

Year B, March 25, 2018  
Palm Sunday  
Christ Church, Mexia

What can one say after the dramatic reading of the passion gospel? If you are like me, your emotions and thoughts are racing – our moods have been whipped back and forth - from the joyous processional with palms and the singing of “All glory laud and honor” to hearing the grim reality of Golgotha. The author of Mark, in his customary simplicity and brevity, has recounted some of the most dramatic events of all time – certainly ones that have affected the world more than any other in the last 2000 plus years.

Katerina Whitley succinctly recalls most of the questions that we may be asking ourselves at this moment: “How can people be so cruel? How could the disciples have been so blind? (How could they have abandoned Jesus at his most vulnerable time?) We cringe at the hypocrisy of the high priests of the time. We are repelled by the fickle crowd (who turned a triumphant welcome of the entry into the city into shouts to crucify him). We are shocked, astounded, and then we come to our senses and realize that had we been present, we (could easily) have acted as they did.”

The only person in the story who seems to grasp the meaning and impact of what happened is a Roman Centurion, in all likelihood a pagan, who said at the moment Christ died: “Truly this man was God’s Son!” ...and the unspoken words - which scream louder than anything ever spoken and which reverberate throughout all creation and through all time since then ... and we crucified him! - we crucified him.

But this is not just a story of what happened 2,000 years ago and its aftermath, it reminds us of how we live today as a society. It reminds us that Jesus still suffers because of our moral compromises, for the problems of our society that are not unlike those in his. For example, our leadership at almost every level tends to protect those of position and privilege rather than the marginalized; justice is often skewed so that the marginalized receive harsher punishments; we accept the necessity of violence – and, yes, in some very few instances it is sadly necessary, but how often is violence our first option or our only option rather than the very last option?; we do not accept our responsibility for the way things are; and we often ignore suffering here at home and around the world.

Yes, we all have betrayed Jesus at some time, maybe often, maybe recently... That is a burden with which we must deal during this coming Holy

Week. It is easy to be dragged down by the negatives of this story – but let's not dwell on them. There is something else inherent in it.

... “The curtain of the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom” ... The curtain of the Temple in Jerusalem separated God from the people, it separated the space for the Holy of Holies from the rest of the Temple; only the High Priest could enter this area behind the curtain once a year on the Day of Atonement – nothing separates us from God now, thanks to Jesus!

As John Westerhoff III so eloquently explains the passion drama: “It is not a tragic tale but a majestic story of how Jesus’ passion and death serves God’s will and purpose. Jesus, the Christ of God, confronts principalities and powers that distort God’s reign, and through the mystery of his passion and death he fulfills the hopes of humanity for shalom. (And let me add: *Shalom* means completeness, wholeness, health, peace, welfare, safety, soundness, tranquility, prosperity, perfectness, fullness, rest, harmony, the absence of agitation or discord. The root verb means to be complete, perfect and full. For what else could we hope?). He continues ... (The passion narrative) is a great drama about the victory of good over evil, light over darkness, wholeness over brokenness, freedom over oppression, community over estrangement, love over hate, life over death. ... It is a marvelous story of how we live in the mysterious paradox of acknowledging the most awful realities of life, never surprised by the awful condition of this world, yet remaining full of awe at the transforming power of sacrificial love.” The kind of love Jesus demonstrates for us.

That’s why we keep retelling the story – reliving the story. It reminds us of how God takes the brokenness of us and the world into God’s self and makes all things new. That realization gives us the hope and courage to live our lives differently – we can accept our brokenness, offer it to God, and let the love of God transform us, so that we might better contribute to shalom here on earth.

In the name of the one God, the Creator, the Word and the Spirit.

Amen

