROWDS WHO WANT TO MAKE HIM INTO THE TRIUMPHAL KING WHO WILL SAVE THEM FROM ROME. BUT JESUS DOESN'T CARE. HE IS ALREADY WALKING AWAY FROM OUR SHOUTS OF HOSANNA. HE IS MOVING TOWARD THE MEAL HE MOST LONGS FOR, THE LAST ONE, WHEN HE'LL KNEEL DOWN LIKE A SERVANT TO WASH HIS FRIENDS FEET. HE'S WALKING TOWARD OUR ANGRY SHOUTS OF "CRUCIFY HIM!" AND TOWARD OUR BETRAYALS, AS ONE BY ONE WE ABANDON HIM TO TORTURE AND DEATH; HE IS WALKING FORWARD TOWARD THE EDGE OF THE WORLD. AND NONE OF IT CAN STOP HIM. HE JUMPS OFF THE EDGE, ONTO THE CROSS. AND INTO GOD'S TIME. LIFE, ETERNAL. THE LIFE WE ARE LIVING TODAY. WHICH MEANS, IN A PRETTY UNSETTLING WAY, HOLY WEEK CAN'T BE ABOUT A STORY THAT TOOK PLACE IN THE PAST, OR A MERE REMBRANCE, OR A HISTORICAL RE-ENACTMENT.

IT'S ABOUT THE KIND OF LIFE JESUS MAKES POSSIBLE FOR ALL OF US RIGHT NOW.

THAT LIFE DEMANDS A DIFFERENT MIND THAN THE ONE I GENERALLY USE. MY OWN MIND WANTS TO SHOUT HOSANNAS IN A HAPPY CROWD WAVING PALMS, AND LATER ON BE ABLE TO BLAME THAT OTHER CROWD, THE RULING JEWS, FOR ALL THE BAD STUFF THAT HAPPENS. MY OWN MIND WANTS TO CLAIM JESUS AS MY FRIEND AND ME AS HIS PERSONAL FAVORITE AND PRETEND I WON'T BETRAY HIM, LATER, LIKE HIS OTHER FRIENDS. I WANT TO ACT AS IF I'M SOMEHOW SEPARATE FROM ALL THE OTHER SUFFERING, SINFUL SOULS JESUS POURS HIMSELF OUT FOR; DISCIPLES AND EXECUTIONERS, CHEERING AND JEERING CROWDS; EACH ONE OF YOU.

SO IT'S REALLY HARD FOR ME TO WALK WITH JESUS IN A MANNER WORTHY OF THE GOSPEL. SURE, I WANT FORGIVENESS; BUT I DON'T NECESSARILY WANT TO ADMIT HOW VIOLENT MY IMPULSES CAN BE, HOW CAPABLE I AM OF YELLING "CRUCIFY." SURE, I WANT NEW LIFE, BUT I DON'T WANT TO SIT ABANDONED IN A GARDEN, BE HUMILIATED

AND HURT AND KILLED, TO GET THERE. I WANT TO HANG ON TO MY OWN POWER, AND SAVE MYSELF, RATHER THAN EMPTY MYSELF LIKE JESUS. I KNOW PALM SUNDAY'S EXCITING, BUT I ALSO HAVE A FEELING IT'S GOING TO GET PRETTY DARK OVER THE NEXT WEEK, BEFORE ITS'S TIME FOR EASTER.

EXCEPT – EXCEPT THAT WE'RE ON GOD'S TIME NOW. AND IT TURNS OUT I DON'T HAVE TO JUMP OFF THE EDGE OF THE WORLD ALONE, BECAUSE JESUS ALREADY HAS. HIS ABIDING LOVE IS EVERYWHERE. THE GOOD NEWS IS THAT THERE'S NOTHING LEFT FOR ME TO DO THROUGH MY OWN ANXIOUS EFFORTS AT SELF-IMPROVEMENT. THERE'S NOTHING LEFT FOR ANY OF US TO DO. GOD IS ALWAYS MOVING ALL HUMANITY CLOSER TO GOD, WITH THE ENDLESS LOVE OF OUR FRIEND AND SAVIOR JESUS LIGHTING THE WAY FOR US, FROM THE CROSS.

AMEN