

Giving Up

What a day!

In a political season where there's so much talk of losers and weaklings and America in decline, here are you strange people, gathering to worship, and to pledge your lives, to a loser, a weakling, one who is gobbled up by the powers of his day.

Are you sure this is where you want to be?

Is this the fellow you really want to follow?

These questions go right back to the very beginning, and Jesus is keenly aware of them, as he prepares his friends for what is coming; as his friends ask themselves the very same question: is this who I really want to hitch my star to?

This strange Jesus, who not only talks the talk but walks the walk of this strange life – if you wish to be great, serve the least; if you seek true power, renounce all violence, in order to find real life, be willing to die.

And the disciples, like us, miss the point - again and again.

We live in times when Bible waving folks claiming to follow Christ demand that millions of immigrants be rounded up and deported; or brag about carpet bombing the enemy; or promote killing the family members of enemy combatants.....

Unlike our politicians, who press us to move up the corporate, military and social ladder, Jesus moves low, operating at the bottom of the ladder, close to the ground, close to the grave; yet the disciples, like us, want to fly high.

They have the gleam of riches and power and authority over others sparkling in their eyes; even as Jesus nears the tomb, his followers can't see what's coming: they are flying too high.

Are we any different?

As our Episcopal Bishops put it just the other day:

"In a country still living under the shadow of the lynching tree, we are troubled by the violent forces being released by this season's political rhetoric.

Americans are turning against their neighbors, particularly those on the margins of society.

They seek to secure their own safety and security at the expense of others."

Looking out for number one bleeds through today's gospel lesson: Judas the sell-out, Peter the coward, the rest - except for the women - will soon run for their lives.

Jesus sees it coming.

He tries to prepare his friends, he tries to bring them low enough to understand about being servants rather than rulers, he warns of the sifting that is coming within the hour; yet, even as Jesus tells them that his fate is to die a condemned criminal - they just don't get it.

When he tells them that hard times are coming, using the metaphors of grabbing your wallet and buying a sword -- they don't hear metaphor, they only hear permission - "Take up the sword?!" - which is what they'd been waiting for all along! - armed revolution! - victory through violence! - the same thinking that so infects our world today.

And so they respond: "Look! We have two swords!"

And Jesus says: "It's enough."

Some say: "See, Jesus supports violence!"

But the unanimous consensus of Biblical scholars is that Jesus is either being ironic, as in: "Two swords for twelve men against the power of Rome?"

....."Oh yeah, pure genius"or.....

.....he simply surrenders to the sorry truth that the time for words is over.

And so he says: "it's enough" as if to say, "You're still deaf, you're still blind-it will take my death, and my resurrection, for you to finally see, for you to finally hear."

We gather this Sunday of the Palms, this Sunday of the Passion, to remember that we indeed are the shouting crowds who love the parade -- and we also are the shouting crowds yelling out to crucify him.

A woman leaving the Palm Sunday service whispers to the priest "I just can't say: 'crucify him.'"

If she's thinking that's admirable, she's missing the truth of this day.

An author responds to a newspaper contest asking this question:

"What's Wrong With The World?"

He sends in a two word reply: "I am."

A philosopher is asked why he's a Christian rather than a Buddhist since the ethics of both are so similar; and he says, because there's nothing about the Buddha that makes me want to scream: "Crucify him!"

Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life, because he brings us face to face with who we really are..... what a shock to catch myself in the mirror as I and we yell: "Crucify him!"

While so many flock to strongmen and war and the comfort of money, Jesus rejects all these things.

The passion of our Lord reminds that we are each of us the problem, not only as individuals, but the very structures of society that we and our forebears create and nurture and adore; structures which reward the rich, and punish the poor, and leave those in the middle squeezed and anxious.

Only by getting down low, by setting our sights on service rather than success, on taking the side of the vulnerable "other" rather than seeking to feather my own nest, only that allows us to be set free.

There is, after all, only one remedy for people like you and I, people who cry out with such enthusiasm: "Crucify him!"

It is to surrender.

Surrender eliminates rivalry.

And while the thought of surrender makes most Americans' skin crawl; this is precisely what we are called to do:

"Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God ... emptied himself, taking the form of a slave ... even to the point of death." Phil. 2:5-7.

"unless a seed dies, it remains but a single grain....."

"unless you lay down your life....."

"unless you take up your cross....."

Surrender, you see, is love in action.

When we acknowledge, together, that yes indeed, we killed Jesus, we then become the community that can also stand under his word of forgiveness.

"This is my blood, shed for many for the forgiveness of sins."

We are the many.

If we can embrace this truth, and accept the forgiveness we receive, then perhaps that acceptance can allow us to forgive those who have hurt us, as individuals, as communities and as a nation.

Perhaps it will allow us to walk away from those who play to our worst fears and who promise lives lived in the heights, because it is in the circle of surrender meeting forgiveness that we encounter the mystery we call God, in which all of creation lives and breathes and has its being.

In the giving up, lo and behold, we are found by God.

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