

SERMON: PALM SUNDAY (4-9-17)

PRAYER (4-9-17) Dear God, The attacks on Coptic Christian churches in Egypt this Palm Sunday are reminiscent of the positioning that took place when Jesus entered Jerusalem. As he entered in peace, the forces of secular power and oppression came from the opposite direction. The circumstances are different today but the dynamic is the same. The witness of Jesus teaches us that challenging the world the way it is always comes from those who want to make the world the way it can be. Be with us this day, this holy week and through the resurrection that promises new life. The world is in transition, a constant churning that presents opportunities for compassion, empathy and human witness. Be with our country as it finds its way in the community of nations on a global scale. Be with each and every one of us, God, as we go about our lives, caring for one another and living in accordance with your will. This morning, God, we pray for all who ask for our prayers and pray for us.

MATTHEW (26: 14-27:66) There are several readings to choose from for Palm Sunday. Each one tells part of the story of what is going on this Holy Week. Each of the readings are in keeping with the history and tradition of our faith that is pieced together in the lectionary that provides us with a linear and coherent telling of the gospel.

Matthew gives us a good look at the events that led to the capture of Jesus and all that followed. Jesus knew his days were numbered when he entered Jerusalem, but he

went anyway. That's a big part of what it is to be a person of faith. When things are difficult, challenging and even risky, a person of faith acts in ways that are in keeping with the will of God.

It is possible to speculate, but hard to fathom what would have become of Jesus had Judas not sold him out to the religious leaders; who were threatened by the authenticity of Jesus. But we do know that Judas went to the high priests to see what they would give him to betray Jesus; by letting them know where they could find him. Jesus could have slipped away, but he did what we have come to expect of Jesus. He stood his ground and let history unfold.

From the time Judas made his deal for some money, until Jesus was sentenced, Jesus went about ministering to the people around him. He directed his disciples to prepare for the feast that would become known as the last supper. Jesus did not seek out an arena or some grandiose place to break bread with his disciples, he met them in their house to celebrate Passover. This tells us a lot about Jesus and what is expected of us. We are to gather together in his memory to nourish our bodies and our faith. And we are to hear the truth of what Jesus is saying to us. That's what Jesus did. He said what he knew to be true. He said he would be betrayed and he knew the betrayer. And Jesus did not back down when Judas tried to call his bluff. Jesus does not bluff. He knows. He puts all his chips on the table and plays the hand he is dealt.

Jesus knows us, just as he knew Peter who tried to convince Jesus that he would not deny him. Jesus knows that human beings under pressure and in fear will say and do most anything to avoid the consequences that Jesus faced. Peter is a good example of what it is like for a person who thinks of themselves in a certain way, but does not discover who they really are until the chips are down.

Jesus did not run or hide from his fate or his destiny. He allowed himself to be arrested. In this moment; in the encounter with the guards who came after him, Jesus is saying to the world: "Let's get on with it. Time's a-waisting. There is no point in prolonging the agony and the suffering of the world at the hands of rulers and oppressors that govern by force. Do not be afraid. Stand with God to demonstrate what is right and good and just and fair."

As the gospel lessons for this morning make clear, Jesus had a choice. Instead of raising an army and shedding blood to live another day, Jesus opts to shed his own blood to show us the way. The way to peace and understanding, once we get it that the killing of Jesus who is an innocent man, will not stand the test of time as the way to be. That is made clear when Jesus is taken before the teachers of the law and the elders of the faith; who were looking for false evidence against Jesus so they could put him to death.

Abraham Lincoln said that you can fool some of the people all of the time, and all of the people some of the

time, but you can't fool all of the people all of the time. As the gospel testifies, many people said things about Jesus that were not true, and no one provided evidence that Jesus had done anything wrong. That's why it is so important that we do not go along to get along by telling people what they want to hear, or believing things that are false. For the sake of our integrity and the life of our souls, it is up to us to discern and speak the truth. Judas found that out the hard way. When he realized what he had done, he killed himself.

Pilate, the governor who represented Caesar could find nothing wrong with anything Jesus had said or done. He knew that Jesus was not guilty, but he became complicit in the torture and death of Jesus by letting a mob of ordinary people decide the sentence of Jesus. That's not leadership. That's why leadership with integrity that applies both justice and mercy, and that makes decisions on the basis of reason, information and facts, in an atmosphere of good faith is critical to our understanding of what is real, what is true and what to believe. In the midst of conflicting information, it is up to us to discern for ourselves whether we are being lied to or bamboozled.

The gospel reveals that Judas, Pilate, the soldiers who crucified Jesus, and history came to realize that Jesus did not deserve to die. They knew that their involvement in his death was neither fair nor just. It was wrong. That sort of realization leads to redemption. When we own up to the worst in us, God is with us. It is up to us to do what only we can do, and that is to see ourselves as God sees us;

so we can choose to become the souls that God intends for us to be.

BENEDICTION: Jesus shows us who God is. It is up to us to show Jesus who we are. Amen. Peace be with you and go into the world in peace.