

Jesus, Spiritual Friend Until the End

Matthew 21 1-11; Isaiah 50: 4-9a; Psalm 31; Philippians 2: 1-11

What a roller-coaster week of emotions in our readings this week. The joy and excitement of Palm Sunday includes the fact that Jesus has to receive all of this love in the midst of knowing where he was about to go: to a place of despair, to a place of betrayal, to a place of torture and death. And so, how did Jesus do it? How did Jesus accept the praise, the hallelujahs and the children's gratitude while knowing that some of those same people would help him get arrested, would deny that they knew him, would run and hide and would not even come to his trial or execution.

Jesus' great rollercoaster of emotions that week follows what we believe also happened theologically. Through the mystery of God and Spirit, Jesus was one with the great power of God, the creative power that made heaven and earth, and the Spirit, the emotional and relational power that allowed God to discern that humans were needed (along with the rest of glorious creation). Jesus was fully divine. Then Jesus became something completely different than God; became limited, embodied, incarnate. He had the temptations and trials of a human. He was poor and a refugee. He was part of a culture and religion that were being oppressed by an empire and part of a people being used for their labor without being respected for their dignity. He was someone who made friends and lost them. He was someone who knew grief. His friend Lazarus had just died upon his journey to Jerusalem and while he could raise Lazarus from the dead with his divinity, he experienced grief and mourning. He was fully human.

Jesus, human, stayed present enough during a palm parade held in his honor spontaneously, and I believe, he did that gracefully - accepting the love that would soon turn to rejection - through mindfulness, being present in the moment. He did this by not projecting to what the future might hold, but feeling the colt beneath him, smelling the leaves, smelling all the smells that came with Jerusalem, for he was a country boy. He would have been smelling food and oils and people, spices from the market, and he would have been listening to every type of voice. Many voices shouted out, 'Hallelujah, thank you Jesus for coming.' Some shouted, 'That's the man who healed me.' And probably a few people shouted, 'What is all this fuss about? It's just another one of those country folks who thinks he's important.'

I believe one reason why Jesus was on a colt, and not a horse, was so he could proclaim his humanity - how unimportant he was; this was proof of how important he was. His humility allowed him to accept all this love and praise and stay in that moment.

In the coming days, we will experience Holy Week and we will see Jesus continue to remain in the moment, no matter how dark it is. He will gather his friends even though they are in conflict. Some of them think he should get a mob together and overthrow the temple. Others think he's gone beyond what he should be doing and that he should go back to country healing and teaching. One disciple is so conflicted that he succumbs to the temptation of riches, of peace from this rabble and betrays Jesus, ensuring that the Roman soldiers know exactly where he is. And Jesus still will break bread on Thursday and everyone at that table, including Judas, will be given bread of life.

Jesus will then stay in the moment as he becomes more and more vulnerable to the human fear of being arrested and tortured. He will begin to ask God if the big picture makes sense anymore. He will invite his disciples to be with him in prayer; ready to share this vulnerability, first with them and then with God. He will experience the feeling then and after his arrest, of being abandoned; of being left to be alone and to be present with pain on Good Friday.

If you're like me, you've had at least this many roller coaster moments this week. The joy of when the phone rings and we get good news of an engagement or someone's pregnancy. The joy of seeing - or at least somehow connecting with one another on-line - or receiving a letter in the mail. When you have those moments stay in them. Enjoy them and rejoice. Allow them to nourish you and hold off as best you can, before thinking about what else is going on in your life.

For that time will come. A time during your day, or perhaps in the middle of the night, when it will strike you that the world is going through something unknown to those of us with living memory. A time when we're all being asked to contribute. Some of us on our feet in the hospitals and some of us by staying off our feet at home. This week I have felt fear and anxiety. I have felt the hope that maybe this is the last week and I have felt the sadness this is not nearly the last week. In those moments when you have fear or sadness, of feeling very vulnerable, I invite you to take Jesus as your guide.

Call out for help both from God in prayer and to friends and family, to the church community so that someone can hear you and help you respect those feelings. You are not broken for feeling anxious and you are not broken for feeling bits of joy, maybe big pieces of joy. Maybe you've never spent this much time slowing down or this much time speeding up. There is no wrong way to do something that none of us have done before.

I only ask that you follow Jesus and do not do it alone. Even after Jesus was arrested, he remained in relationship- asking and answering Pilate's questions, engaging with those folks around him, talking even to the men crucified beside him. He remained connected to the human family while struggling to remember the divine plan. So, do not be isolated; do feel, and when safe, share your feelings.

I pray that you can join us through this week: at the table on Maundy Thursday, in lamentation on Good Friday, in the expectant wait of Saturday night and in the moment when everything will change on Sunday. No, the "stay at home" orders will not be lifted on Sunday. But we will all be

reminded that there is life; there is life everything that seems dead, and that God is doing something in the midst of all of this that we may never know or understand until we see it from God's heart. May God be with us and unite us. Thanks be to God and Amen.