

Palm Sunday 2022

The Church of the Redeemer, Greenville, SC

April 10, 2022

The Rev. Catherine L. Tatem

Psalm 118: 1-2, 18-19

Luke 19:28-40

Isaiah 50:4-9a

Psalm 31:9-16

Philippians 2:5-11

Luke 22:14-23:56

The last few weeks we have been immersed in stories about wastefully extravagant love: in a father's celebration for a son who returned home; in an anointing with costly perfume anointing Jesus' feet. It is only God who knows how to love so extravagantly – so much love poured out that to us it seems wasteful. Simultaneously, however, God's love is both outlandishly abundant ... and never enough for a world fraught with war, disease, and hunger. For our hearts, that want to be with Jesus, and then deny him in fear.

Our deep call this week is to walk deeply in love with Jesus, Jesus who is loving us all the way to the cross. Those words, all the way to the cross, are overused, maybe, but this week they are real. We begin with a parade that echoes fulfillment of scripture from Zechariah:

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!
Lo, your king comes to you;
triumphant and victorious is he,
humble and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey. (Zechariah 9:9)

It's not much of a parade, compared to the one going on across town. You know the one – the one for Pontius Pilate, where King Caesar is. This prophet Jesus, how will he save us? We are filled with hope, and love! The whole multitude of the disciples begins to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, saying,

"Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!
Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!"

The psalmist sings the same words:

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord; we bless you from the house of the Lord – and that is us, praising God in this house of the Lord, today.

And we've heard those words before ...

An angel appeared to the shepherds "keeping watch over their flock by night;" and the angel said:

'Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ... And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,
'Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favours!'

We are present with a different throng now, and the words are the same – words of praising God: glory to God in the highest heaven! Luke wants us to know that in the whole span of Jesus life, the Lord is acting, just as God acts throughout our lives, from birth to death to resurrection. And to get to new life, we have to die: die to self, die to glory, and walk humbly with our Lord.

Holy Week is a walk of love. Christ loves us: in bread, in wine, in servanthood; when we deny knowing Jesus, and when we betray him. Even the criminal hears: “today you will be with me in Paradise.” Words from the cross, and those other words:

“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”

We are welcomed to the table. Take, eat. Allow love so vast to pour over you, love so strong you can taste it. Bread. Wine. Jesus loves you.

God loves you,

Through his son Jesus who follows God’s will, God’s call on his life, to perfection, in agony, so that we will live forever with him. May we learn to follow God’s call on our lives.

God loves you,

In the way God loves all disciples, who do not understand, who do the best that we can in each moment, and who become the church. May we learn that current failures do not banish us from the kingdom of God, and the we are the church.

God loves us through Simon of Cyrean, who bore on his back the cross of our Lord. What part of Jesus’ cross do we carry?

God loves us through Joseph of Arimathea, a good and righteous man, who buried good and righteousness.

God loves us in the women who follow Jesus from Galilee, prepare a proper burial, and proclaim the Lord. May we also follow, prepare, and proclaim.

God is loves us through the proclamation of God’s love by outsiders like the Centurion, who proclaim God in Christ to all who will hear. May we have ears to hear.

Our palm procession is our first act of Holy Week. Through the liturgy, we show our willingness to take up the cross and to follow Jesus to glory. The path is one of sorrow, travesties of justice, misuse of, and the hunger for, power. The bedrock of our story is that this is God’s story, and God loves us so much that sin and death have no power over our lives. Nothing will keep love hidden. As Jesus says, If these were to be silent, the stones would shout out God’s love through Jesus Christ.

Be present this Holy Week. Enter the meditation on Jesus’ passion, death, and resurrection, and make it your priority. Come worship. Pray. Fast. Hold onto your expectant joy in this solemn approach to Easter. Live the story. It will change your life.

Together, we walk in love, as Christ loves us. Let the stones shout with us.