

March 25 Palm Sunday Manor Road United Church Rev. Debra K. Schneider

OLD TESTAMENT
SUNG RESPONSE
GOSPEL
REFLECTION

Isaiah 50: 4-9
When a Grain of Wheat
John 12:12-19
A Little Street Theatre

MV 125

Jesus seizes the moment. The word has spread. Crowds are running to meet him. They come carrying palm branches & raising their voices in the glad shout: "Hosannah! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord, The King of Israel." "Hosannah! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord, The King of Israel."

Jesus knows their hearts. He knows the dreams they carry--the grand hopes that pull them away from whatever they were doing to run out to meet him. They are looking for an earthly king—a powerful king—one who will lead Israel out of her bondage—and out from under the boot of her Roman Oppressors. They are looking for one who will raise a mighty army and defeat the enemies of Israel—the promised one who will restore and sit upon the throne of David.

Jesus knows the hopes they carry that day. He knows our hearts, our dreams and hopes too.

Jesus also knows what is in the heart of God. He knows the Kingdom that he represents does not operate in the ways of the kingdoms of this world. The Kingdom of God does not rule by military power and might. The Kingdom of God is not violent. It does not oppress its enemies. It is small. Lowly. Gentle. Resolute. Peaceable. Strong. It is everywhere... just waiting to rise up.

He also knows that any words he might speak, will be drowned out by the noisy crowd; so he casts his mind back over the ancient scriptures of his people—the scriptures that he knows so well. He remembers the words of an ancient prophet by the name of Zechariah: ¹⁵ "Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion. Look, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!"

Without saying a word, Jesus is seeking to recast the expectations of the people--to bring them in line with the wisdom of the God who does not meet violence with violence—but with gentleness, humility, and loving service.

Jesus—a man of few possessions, rides into Jerusalem on a borrowed donkey colt... trusting that when everything is said and done and the people look back on this fateful day, they too will remember these ancient words, and begin to grasp his message. Trusting that they too remember the ancient words that echo again and again and again throughout our scriptures. "Do not be afraid." "Do not be afraid." "Do not be afraid."

GOSPEL
REFLECTION

John 12:20-27
Longing

Rumours about Jesus-- of his healing and life-giving powers are reaching beyond the bounds of Israel. Spiritual seekers are coming from afar and asking to see him. Their arrival seems to come as a signal to which Jesus immediately responds, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be Glorified." Over time, these words will come to be understood to say: "The time has come for the Son of Man to be lifted up (on the cross), ... to be raised up (in resurrection power), so that all might see and understand what true glory looks like;"

When Jesus says, "The time has come..." he turns his face resolutely towards Golgotha. The words of the ancient prophet Isaiah take on flesh and bone. As we listen again to Isaiah's voice, consider the challenges that lay before you and allow your own flesh and bone and spirit to take in

the strength, courage and determination they inspire. Hear the Word of the Lord through these ancient words, and let the spirit whisper through them —“Be not afraid.” Isaiah says:

“The Holy One has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I did not turn backward. ...The Holy One helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame; the One who vindicates me is near. Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who are my adversaries? Let them confront me. 9 It is the Holy One of Israel who helps me; who will declare me guilty?”

Jesus sets his face like flint towards Golgotha. The time for teaching, preaching, feeding and healing the crowds has come to a close. Now, he turns towards those closest to him—those who have left everything to follow him—those who will be completely undone by the events soon to unfold.

In these final days and hours he draws his dear friends close. He promises them that though he will and must leave them, he will not leave them orphans. He assures them that the Spirit at work in him--will well up from deep within them, and will empower them, to carry on his Kingdom work in the world. The movement that has been set in motion through his life cannot be reliant upon the words and actions of a single person.

The time has come—in truth the time has always come when each one of them, and all of us, must learn to listen for and hear the voice of Divine Wisdom echoing down through ancient scriptures; whispering in the silence of our hearts, spoken in the words of others, and enacted by us all.

He reminds them and us: “ Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”

Jesus is the grain that falls into the earth; and as the disciples, and their disciples, and their disciples seek to follow in his way, each generation will discover anew what it means to lay down our lives, and to take them up again.

Each generation of disciples will plant seeds and harvest the nourishing fruit of the Kingdom of God. Like grapes on a vine, pears on a tree, or wheat in a field...those who catch sight of the vision of God’s In-dwelling Kingdom will bring strength, beauty and life to the world--offering to all who have eyes to see, glimpses of the Divine dream for our world— and a deep joy.

GOSPEL

John 19:16b-22

REFLECTION

Golgotha

“Jesus of Nazareth. The King of the Jews.” These are the words inscribed upon the cross of Jesus for all to see. They are written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek—that all who pass by might understand Pilate’s intent.

Pilate has done their dirty work. “I find this man guilty of no crime worthy of death,” followed by a begrudging, “Take him out.” “Crucify him.”

It cuts again his grain somehow... and now whether in resignation, in anger or in regret we’ll never know.. but Pilate takes a brief stand: “What I have written, I have written.”

For some reason I hear an irritable and sneering voice in my head... “Why don’t you cry about it.”