

Palm Sunday, 2019
Lent is Worth the Effort

Matthew 27:1-54

By Fr. Bill Baker

St. Andrew's Church – Jacksonville, OR

"Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost."

A sad ending so it seems. Hope and expectation seemingly lost. Can we even imagine the thoughts of the Apostles as they were forced to cope with such a turn of events? Can we even begin to empathize with their loss? Love that is tragically taken is an encounter all too common within the human experience. Its as though a part of us is taken to a place just out of reach...so close...and yet so far away. Our Lord, God Almighty, came to us in an Advent promise that would change the course of history and touch the hearts of billions. It was the Advent dream that became a reality...God became one of us and he walked beside us. How did things turn so abruptly into darkness?

Maybe the answer to this question was one of the purposes of Judas, *"I have sinned, admits Judas, in that I have betrayed innocent blood."* Sounds about right. What is Lent all about anyway but to expose the true cost of sin. We cannot sit in the glory of prosperous modernity and cast stones at the past as though we have no part to play. If we could simply sit back and cast blame at our predecessors we would have no reason to come to Christ for redemption. But the truth is...we still choose sin...freely. And it is each and every sin that requires the death penalty. Can you pay the price and live? I hope this Lent has brought you to your knees. I hope you have realized the depth of God's love for you. I pray you are beginning to understand the sacrifice he has made. How are we to live in the shadow of so much loss? How are we to cope when we realize that we have no power to fix our broken hearts? Sin rages through us all and love calls us all to repentance. Can we feel the loss of the Apostles? Can we empathize in a manner corresponding to their grief? I think we can...if we truly give our hearts and minds to God alone.

In case you missed it, hear again our prayer in the Collect for Palm Sunday:

“ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, who of thy tender love towards mankind, hast sent thy Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, to take upon him our flesh, and to suffer death upon the cross, that all mankind should follow the example of his great humility; Mercifully grant, that we may both follow the example of his patience, and also be made partakers of his resurrection; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

In this great Gregorian prayer, translated by Thomas Cranmer, we see the tender love of God taking on our flesh that we might follow in his great humility and patience and be partakers of his resurrection. It is only through the experience of our Lenten meditations that we are able to focus on the Incarnation, the Passion and the Resurrection simultaneously. We see our Lord Jesus Christ taking his first steps as a babe and fast-forward to a grown Jesus standing on a hill just above Jerusalem where he stops with tears in his eyes...tears not for what he must endure, but tears for what we have done...and left undone. This is the price of atonement and we must, by virtue of being in Christ, endure some amount of the pain. We are called to take up our crosses and bare some of the burden.

But fear not ye who have given your lives to Jesus Christ! Jesus may have been accused, mocked, betrayed, lied against, beaten and crucified, but at his death...when he had given up the Ghost, the temple partition, meant to keep some out, was torn in twain, the very created embodiment of the earth quaked and the graves of the dead were opened to release their spoils. The love of God prevails...then...and now.

The life work of Jesus Christ culminated in this final week. That's why we call it Holy Week. The Atonement began as a babe and ends in redemption and eternal life! Don't miss the importance of Lent. Don't let the holy day celebrations of this week pass by like any other day. Don't keep the Holy Spirit from doing a work in you that will bring you closer to the One who created you.

In our prayer today we asked God to grant us patience and to be made partakers of his resurrection. This could be the most important prayer found in our prayer book...the most selfless prayer that we could utter. If we are to live in observance of these words we will find ourselves

imitating our Lord in the sufferings of this world by engaging the communities around us in honesty and truth, by seeking true justice and abiding in our obligations to the Gospel of Christ.

“Art thou the King of the Jews?” How we answer that question says much about our belief in who Jesus was and who Jesus is. The triumphal entry of Christ into Jerusalem was not to give lip service to the emperor...words could not convey the truth to those who would not understand. The triumphal entry of Christ into Jerusalem was not to usurp power over a kingdom...all of creation is his already. And the triumphal entry of Christ into Jerusalem was not to save himself...the God of the manger would stretch out his arms along the beams of a cross for you and for me. Our glory and our joy are not to be snuffed as a candle. They are to be resurrected by taking our sins to the cross and releasing our burdens to the only one who can forgive those sins and offer everlasting life. As difficult as this task may be, we must search the deeper things of God. And when we get there we will find love...and we will find joy...and we will find peace.

“Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared, saying, “Truly this was the Son of God.”

A day will come, scripture tells us, when *“every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord”* (Romans 14:11). Your Lenten journeys are meant to give you hope and a reason for your calling because *“while we were yet sinners Christ died for us”* (Romans 5:8).

And what will our end look like? Mark and hear St. John’s revelation:

“And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him: And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no

“candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever” (Revelation 22:1-5).

Brothers and Sisters, Lent is worth the effort. Come to the Table of the Lord and he will enter in.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.