

Reflections

Connecting the True Word to Real Life

Palm/Passion Sunday: April 8-14, 2019



A Word of Introduction

We are drawing ever closer to Holy Week. It hardly seems possible. This year it feels as if I've yet to really get into the practice of Lenten discipline. That fact makes me want to make the most of the time that is left. Maybe you feel that way as well. If so, you're reading the right sheet of paper. This week's readings will take you closer to the way of the Cross. Come Sunday we will be celebrating Palm/Passion Sunday. The dual identification of this particular Sunday acknowledges the fact that the celebration that marks Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem is conducted in the shadow of the cross. Then again, some might argue that His entire life from Manger to Calvary was under the shadow of the Cross. You might want to consider that as you journey through this week in the company of these scriptures. The reflections that follow are based on this week's passages from the Revised Common Lectionary- a collection of scripture readings designed to take churches through the broad sweep of scripture over the course of three years. By studying these passages you will be joining a multitude of Christians around the globe who are reading the same parts of the Bible that you are. You can, of course, do these readings on your own and gain great benefit. Greater benefit still can be achieved by joining others to share your thoughts and reflections. Feel free to use these questions as a starting point for your own small group discussion. If there is enough interest I would be willing to lead or sit in with small groups when my schedule allows. Contact me via e-mail at dbagley@michiganumc.org to indicate your interest. You can also receive a daily dose of the reflections below along with some additional material by checking our Greater Southwest District Facebook Page each day. The prayers for morning and evening remain. Even if you have no trouble finding the words you need to pray, lifting up those of others might help your focus and expand your spirit. The morning and evening prayer this week come from St. Francis of Assisi. Choosing to spend time with this faithful follower of Jesus will put you in good company.

Passages for the Week

Isaiah 50: 4-9a, Psalm 31:9-16, Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29, Philippians 2:5-11, Luke 19:29-38

Prayers for the Week:

These prayers may be familiar to some of you. St. Francis was born the son of wealthy cloth merchants. In his youth he began to put aside the pursuits common to the well to do- a practice that raised concern and provoked derision among his friends. This came to a head one day when a beggar approached Francis while he was selling cloth for his father. Francis abandoned his stall, ran after the man and gave the man all he had in his pockets. Later, when some of his companions mockingly asked him whether he intended to marry, Francis responded, "yes, a fairer bride than any you have ever seen," meaning his "Lady Poverty". Soon after, Francis took vows

of extreme poverty and founded the Catholic Order that bears his name- the Franciscans. These missionaries followed Francis' example of connecting with the poor and finding the theophany of God in the created order. Among other things, Francis is remembered today for instituting the practice of the Holy Nativity as a means of communicating the circumstance of Jesus birth to common people. His dictum to his followers, "Preach the Gospel always, if necessary use words", is more often quoted than taken to heart. He is often depicted as being surrounded by birds or other wild creatures. Two of his prayers have achieved a prominent place in Christian memory, the "Prayer of St. Francis" (it begins: "Lord make me an instrument of your peace...") and his "Vocational Prayer". Portions of each serve as our prayers for the week this week. Those who are interested can find these prayers set to music. They make wonderful background for devotional reflection. Although there are many versions, John Michael Talbot offers some of the finest interpretations.

Morning Prayer (*This paraphrase of the Prayer of St. Francis was offered by Mother Teresa when she spoke before the UN in 1985*)

Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace.
That where there is hatred I may bring love,
That where there is wrong, I may bring the spirit of forgiveness,
That where there is discord, I may bring harmony,
That where there is error I may bring truth,
That where there is doubt I may bring faith,
That where there is despair I may bring hope,
That where there are shadows I may bring light,
That where there is sadness I may bring joy.
Lord, grant that I may seek rather to comfort than to be comforted,
To understand than to be understood,
To love than to be loved.
For it is by forgetting self that one finds.
It is by forgiving that one is forgiven,
it is by dying that one awakens to eternal life.
Amen.

Evening Prayer

Most High, Glorious God, bring light to the darkness of our souls. Give us a right faith, certain hope and perfect charity, so that we may always declare Your Holy and True Will. Amen.

Questions for Reflection

Day One: Monday, April 8

Set Like Flint - Read Isaiah 50:4-9a.

-This passage is part of the four servant songs found in a portion of the book of Isaiah known as The Book of Consolation (chapters 40-55). Although there is not any agreement on the part of

scholars as to who Isaiah is referring to as "the Servant", early Christians found evidence that they talked about Jesus. In fact, Jesus cites the passages from Isaiah as he speaks about himself. This passage is one he references after he has made up his mind to journey to Jerusalem even though he knows the fate that awaits him there. He says he has "set his face like flint" toward Jerusalem. His example and that of the "Servant" depicted in this passage offer a powerful witness for people of faith. What do you find here? How might the Servant's example- and that of Jesus- embolden and strengthen your own service to God? Can you imagine having the kind of resolve and commitment described here?

-Themes from this passage also echo through the writings of Paul. You see it quite clearly in the book of Romans. In Romans 8:33-34 Paul indicates that disciples of Jesus can have the same confidence as the Servant. This kind of confidence frees them to follow God through any circumstance. Do you possess this kind of confidence? What strengthens your confidence when dreams you thought secure fail to bear fruit?

Day Two: Tuesday April 9

This is the Day - Read Psalm 31:9-16.

-This Psalm was typically used in situations where a person had been accused of a crime. Christian believers saw in this particular passage a prophetic image of the plotting around Jesus' crucifixion. Other portions of this Psalm find their way onto Jesus' lips while he was on the cross. Do you think this Psalm anticipates events in Jesus' life? Why or why not?

-Although much of this Psalm is pretty bleak, do you find any word of hope? If so, what is it? In what kind of situations might it be of benefit to bring these words to mind and take them to heart?

Day Three: Wednesday, April 10

Let the Same Mind Be in You- Read Philippians 2:5-11

-It is a pretty tall order to allow the same mindset be in us that was displayed by Jesus. What characterizes such a mindset? What stands in the way of having such a mindset? When have conceit or pride kept you from letting that same mind be in you? When have you allowed a Christ like mind to shape your thoughts, actions and interactions? What was the outcome of practicing such Christlikeness?

Day Four: Thursday, April 11

This is the Day - Read Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29.

-In addition to those moments when you are in church, what are some things that cause you to say, "This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it? Are those occasions rare or common? Is there a mindset you might adopt that would help you encounter these moments more frequently?

-Parts of this Psalm find their way into the shouts of those welcoming Jesus into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. What do you think all the cheering was about? What were people hoping for? Can you think of anything that might prompt you to proclaim with similar good cheer and enthusiasm? Does our worship service contains such excitement? Why or why not?

-In what ways has the Lord your God become your salvation? Where are you in your life facing a situation that could move you to cry out to God, "Save now!" What keeps you from doing it?

Day Five: Friday, April 12

The Stones Would Shout- Read Luke 19:28-40

-Where do you think you would find yourself in the crowd lining the streets on that first Palm Sunday? Would it be a comfortable place for you to be? Where would you like to be?

-Our culture tries to get Jesus' disciples to stop, with a great deal of success. Where in our silence have other voices taken up the cry, "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord?" Where should we lift it up? What do you think we might achieve by doing so?

Responding to the Word

What does "obedience" mean in the context of your relationship with God? Is there some calling that God is inviting you to obey? What would being obedient mean for you?