**Palm Sunday 2019 – A Walk Through Holy Week**

**1. Jesus Enters Jerusalem – Palm Sunday *Reading:*** Luke 19: 28-40

***Symbol:*** Palm branch

*After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.****29****As he approached Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them,****30****“Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here.****31****If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ say, ‘The Lord needs it.’”* ***32****Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them.****33****As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?”* ***34****They replied, “The Lord needs it.”* ***35****They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it.****36****As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road.* ***37****When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen:*

***38****“Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!”*

*“Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”*

***39****Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples!”*

***40****“I tell you,” he replied, “if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.”*

***Reflection***:

There were two processions in Jerusalem that day. There was the one that everyone expected – a Roman

military parade that marched the 60 miles west from Pilate’s palace in Caesarea – a mighty display of

force and power. With cavalry and weapons, Pilate came on horseback to inspire fear in the hearts of

the Jews, and to stake once again, the claim of the Roman Empire over Israel, lest anyone think of

rebelling.

But there was another procession that day as well – one that surprised the crowds in Jerusalem. Coming

down from the Mount of Olives in the east to enter the gates from the opposite side of the city was a

ragtag crowd of peasants, in stark contrast to Pilate’s military procession. Their leader –the young rabbi,

Jesus – not riding a warhorse like Pilate, but a donkey – ancient symbol of peace and justice.

There were two processions in Jerusalem that day – both proclaiming the power of a king and a kingdom.

The stage was set for the confrontation to begin ……

♪ ***Sung Response:******VU 144***

*Were you there when the crowds began to praise?*

*Were you there when the crowds began to praise?*

*Oh ….. Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.*

*Were you there when the crowds began to praise?*

-2-

**2. Jesus Cleanses the Temple *Reading:*** Luke 19: 45-46

***Symbol:*** Bag of coins *(put on table so some spill out)*

*Then he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling things there; and he said, ‘It is written, “My house shall be a house of prayer”; but you have made it a den of robbers.’*

***Reflection***:

This story of Jesus cleansing the Temple follows closely on the heels of the Palm Sunday scene of Jesus entering into Jerusalem on a donkey.  Both were overt, symbolic, and dangerous gestures on his part.  And Jesus knew that.

The Temple was the heart and soul of Jewish religious life.  It was both the house of God on earth and the institutional seat of submission to Rome.  Those who held priestly offices – including the High Priest, Caiaphas at the time of Jesus – were forced to constantly play a balancing act between their priestly roles and collaborating with Rome on behalf of the Jewish people.  Herod the Great rebuilt the Temple in the last Century BCE – expanding the original size to include a large platform gathering space, known as the Court of the Gentiles.  It was here that anyone could come, and from where the taxes owed to Rome were paid, as well as animal sacrifices for the Temple worship purchased.  The money changers and animal sellers were perfectly legitimate and absolutely necessary for the normal functioning of the Temple.

The money changers enabled Jewish pilgrims from all over the known world to pay the Temple tax in the only approved coinage.  And the buying of animals and birds on site was the only way worshipers could be sure the creatures were ritually adequate for the necessary sacrifices.  Jesus knew all this.  So what was his righteous anger all about in this passage?

Marcus Borg, well-known Biblical scholar, in his book 'The Last Week' tells us that it was not a condemnation of the money changers or tax collectors per se - as many have contended – but a symbolic action of protest that the Temple authorities had become so intertwined with Roman authority that they had forgotten who they were as God's people.  And his actions demonstrated that when worship becomes an end to itself and a substitute for justice – then that is what God rejects.

So what questions, then, does this reading open for us on our journey through Holy Week?  Perhaps it gives us pause to reflect on the times prayer becomes a token gesture or a substitute for concrete action and righting of injustice;  or when our focus is primarily centred on preserving a church building rather

than *being* the church in the world.

♪ ***Sung Response:***

*Were you there when he turned the tables o’er?*

*Were you there when he turned the tables o’er?*

*Oh ….. Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.*

*Were you there when he turned the tables o’er?*

-3-

**3. Judas Bargains With The Religious Authorities**

***Symbol***: Silver coin

***Reading:*** Luke 22: 1-6

*Now the festival of Unleavened Bread, which is called the Passover, was near. The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to put Jesus to death, for they were afraid of the people.  Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was one of the twelve; he went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers of the temple police about how he might betray him to them. They were greatly pleased and agreed to give him money. So he consented and began to look for an opportunity to betray him to them when no crowd was present.*

***Reflection***

Judas – the very name has become synonymous with evil and betrayal. And yet – Judas Iscariot was a member of the inner circle of Jesus' disciples for 3 years – almost from the first. He was there to hear Jesus' teachings, to witness his healings, and to watch his interactions with the people – young and old, rich and poor, righteous and outcast. So what could possibly have led him to betray the very one at whose feet he had sat for all this time?

Many scholars believe that Judas was also a member of the Zealots – Jewish rebels looking for ways to overthrow the Roman domination of their country and lives. Could it be that after 3 years – Judas saw in Jesus the potential and charisma needed to lead the Jewish people to freedom? Could it be that his 'bargain' with the Jewish authorities had more to do with forcing Jesus' hand – forcing him to take a stand – rather than the intention of betrayal or greed?

And if so – how is it that he could have lived side by side with Jesus and listened to him speak of God's way and God's kingdom – and managed to get it so very wrong in the end?! Could this tragic scene have more to do with Judas' inability to accept Jesus and his message for what he was – rather than what Judas wanted him to be?

And when is it that we also, have tried to make others into what we wish them to be – rather than accepting them for who they are – our children, our spouses, our friends, those who challenge our patience or ideas – even God?

And when it is that we have tried to manipulate things to our own advantage – sometimes at the expense of another?

♪ ***Sung Response:***

*Were you there when Jesus was betrayed?*

*Were you there when Jesus was betrayed?*

*Oh ….. Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.*

*Were you there when Jesus was betrayed?*

-4-

**4. Jesus Washes The Disciples’ Feet**

***Symbols:*** Pitcher and towel

***Reading:*** John 13: 2-17

*The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, ‘Lord, are you going to wash my feet?’ Jesus answered, ‘You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand.’ Peter said to him, ‘You will never wash my feet.’ Jesus answered, ‘Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.’ Simon Peter said to him, ‘Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!’  Jesus said to him, ‘One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you.’ For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, ‘Not all of you are clean.’*  *After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, ‘Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.*

***Reflection***

 Come, all of you who need healing;

 who need to know there is Someone

 who will hold you and wash your feet,

 who will serve you in your moment of need,

 who will offer you nourishment for the journey of faith,

 who will come to you in love and grace

 and call your name,

 and care for you – whoever you are.

 This is the gospel of love. Come share it with me …

 wet your feet

 feed your soul,

 and open your heart

 to Love’s servant.

♪ ***Sung Response:***

*Were you there when Jesus washed their feet?*

*Were you there when Jesus washed their feet?*

*Oh ….. Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.*

*Were you there when Jesus washed their feet?*

-5-

**5. With Jesus In The Upper Room – The Last Supper**

***Symbols:*** Bread and chalice

***Reading:*** Luke 22: 14 - 20

*When the hour came, Jesus took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. He said to them, ‘I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.’ Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, ‘Take this and divide it among yourselves; for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.’ Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’  And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.*

***Hymn:*** ‘Eat This Bread, Drink This Cup’ ***VU 466***

**Breaking the Bread … Lifting The Cup**

**Sharing The Gift**

**6. With Jesus on the Mount Of Olives**

***Symbol***: Praying hands

***Reading:*** Luke 22: 39 - 46

*Jesus came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed him. When he reached the place, he said to them, ‘Pray that you may not come into the time of trial.’  Then he withdrew from them about a stone’s throw, knelt down, and prayed, ‘Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done.’ Then an angel from heaven appeared to him and gave him strength. In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground.  When he got up from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping because of grief, and he said to them, ‘Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not come into the time of trial.’*

***Reflection***

As was often his custom when he needed time in prayer – following his last supper with his friends and disciples – Jesus went to the nearby garden found on the Mount of Olives. There – sensing that time was drawing short – he knelt to pray. A later edition to the gospel of Luke adds that his prayers were so intense that his sweat became like great drops of blood falling to the ground. Here was his moment of indecision – of uncertainy and grief – as he questioned whether he had the strength to see the journey through to the end. "Father – if you are willing – remove this cup from me" he agonizes.

-6-

This experience of the garden mirrors our own shadow times. It is the place of questions, of second guessing, of fear for the future. It is the place of regrets, of grief, of 'what ifs', of loneliness and of deep sadness – when we wonder if we have the strength to go on. We've all been there – most of us probably, more than once.

But the power of this garden experience comes not only as we identify with the anguish and uncertainty of Jesus' struggles. It also comes as we wait for the sense of peace and purpose he felt in the acceptance and surrender. Somehow – in retelling the stories of Holy Week – we sometimes get the impression that this shadow time was easier for Jesus than for us. Far from it. Did he have a sense of purpose in what he did? Yes. Did he have trust that God was with him? Yes。 Did that make the path he chose any less difficult? No.

But here, in this garden scene – we find Jesus able to wait through his anguish – and in the end – surrender to what lay ahead – in trust that God would walk with him. He drew on his lifetime of being in close relationship with God to enable him to garner the strength he needed at this time he felt most intensely alone and powerless.

We cannot bypass the garden on our way to Easter. It just doesn't work that way. But in our shadow times of grief and uncertainty – and of feeling most alone – we can place ourselves once again in the hands of God – and draw on the faith, prayers and support of others. And in doing so, feel the strengthening presence of our God, as Jesus did – and light enough for the next step.

♪ ***Sung Response:***

*Were you there when Jesus knelt to pray?*

*Were you there when Jesus knelt to pray?*

*Oh ….. Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.*

*Were you there when Jesus knelt to pray?*