

The Sunday Missive – March 24, 2024

Palm and Passion Sunday

Hymn 435 At the name of Jesus, every knee shall bow

At the Name of Jesus every knee shall bow,
Every tongue confess him King of glory now;
'Tis the Father's pleasure we should call him Lord,
Who from the beginning was the mighty Word.

Humbled for a season, to receive a Name
From the lips of sinners, unto whom he came,
Faithfully he bore it spotless to the last,
Brought it back victorious, when from death he passed;

Bore it up triumphant, with its human light,
Through all ranks of creatures, to the central height,
To the throne of Godhead, to the Father's breast;
Filled it with the glory of that perfect rest.

Name him, Christians, name him, with love strong as death,
Name with awe and wonder and with bated breath;
He is God the Savior; he is Christ the Lord,
Ever to be worshiped, trusted, and adored.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OK8OhC6roI4>

The Collect of the Day

Almighty and everliving God, in your tender love for the human race you sent your Son our Savior Jesus Christ to take upon him our nature, and to suffer death upon the cross, giving us the example of his great humility: Mercifully grant that we may walk in the way of his suffering, and also share in his resurrection; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Isaiah 50:4-9

The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. Morning by morning he wakens--wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught.

The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I did not turn backward. I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting.

The Lord God 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; he who vindicates me is near.

Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who are my adversaries? Let them confront me. It is the Lord God who helps me; who will declare me guilty?

Psalm 31

Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am in trouble* ***My eye is consumed with sorrow, and also my throat and my belly.***

For my life is wasted with grief, and my years with sighing* ***My strength fails me because of affliction, and my bones are consumed.***

I have become a dismay to those of my acquaintance* ***When they see me in the street they avoid me.***

I am forgotten like a dead person, out of mind* ***As useless as a broken pot.***

For I have heard the whispering of the crowd: fear is all around* ***They put their heads together against me; they plot to take my life.***

But as for me, I have trusted in you, O Lord* ***I have said, "You are my God."***

My times are in your hand* ***O rescue me from the hand of my enemies***

Make your face to shine upon your servant* ***And in your loving-kindness save me.***

Philippians 2:5-11

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death -- even death on a cross.

Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Hymn 458 My song is love unknown

My song is love unknown, my Savior's love to me,
Love to the loveless shown that they might lovely be.
O who am I, that for my sake my Lord should take frail flesh, and die?

He came from his blest throne salvation to bestow,
But men made strange, and none the longed-for Christ would know.
But O my friend, my friend indeed, who at my need his life did spend.

Sometimes they strew his way, and his strong praises sing,
Resounding all the day hosannas to their King.
Then "Crucify!" is all their breath, and for his death they thirst and cry.

Here might I stay and sing, no story so divine;
Never was love, dear King, never was grief like thine.
This is my friend, in whose sweet praise I all my days could gladly spend.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DvYKv_rwM6E

The Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ According to Mark

They went to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." He took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be distressed and agitated. And he said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake." And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. He said, "Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want." He came and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep awake one hour? Keep awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words. And once more he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to say to him. He came a third time and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Enough! The hour has come; the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand."

Immediately, while he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; and with him there was a crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders. Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard." So when he came, he went up to him at once and said, "Rabbi!" and kissed him. Then they laid hands on him and arrested him. But one of those who stood near drew his sword and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear. Then Jesus said to them, "Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit? Day after day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not arrest me. But let the scriptures be fulfilled." All of them deserted him and fled.

A certain young man was following him, wearing nothing but a linen cloth. They caught hold of him, but he left the linen cloth and ran off naked.

They took Jesus to the high priest; and all the chief priests, the elders, and the scribes were assembled. Peter had followed him at a

distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest; and he was sitting with the guards, warming himself at the fire. Now the chief priests and the whole council were looking for testimony against Jesus to put him to death; but they found none. For many gave false testimony against him, and their testimony did not agree. Some stood up and gave false testimony against him, saying, "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands.'" But even on this point their testimony did not agree. Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, "Have you no answer? What is it that they testify against you?" But he was silent and did not answer. Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?" Jesus said, "I am; and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven."

Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "Why do we still need witnesses? You have heard his blasphemy! What is your decision?" All of them condemned him as deserving death. Some began to spit on him, to blindfold him, and to strike him, saying to him, "Prophecy!" The guards also took him over and beat him.

While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant-girls of the high priest came by. When she saw Peter warming himself, she stared at him and said, "You also were with Jesus, the man from Nazareth." But he denied it, saying, "I do not know or understand what you are talking about." And he went out into the forecourt. Then the cock crowed. And the servant-girl, on seeing him, began again to say to the bystanders, "This man is one of them." But again he denied it. Then after a little while the bystanders again said to Peter, "Certainly you are one of them; for you are a Galilean." But he began to curse, and he swore an oath, "I do not know this man you are talking about." At that moment the cock crowed for the second time. Then Peter remembered that Jesus had said to him, "Before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times." And he broke down and wept.

As soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. They bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate. Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" He answered him, "You say so." Then the chief priests accused him of many things. Pilate asked him again, "Have you

no answer? See how many charges they bring against you.” But Jesus made no further reply, so that Pilate was amazed.

Now at the festival he used to release a prisoner for them, anyone for whom they asked. Now a man called Barabbas was in prison with the rebels who had committed murder during the insurrection. So the crowd came and began to ask Pilate to do for them according to his custom. Then he answered them, “Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?” For he realized that it was out of jealousy that the chief priests had handed him over. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release Barabbas for them instead. Pilate spoke to them again, “Then what do you wish me to do with the man you call the King of the Jews?” They shouted back, “Crucify him!” Pilate asked them, “Why, what evil has he done?” But they shouted all the more, “Crucify him!” So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

Make Sweet Hosannas Ring -- Palm and Passion Sunday B

“Make sweet hosannas ring,” we joyfully sing, echoing and reiterating the eager and giddy shouts of those people long, long ago whose excitement and hunger for good news welcomed Jesus on his dramatic, theatrical burro ride. They lay palm branches in the roadway in an exuberant, sacred gesture acknowledging the presence of divinity in their midst. At Succos, the Feast of the Tabernacles, palms had been waved since Moses’ time to glorify the deity. “Save us,” is a translation of the word “Hosanna.” The Hebrew people followed the law in the Book Of Leviticus to bear palms on that feast day.

They were doing it even when, after fifty years exile in Babylon, the prophet Isaiah sang out the people would be vindicated and redeemed by their God, a God of enduring love and ultimate goodness who would hear, accompany, strengthen, shield and embrace them forever. We’re still doing it.

We enact a sacred drama by raising our palms to glorify the deity. “We believe in one God.” (Although lately we’ve realized the ironies of

calling our God, “The Father Almighty;” no great scholars have come up with very strong arguments why God should be a ‘he’ or a ‘she,’ except in linguistics. But language development is, like political development, technological development, etc. of relentlessly dubious benefit to human society. The winners write the history, and they tend to spawn language. That ‘steadfast love’ Isaiah refers to, in the passage we heard translates a Hebrew word that comes from ‘mother’s womb,’ which at least proves they too struggled with Holy Gender. But I digress.

Of course, there’s a difference between us and those long-ago palm bearers. We let our sweet hosannas ring, well-knowing that those cries will turn into shouts of “Crucify him!” before the day is out. Imagine how Jesus must have felt, receiving the ecstatic reception of the people but knowing all the while how his week would progress. Significantly, he doesn’t make it all the way into Jerusalem. He doesn’t ride all the way into the heart of his people’s problem in triumph; it is humiliation that finally characterizes his last days as a human fellow traveler. Our palm bearing today, and indeed our entire lives as Christians are aslant with the same kinds of paradox: self-forgetting in order to gain, forgiving in order to be forgiven, dying to attain life as subjects in a kingdom not of this world. Our triumphs are gained through humility.

The ethicist Margaret Farley observes: “...the shadow of Good Friday transforms the light of Palm Sunday, for only with them both together do we learn that dignity is sustained with integrity; that the forces of false judgment and suspicion, servile fear and violence, are to be named for what they are and resisted, even unto death. But they are not to be resisted by adopting the patterns of evil they represent. Through the death of Jesus, all death is overwhelmed; through the humiliations of Jesus, all humiliations can be transformed, not because of the death or the humiliation, but because of the love that was not broken.” Such is the enduring love of which Isaiah speaks when he says, “But I trust in you, O Lord; I say, ‘You are my God.’ My times are in your hand. Let your face shine upon your servant; save me in your steadfast love.”

God saves us by allowing – by insisting – that we pay attention to the facts of what makes goodness grow. That we boast to have been made, “in the image and likeness of God,” means we must continually be

seeking godliness. We have the obligation to be co-creators with God and to empty ourselves of self-oriented power. The animals, the plants, even the rocks can just go about their business of being weasels, rhododendron bushes or dolomite, but not us. Jesus came to show us our business. We all still have choices in many matters – that’s our defining feature, our niftiest attribute and our biggest hassle: choosing. Our choices are ours and ours alone; it’s a lonely business. Imagine how lonely Jesus felt, deserted, abused and condemned by others’ choices.

What is our business? What does the life look like, what is the frame of reference, the point of view, the foundational attitude of such a life?

My daughter Lelia and I had the pleasure of spending a few days with my parents – her grandparents not long ago. They’re plenty old, but the joy of our relationships and mutual eagerness to engage in light dinner table conversation with my Dad -- about good and evil, right and wrong, the nature of God and other merry subjects – has yet to diminish. And we will always be in conversation, even when their bodies have died. Coming back, we were socked in and missed our connection, so the long trip from the East Coast was made even longer. A friend had recommended the novelist David Mitchell, so I had a juicy book to listen to that lasted me the whole day and night while travelling. *Cloud Atlas*, it’s called, wherein Mitchell compellingly juxtaposes scenes of crisis and self-examination in a number of human societies whose contexts range across many centuries and into the future. The civilizations are as culturally disparate as, say, us and the Hebrews of Biblical times, but the necessity of making moral choices, choosing spiritual and social responses to violence is all but identical.

Mitchell’s narrator concludes like this: “Why must we fight (against oppression, selfishness and injustice)? Because of this: One fine day, a purely predatory world will consume itself. Yes, the Devil shall take the hindmost, until the foremost is the hindmost. In an individual, selfishness uglifies the soul. For the human species, selfishness is extinction. Is this the doom written within our nature?”

“If we believe humanity may transcend tooth and claw, if we believe diverse races and creeds can share this world peaceably, if we believe leaders must be just, violence muzzled, power accountable, and the

riches of the earth and its oceans shared equitably, such a world will come to pass. I am not deceived; it is the hardest of worlds to make real. Tortuous advances, won over generations, can be lost by a single stroke of a myopic president's word or a vainglorious general's sword. But a life spent shaping a world I want my child to inherit, not one I fear my child might inherit, this strikes me as a life worth living."

Such a life is a choice is offered to us as human beings. Such a choice is incumbent upon us as Christians this Palm Sunday and always.

Lift Every Voice and Sing Hymn 38 The old rugged cross

On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross
The emblem of suffering and shame
And I love that old cross where the dearest and best
For a world of lost sinners was slain

So I'll cherish the old rugged cross
Till my trophies at last I lay down
I will cling to the old rugged cross
And exchange it some day for a crown

To the old rugged cross I will ever be true
It's shame and reproach gladly bear
Then he'll call me some day to my home far away
Where his glory forever I'll share.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-JS9P8d2iOc>

Naive

When I was seven, I walked home with Dereck DeLarge, my arm slung over his skinny shoulders, after-school sun buffing our lunch boxes.

So easy, that gesture, so light — the kind of love that lands like a leaf. It was 1963. We were two black boys whose snaggle-toothed grins held a thousand giggles.

Remember? Remember wanting to play every minute, as if *that* was why we were born?

Those hands that bring us shouting into this life must open like a fanfare of big band horns.

Though this world is nothing like where we'd been, we come anyway, astonished as if to Mardi Gras in full swing. There must be a time when a child's heart builds a chocolate sunflower while katydids burnish the day with their busy wings.

This itching fury that holds me now—this knowing the early welcome that once lived inside me was somehow sent away: how I talk myself back into all the regular disguises but still walk these streets believing in the weather of the unruined heart.

My friends, with crow's feet edging their eyes, keep looking for a kinder city, though they don't want to seem naïve.

When was the last time you wrapped your arm around someone's shoulder and walked him home?

Tim Seibles