



ST. ANDREW'S IN THE PINES EPISCOPAL CHURCH

SERMON
4-9-17

For years I have assumed that the people shouting, cheering, clamoring alongside the road as Jesus entered into Jerusalem were the same folks that later gathered and cried out for his crucifixion. That assumption has led me to reflect often on the fickleness of human beings. I soberly think of how we can change on a dime from being supportive to condemning. And those thoughts may still have some value –

BUT this year I realized that those pivotal moments in the life of Jesus could have involved entirely different sets of people. Consider the people who are crying out with hope that this man entering into Jerusalem riding on the donkey could actually be the Messiah. Consider that something inside of each person, something divine perhaps has spoken to them about the possibility of God dwelling on earth, God coming to care for them. Think of a group of people caught up in holy excitement. During this Lent I've been preaching about both the humanity and divinity found in Jesus and in us. I like to think that this crowd welcoming Jesus into Jerusalem is drawing deeply from the divine spirit nudging them, drawing them, encouraging them. They see the clouds parting and heaven being revealed.

Then as the next few days go on, we experience an arrest, a trial, a parade of criminals to Golgotha, and the crucifying of Jesus on the cross. And during those events there are people present jeering Jesus, calling for his death, deriding any possibility of his oneness with God, with his holiness in their midst. They have gone mad with a desire to defeat a new way of knowing God in the world, they have gone mad with a desire for death, a desire for remaining with the same ways of authority and rule in their world. They have, I believe, closed themselves off from noticing the divine dwelling within them and dwelling within Jesus. So these might be – perhaps are – an entirely different group of people from those along the road. These folks may have disapproved of Jesus all along. Which give me pause to look at the what happened in a new light.

For how then could they live with such a divide, with such differences in the people living together in that culture? How about for us in our culture? How do we live with such stark differences in emotions, in opinions, in choices, in fervor for what each wants to have happen? That to me is even harder to process than my earlier reflection that people are fickle and can change their minds at the drop of a hat. Now I'm considering how we live together if those two

crowds consist of completely different sets of people – people who have to somehow continue to cross paths, live in the same community with such opposition to each other’s ways.

Towards the end of World War 2, German bombers flew over Coventry Cathedral and utterly destroyed it with their bombs. After the attack survivors ventured to the site and found one small area that remained standing. It was a side altar with some of the stones framing the altar still arching into the sky and a charred beam in the shape of a cross fallen in the rubble. Within hours the Dean of the Cathedral Richard Howard went on the air with a prophetic and powerful message. At the core of the message were these words: FATHER FORGIVE. Those words were eventually carved on to the front of the small altar and remain there today. A new Cathedral was built next to the bombed out site and a ministry of reconciliation continues as the primary focus of that congregation.

FATHER FORGIVE. You might notice that the word THEM is missing. That’s purposeful - Father forgive – each of us, all of us.

There is no cheap grace in this coming week. There is no healthy way to skip through Holy Week. There is no possibility that it is not ourselves that need forgiven. Whether we clamor that the Messiah has come into the world while waving our palms, or whether we clamor for the crucifying of Jesus – in our own ways each of us abandon Jesus, each of us doubts, each of us stands on the sidelines unwilling to commit our own lives to possible death or betrayal, each of us avoids, forgets, falls short. And that is how we manage to live side by side with our neighbor. We share our humanity – that’s it.

No there is no cheap grace during the events of Holy Week. But there is grace, because Jesus came for all! Jesus came for all. That is true grace – a gift for all of us – freely, not cheaply given.

So as you pray this week - Father Forgive – add in your own “ME” and prepare for resurrection.

Thanks be to God.