

We Don't Know What We Don't Know Until We Know It

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

Isaiah 50:4-9a

Luke 19:28-40

Philippians 2:5-11 (from Vanderbilt Divinity Library)

2:5 Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

2:6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,

2:7 but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form,

2:8 he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death-- even death on a cross.

2:9 Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name,

2:10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

2:11 and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Palm Sunday is such a unique day in the church year. It is this odd day of rejoicing and foreboding. I have heard *Advent* being described as that moment on the diving board when you jump up and you are at the highest point – that millisecond of waiting and anticipation before the descent and dive into the water. If that is true, then Palm Sunday is that millisecond after, when you are at the highest point and spotting where you are going to aim for the plunge.

And we all know the plunge is coming. We want to celebrate along with the multitudes on the path down from the Mount of Olives, but unlike them, frozen in time in the story, we know what is coming afterwards. We know that there will be a sudden awakening, a painful apparent fall, and a resurrection of their awareness of who Jesus really is and what kind of God we really have.

The Disciples and the people throwing down their cloaks and palms thought they knew what kind of a Messiah Jesus was. This triumphant entry was to be the beginning of a push for political power, and in a short time that dream imploded. So why include this teaser of a day in our church calendar? Why celebrate this day with the red colors of the Paraments, the palms, the songs?

We *can* celebrate this day because we know what the triumphant entry really was about, and we wish for Jesus to have his big day – sort of like the Wedding ceremony being the big day for a couple – before the reality of the challenges of the marriage comes to light! Knowing what pain he has to face soon enough, I wish for him all the pleasures of this day possible! To revel in the glory – to say with confidence that he has no control over humanity – they are responding honestly to their awareness of the truth.

Those who are calling out and acting out their faith *know something* that they didn't know before. They know that he is the Messiah – they just don't know the deeper truth and the true nature of God and this Messiah yet.

And I think that is part of what causes them so much shock and grief when Jesus ends up being taken and crucified. They knew there was something mysterious and wonderful and powerful about that man – but the logical results that they counted on, were not anywhere near the truth. And that can really shake one to the core. It makes one doubt their own perspectives; doubt their own power to know anything for real.

The dear Lord knows that I have had these moments numerous times in my life. I would be traveling along in my daily interactions and suddenly realize that there was something amiss between what I thought would happen and what really happened. It usually happens for me when I make certain assumptions about human nature. Something inside of me wants to be prepared for the worst, so I project negative characteristics to a person, and am then faced with the reality that that person is nothing like I imagined. Or

visa-versa – I expect something wonderful and am faced with pain. And then I kick myself – because I think I should have known better.

That is when I feel the most vulnerable – so weak – I hate myself for being so stupid, when the reality of the situation is – I couldn't possibly know what I don't know until I know it. Until I really know it! I may have been exposed to the truth about life thousands of times and then one day it hits me! And I know the truth. And then I start kicking myself about not knowing things before I know them – and that is only counter productive.

Because the truth is – on those cognitive dissonant moments, we are acting from our own will and not in connection with God's will. We see things as we would have them fit into our experiences rather than trying to experience life through the grace of God. For God is grace. God didn't come to earth as a powerful military human in order to force his way on this earth. God came as a Peaceful King, allowing all to choose how they were going to react.

I believe I heard this example years ago from Billy Graham, where he compared God to a mother who receives flowers from her child. How much joy would it bring that mother to have the child say, "Here Mom, I brought you these flowers because I am afraid of you and was told that this is what I should do to gain favor with you"? Compare that with, "Here Mom, I brought you these flowers because I love you so much and want to show you how much I care."

That difference in foundation of faith is what Palm Sunday is all about – *are we* expecting a God that is militant and powerful – one that fits into the historical human power structure of judgment and punishment? Because if we are, we will be disappointed, as the followers of Jesus were, who spent this day crying out in joy and then sorely disappointed as each step of the passion began to unfold.

The truth is; we can never really know in our lifetime all that we think we should know. We will forever have moments of utter surprise. The very best that we can do is to walk through our lives leaving room in our thoughts and in our hearts for God. And when we experience those moments where we are once again surprised at what we didn't really know, accept the grace of a peaceful God who wants love to prevail, and offers us the freedom to do so, not a mandate and a threat.

Taking this day into consideration, where we witness the reality of ours being a non-violent Messiah over the concept of the militant King who was expected; let us look again at the Epistle text. There are some who feel that this is the closest thing to a Confession of Faith that we have in the Bible.

Because we have this human tendency to see life as a power struggle, and we would prefer the power of the owner over being the slave, that is when we are in most danger of thinking that we know something when we don't. Jesus showed us the way to be in connection with God's will, but most of us don't like it. Jesus, "emptied himself, taking the form of a slave . . . humbled himself and became obedient". Jesus was that rare example in this world of a person who was able to give his life for peace. Jesus made his own power so unimportant and God's grace and love and the power of mercy so vital, that his life was highly exalted. He didn't need to know anything before he knew it – he was following God's call and trusting.

Sharon H. Ringe, Professor of New Testament, at the Wesley Theological Seminary in DC writes:

Though [Christ's] journey involved 'emptying himself' of power and status, it is not the journey of a victim of someone else's oppressive policies or actions. Rather, it is a path freely chosen from a position of power. Christ begins in God's "form" and equal to God.

This embodied "Christ-mindedness" took Christ and would take the Philippians on a path contrary to the wisdom of the world in which they operated. Competition and the effort to acquire ever greater status and power rule the world of commerce, and from there the rest of our social interactions as well. One does not deliberately choose a downward spiral for one's life. *Indeed, success is often taken by people of faith to indicate that God is rewarding their diligence, and failure is often read by the same logic as the consequence of laziness, ineptitude, or the just punishment for some wrong done.* We identify more readily with the theology of Job's friends than with a theology of God's abundant grace!

“We identify more readily with the theology of Job's friends than with a theology of God's abundant grace!” It seems that we are called all the more to be aware on this Palm Sunday how different God's kingdom is than our own. Humans expect God to work one way, as Job's friends had, and the reality is very different.

We all, at some times more than others, need desperately God's grace and mercy, and still there are times when we cling to our earthly understandings and place *our perspectives* as priority over God's Grace. We think we know - but we don't. And when we do know that we don't know - there is the truth waiting for us - the truth of mercy and grace!

Amen!