



ST. ANDREW'S IN THE PINES EPISCOPAL CHURCH

SERMON
4-2-2017

We are getting close. We are getting close to Jerusalem – to Jerusalem, the hysteria and trials, the cross and crucifixion. We are getting near to the end of the Life of Jesus on earth. Today we are only two miles away in the village of Bethany- Two miles from Jerusalem. And we are, in our church time, in the season of Lent, only two weeks away from the empty tomb. How important then to consider the lengthy gospel readings we have been listening to and reading these last five weeks. Why these super long readings?

Our season of Lent began with the reading of the temptations of Jesus in the wilderness. On that Sunday I was taken by the thought that here was young Jesus spending time learning how to blend his life of being fully human and fully divine. What a challenge to consider. We are told he neither ate nor drank during those 40 days so that would take one being divine. But we also hear that he denies performing any miracles or claiming any power that is not granted to one who is human. I believe Jesus lived in that desert accepting his humanity, his identity with each of us.

The next week was the story of Nicodemus and his confusing visit to Jesus at night. Jesus spoke of the importance of being born of water and the spirit – in other words – we are people of the flesh and we are people filled with the Spirit. Perhaps we are challenged to be fully human and divine?

Then we listened to the story of the Samaritan woman at the well. And the request Jesus made of the woman was for a drink of water. He said, “I am thirsty.” – fully human. But then he shocks the woman by telling her prophesy about living water and worship and tells her straight out that he is the Messiah – pretty divine with that statement.

Last week we learned of the healing of the man born blind. In this gospel message Jesus demonstrates loving care for our physical bodies. He carefully uses mud and saliva to open the blind man’s eyes. He continues to teach and talk with the people around him – living as a human being but also performing the miracle of healing blindness. Again, a story of humanity and divinity mixing together.

And today, today here is Jesus weeping over the death of his friend, distressed by the sorrow and pain in Martha and Mary. How fully human he is when he meets his friends and shows them his compassion. Then come two miraculous manifestations of his divinity. I can see Jesus cupping

Martha's face in his hands and looking her in the eyes and saying, "I am the resurrection and the life." I am, here now in your midst, I am, not was or will be, I am the resurrection and the life. Right now! Wow. How about that for our gospel message - The Word became flesh and dwelt among us? And of course, then there is the stunning bringing back to life the dead Lazarus- a divine miracle.

So where does that leave us today? We have been hearing these stories, the stories of humanity and divinity colliding. Paul even continues with that struggle in his writings in Romans. Are we flesh or the Spirit? Is Jesus fully human? Is Jesus fully divine? How we will move into Holy Week and process the tumultuous events that take place? How do we handle the crucifixion? Who do we say Jesus is?

We are blessed in this church to observe, through our worship, the cycle of the life of Jesus each and every year. Every year to enter into Lent and every year we face again the betrayal and horror of the crucifixion. And every year we celebrate new life and resurrection. Because of that rhythm of worship – every year we must consider again and again who Jesus is.

Do we, do you lean more toward the humanity of Jesus and look to him as a great human guide/example? Is the crucifixion horrible in its cruelty and a harsh death?

Or do you, we focus more on the Lordship of Jesus? Is he part of a mystery beyond our knowledge and beyond feeling close to him as if he could be our friend and buddy? In that case the crucifixion needn't be too terrifying as he is always God anyway so knows what he's about even as he dies on a cross.

The answer to that question – who is Jesus for you – is what we've been honing in on in this season of Lent. It is the same challenge faced by Martha when she experiences Jesus as a friend with healing power who just let her down and as she must answer Jesus asking her about resurrection and whether he is the Messiah.

The balancing of Jesus as human and as divine I believe is the fulcrum of the entire gospel. How do we live with and accept Jesus? When Jesus tells us that he is the resurrection and the life and in believing in him we will have life and never die – do we believe this? Can we say with Martha – "Yes Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world." If that is our cry – we will see the glory of God. If that is our hope – then we are ready for next week and the week after. If that is our answer – then we will arrive at Easter.

Thanks be to God.