

Palm Sunday 2008

Agape Love Revealed

We began our worship this Palm Sunday with
the Liturgy of the Palms.

And we said the same words that the people said 2,000 years ago
when they lined the streets and laid palm branches on the road
as Jesus road into Jerusalem.

“Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord”.
Then we read the passion of Christ.

Jesus walked the straight road into Jerusalem but what happened
took a 180 degree turn.

Today’s political experts would say that coming into Jerusalem Jesus
had the momentum.

The polls were swinging in his favor.
He had the grass roots support of the working class people.

To the natural eye the campaign went sour real quick.
Jesus is accused and arrested but remains silent.
Jesus is beaten and mocked but refuses to fight back.

His followers wonder why he was able to
call on God’s power to raise Lazarus from the dead
but there are no last minute heroics now.
The political polls indicate Jesus’ approval rating has dropped to zero
across religious, ethnic and gender lines.

There are a series of TV commercials by Nationwide insurance company
built around a theme: “Life comes at you fast”.

One day a rap musician is strutting around with
beautiful women and a fancy car.

He’s rich, famous and powerful.
The next day he is sitting alone on a street curb.

In the background there is a foreclosure sign on his front lawn.

Moving men are carrying furniture out of his house to a truck.
The voice over says, "Life comes at you fast."

Is this all that is happening during Holy Week?
Did life come at Jesus fast?
Was he just a victim of circumstances?

The commercial is meant to do two things:

First, to jolt us that wealth, fame, and power are temporal.
A fire, an illness, or a death, in a moment's time,
can take away the things we value;
the things and relationships we have spent a lifetime building;
the things we look to for the security and safety we all desire.

Second, to turn to their company to buy insurance
to give us that safety net of security,
when we are the victim of circumstances and life does a 180 on us.

The commercials are clever and they reveal some things about life
that are true for all of us
and have been true for thousands of years.

We accumulate things or achieve a status or control people around us
to give ourselves a sense of security.
Deep down we know these things
will not satisfy us or put our fears to rest,

I used to think that Jesus was out of control in the passion gospel.
But, in reality, he is the only in control every step of the way.
He knows exactly where he is going and why.

Ironically, Pilate asks Jesus "What is truth?"
And Pilate is staring truth in the face.
Jesus Christ is the truth, grace, and love of God revealed in the flesh.

To the spiritual eye, an eye awakened to the glory of God by the Holy Spirit,
Jesus is glorifying God as he continues to walk the straight and true path
from heaven to earth,
from the earth to the cross,

from the cross to the grave,
from the grave back to heaven on high.

In every moment of his life Jesus is
faithful to God (point up)
fully human (point down)
revealing, offering the mercy and love of God to everyone (outward).

In his book The Four Loves, C.S. Lewis says that
there are three types of 'natural' or 'creation' loves
that we all have the capability to experience:
Affection, Friendship, and Eros (or Romance).

Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Agnostics can all
know affection, have friends, fall in love.
The fourth love is Agape love or Divine gift love
and that is not natural to human beings.
Agape love desires what is best for the beloved, the object of that love.

Divine gift love is poured out from the heart of God
that overflows like a fountain.
Only Christ was able to offer it to every person he ever met.

What is revealed in our worship on this Palm Sunday
is the fullness of God's Agape love revealed through his Son,
our Lord and Savior and Friend, Jesus Christ.

In Lewis' words:
God's Agape love enables us to love what is not naturally lovable:
lepers, criminals, enemies, morons, whiners,
the superior, and the sneering.

To love at all involves the risk of heartache but far better to live
in that risk than to lock up our hearts in a coffin
where they grow cold, hard and irredeemable.

God's Agape love through Christ oversees and balances
the other three loves and brings them in us to their fullest expression.
We can be a more compassionate person, forgiving person, loving friend,

or spouse in and through the Agape love of God given to us through Christ.

Do not confuse the love of Christ revealed this morning with weakness. The love of God is unyielding.

God's purposes, for our benefit, are coming to fruition in every step Jesus takes to Jerusalem and to the Cross.

The power and grace of God, through Jesus, is revealed like a locomotive on velvet wheels. The Agape love of God will triumph, only by exposing, taking on, and defeating the powers of darkness.

The humility and suffering of Christ reveals: the tender love and mercy of Christ to a broken and fallen world; and the strength of God which refuses to yield to human demands or schemes.

When we walk the way of Christ we learn to trust and yield to God's wisdom to prune us and not destroy us, through the love he has planted in our hearts. And so we embrace the learning of His love.

As Lewis says,

“It is in the weaknesses and frictions with our acquaintances, friends, and spouse that we are able to apply the longsuffering, patient, merciful, giving, comforting embraces of Godly love...

We should not believe in God only to ‘get to heaven’, we should not attempt to ‘use’ God's charity to this earthly end in itself.

It must be the desire for learning His ways, His Love, His Charity, His very Person that drives us to be like Him.”

We all come to church with many needs. We come to church to worship our Creator, to be accepted and be part of a community,

to do ministry;
to learn about God;
to have fun.

But ultimately, the church exists solely by the grace of God,
to be a place where
we come to receive,
learn about, and grow in God's Agape love.

To the natural eye and ear,
as Jesus makes his journey from the procession of palms
to the cross
God is silent and we may think He is absent.
But, the silence of God is not the same thing as the absence of God.

The silence of Holy Week is the time of preparation
for the awesome sounds of glory
that will shout on Easter morning.