

†Will's Sermon

Sunday, March 16, 2008

Sunday of the Passion: Palm Sunday

Lectionary Readings: Matthew 21: 1-11; OT – Isaiah 50: 4 – 9a; Psalm 31: 9 – 16; NT – Philippians 2: 5 – 11; Gospel: John 19: 13 – 22

We join thousands and thousands of pilgrims going to Jerusalem.

To get an idea of what it was like, consider what Charlotte would be like if we had Race Week, the NCAA Tournament, a Panthers playoff game with the Steelers, Tiger Woods for a PGA event, Special Olympics and a 10K race all at the same time.

Jerusalem was a madhouse. Lots of extra security, lots of vendors or every corner, lots of robbers, thousands and thousands of pilgrims. The City Council of Roman and Jewish rulers loved it and hated it. A very, very lucrative week; a very expensive and potentially violent week. Yet, this was the business of Jerusalem. This was business as usual – successful life demanded this level of activity. People would die; folks would take little care of themselves in order to make hay while the sun shines. It was the Jerusalem way.

Is our American way much different? Each day our news is filled with the downfall of men and women who give it all for success and power. Powers and principalities push each of us. Folks like to consider this a Christian culture. Not. This, at best, is a Republic, led by the satin glove dictator “Bubba Profit.” Sure the goal of profit may kill citizens but that’s business as usual. Approved untested drugs, cigarettes that, of course, are not addictive and on and on.

You and I live here. We try to make it through each day. There is a cost – physically, emotionally, mentally and socially – babies, children, the elderly, no one is free from bondage. If one attempts to leave Egypt, if one detaches from the total connection with business as usual, there will be negative and positive consequences.

Every few years there’s a big deal about simplifying one’s life. The bottom line is letting go of needs and wants in a slow methodical way. We detox and prevent a relapse.

In order to shift our allegiance from Bubba Profit – the American Way – from business as usual we will have to have daily encouragement. Powers and

principalities and our seemingly absolute dependence on this way will not show us a new path.

Folks with a dramatic physical event are the lucky ones. They are like Paul on the way to Damascus. They are literally knocked off the merry-go-round. For some, the physical message is more powerful than the desire to take a few more rides on that merry-go-round.

So here we are, riding our Lexus into Jerusalem. Here we are, entering the world of Bubba Profit. We will come face to face with spiritual – slash – worldly reality. (There is no difference.)

To be human and Christian we will face death. We will know the deep fears of losing ourselves, our place in the grand scheme of things, our ranking, our hard-won identities, and some good friends will become scarce.

Jerusalem is the place of pilgrims, yet so it is the last days of many, many prophets and mystics. Going to Jerusalem will change us.

Back in the day the person prepared three years to try and be ready for this new way of life. On Saturday night they were baptized into Christ's death and reborn in His Resurrection.

We too are baptized and we come here for encouragement to live into our new way of life.

We come and receive bread and wine as we remember He in us and we in Him.

This is the joyful Gospel Message. Business as usual, darkness, death, bondage, blindness, disease, separation from the love of God – all life has to offer has never defeated the eternal living presence of love and justice. Emmanuel is with us.

We go to Jerusalem as the living presence of God. We return to Central Avenue as the living body of Christ.

Living into the living body of Christ is the desire of all Christians. It is our full baptismal promise to grow into the full statue of Christ. Now, you may realize that I have a hard time doing this. Yes.

That is why I love our confession and absolution. We leave things undone and I may even do something not right. I do not respect folks on occasion. I have erred and strayed from the ways. We all deny. We all drift back into business as usual. Yet, we are invited to see ourselves as members of God's Family.

Invited to see God come to give us a large hug. Welcome. We are reminded of who we are. We realign our allegiance.

One way we can encourage ourselves in our new way of life is with daily prayers. Let us begin each day saying, “We in Him and He in us.” Let us give thanks for our ability to see ourselves as the living presence of God. We can ask for the willingness to be honest, compassionate, and seek the welfare of others.

As our Muslim brothers and sisters take time to pray several times each day, we can too. Our culture can never stop, but we can focus our hearts and minds to our prayers.

Here we are resurrection people. We give thanks as we remember Emmanuel – God is with us. Then we leave this place renewed, nourished, and open to the eternal presence of Love.

As we leave this place, we face all the world has to offer. We will do the best we can. But we alone are no match for it all.

When we make our Baptismal promises each one ends – “I will, with God’s help.”

We will receive bread and wine, we will again make present the living Christ. He in us and we in Him, and we will carry our presence of God to Galilee, to Jerusalem, to Central Avenue, and wherever we go,

We will go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

†Amen