

“Turbulence...Along The Way”

“Passion’s Week”

Psalm 118:1, 19-29;
Matthew 21:1-16a, 23: 37-39;
The Gospel of Truth 27:1-9, 13

August 2, 2020
Summer Rerun of April 5, 2020
Sixth Week of Lent

After Psalm:

The psalmist rejoices that even in the midst of hard life realities, turbulence, God is God and God invites us

to enter into God’s presence, the heaven on earth.

Right through our turbulent times...

enter through the gates of righteousness.

To be righteous is to be a living manifestation of divine justice. Distributive justice. So, on the way to heaven, you must pass through justice.

No justice, maybe no heaven experience.

And, if you pass through those gates, you will probably find yourself feeling pretty rejected by the world, a cornerstone rejected,

because the world’s ways are often not the ways of justice.

And you will need God as never before and appreciate God as never before...and know success as never before.

A success far different from the one deemed desirable by the world.

Before Matthew:

This is the Sunday of Passion Week...we enter the week with Jesus and go just as far today as he did and look forward... at a donkey’s pace.

Listen to this....Read Matthew 21: 1-16a

Yes, he enters on a donkey...the way most of us enter most new places and situations... not meeting the expectations of those around us either...

but in **not** meeting those expectations, Jesus hoped they might begin to get it...he was not going to be King in the way the emperor was: “over” them!

He would be king with them...co-kings.

He had in mind a very different understanding of Kingdom. The first member of this new Kingdom but a kingdom of 1 is no kingdom...He calls out to us to make this new and present kingdom really real: Join it! (pause)

The reading takes him from the parade of palms into the temple. Some began to see. Some did not.

Those who suffered did!

The kids did!

The Pharisees and scribes and devout Jews did not.

They were still caught up in the religious part of religion...following the rules rather than living the faith...

when they had the *new* law and the true spirit of the religion incarnate right before their very eyes!

Throughout the next chapters, Jesus tries to teach them using many parables. They still don't get it!

So he begins a series of teachings set apart by the use of the words... Woe to you hypocrites! And he goes on to name their hypocrisy in great detail.

Jesus ends this section of teaching as the plot begins to thicken against him and he must poignantly pass through those gates of divine justice the psalmist names.

The Pharisees and religious plot to do away with this trouble maker, as the story implies Judas plots thinking surely Jesus would now be forced to use his power to be King and would surely save Himself and the people.

The Passion Stories are stories of Jesus inspired sense of how to keep on keeping on, turbulence and all, going through those gates.

He embodied a non-violent resistance to all forms of empire.
He was far from the first to encourage non-violence.

But what was unique to him (and made him such a threat) was that He did so as a form of resistance to what was going on around him. And "incited" others to do the same.

Jesus ends this section calling out to Jerusalem.

He calls out...Read Matthew 23: 37-39

Prompting:

Who were the people in the crowd that day?

What were they searching for and in what did they hope Jesus would fulfill their need?

Some would have been his followers.

And the poor throughout that city.

Some would have been those who gathered for the Feast of Passover...thereby we know they were richer and able to afford to be there. They...

benefited from the kingdom/the empire even as they wanted it to have less of a stronghold *on them*. Probably more concerned about more "justice" for themselves vs. more than justice for all, a distributive justice.

Others there at the parade, would have come out of curiosity, caught up in the high emotion of the people shouting Hosanna.

Later, many there, joined another crowd and shout something else altogether different: Crucify him!

Still others in the crowd had been sent to spy.

Certainly the authorities knew exactly where Jesus was and the threat He posed in the midst of the great the crowds gathering.

The air would have been thick with political agenda and subterfuge and none of this escaped the gentle, powerful giant entering Jerusalem on a donkey.

He knew he was part of a slow dance with destiny...set in motion by people, not by God... not God's desires for him...or for you...

but the world's response to anyone who threatens the status quo...who truly cares, seeking justice...who is willing to enter life through those gates!

He went in and out of Jerusalem that week...resting in the village by night...*perhaps* He still hoped it didn't have to go this way. It didn't...still doesn't.

Our reading ends with Jesus' lament...if only you, even you, just one of you, understood.....maybe it wouldn't have to play out this way.

Your life doesn't have to play out the way this way!

Jesus calls out Jerusalem...and he keeps on walking.

No one can rescue you from yourself, but you!

Jesus knows turbulence.

He glimpses clearly the truth there is no way to ignore. And he engages his passion, his intent.

His passion:

That you join Him in saying no to the often violent, corrupt, harming ways of the world.

That you too non-violently resist!

Easter is the ultimate non-violent act of resistance and civil-religious disobedience!

He wants you to join Him because you matter that much!

And Know:

There were 2 processions that week.

One was a peasant procession with Jesus in its midst,
the other an imperial procession.

The other, Pilot's military procession, was a demonstration of both Roman imperial power (an actual threat to anyone who resisted) and a show of Roman imperial theology.

Imperial theology?

Yes. It was dictated and engrained:

the Emperor is Son of God, lord, savior, bringing peace on earth through victory.

(of course, only if you're on the winning side and do what you're told!)

This is the very language Jesus and early followers **usurped** from empire to talk about a new kingdom where peace *comes*...

but not through war and victory, through justice for all.

This is key friends!

So when I find myself reacting to such imperial language used to speak about Jesus or spoken
by Jesus,

I'm clear it was a very clever tactic to
take back power to the people!

Jesus entry was a prearranged "counter-procession".

Did you ever wonder why they let the disciples take that donkey and colt? Jesus was on top of it: had prepared for it.

Everyone in the city swollen with Passover worshippers was aware of the two processions.

Throughout early Christendom this confrontation of kingdoms/world views on that first "Palm Sunday" was known...but few today know the whole of that story and so it's full impact diminished.

And...Jerusalem was not just any city. Yes it was a powerful place, crossroads of economic and political power. But also...

It was sacred geography.

The temple there mediated God's presence, and also God's forgiveness...mitigated through the sacrifice of an unblemished lamb.

Do you know...that

the practice of sacrifice was part of a common cultural understanding based on the assumption that gods have to be appeased?

And the way you appease is through giving a gift and a sharing a meal...not unlike how we personally welcome each other and appease each other.

Thus, because gods need to be appeased in order not to punish us, the practice was a blemish-less lamb was sacrificed as a blood offering on the altar as a gift to god and then the eating of its meat a symbol of shared meal.

It was cultural and found in many forms of worship, including early Judaism.

But Jesus says no to all of that based upon His revelation to us that God is good and gracious!

We don't have a God who needs to be appeased.

He was saying: You have this wrong!

God had been trying to get everyone to realize this way back with the story of Abraham and Isaac. Remember?

And so, it is mistaken Christian theology then...to see Jesus as a sacrifice to appease God because we are/you are so bad and unhelpful...

that understanding is not biblical.

This theology was developed centuries later with Bishop Anselm in England. What? Not in the Bible?

His death does not pardon our sin today in the ways that has usually been shared.

Jesus did die because of choices made by those around him...and because his non-violent resistance to the empire of state and church was such a threat to the status quo.

So, Jesus death through crucifixion is a landmark happening of urgent and current understanding...*but*

Substitutional Atonement theology is not biblical.

We are not sinful by nature and fallen.

We are not trying to get rid of Original Sin (also not biblical!) or future sin, but rather to embrace

our original blessing as human beings...

embrace our humanity as the Gospel of Truth shares with us.

Stretch toward the truth and hope that are stretching toward us. Don't get twisted around the truth: be truth. Find rest. Listen to your root so you don't suffer loss of your soul.

And so we find ourselves in Jerusalem with Him.

Once deemed a holy city, *under Roman rule*,
Jerusalem had gained a different association.

It is the center of a domination system of political oppression, economic exploitation, religious legitimation of the emperor's power. (Sounds too familiar, friends!)

This was especially known to all the prophets of the old testament and so set up to be the place of confrontation of 2 kingdoms, to present a new world order.

One where the ends do not justify the means!!!

There surely would have been some good people in that corrupt system, but the system *was* corrupt! Hhmn...

Just cause you are polite and have a black friend
does not mean you're not racist!

So the Kingdom of God is a political as well as religious metaphor.

No separation between politics and religion for Jesus
and so for us Christians.

But this is **not** Christian nationalism.

This is justice for all in the same moment without force, coercion, exploitation because we
believe all are valued
and all are precious in God's sight, honored, and loved.
And there is enough for all...to have enough!

Yes, Jesus' calls all to repent...that is...return to the way,
...to go beyond the mind we have...
to trust and commit, to live in His ways.

*Even during turbulent times, to see the truth of things!

And so, no dah, His message in His day (and ours!) resonates most clearly with peasants and the poor, those most oppressed...those living a very different reality than those benefiting from empire.

Resistance comes from the have's, not the have not's.
Not unlike empire today! Beware!

And here's the thing:

If you try to live the way Jesus lives...
it does lead you to Jerusalem.

No way around it...Jerusalem is the place of confrontation with the authorities. Inner and Outer we would say.

You have to go to the turbulent place of struggle to confront what is wrong...if you want life to be different.

And, yes, you will get nailed when you resist the truth,
resist what is not just.

But it is exactly in Jerusalem where you will find resurrection. No crucifixion, no resurrection.

The death of what's wrong, makes space for what's right.
Turbulent, passionate times.

Jesus' protest was against a domination system legitimated in the name of God.

It was not Jesus against Judaism,
or Judaism against Jesus.

Rather, His was a Jewish voice
speaking truth to power religious (and civic),
wanting to reform to right practice...
not start a new religion.

Jesus essentially says, so then, you will kill me,
because I'm not going to play by your rules...

I will resist and I will do so non-violently.
The ends do **not** justify the means.

You cannot stop justice by killing me because
justice is in the hearts of the people who can see the true kingdom and will risk for it, stretch
toward it.

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Today...we join those in the crowd along Jesus' route.  
What prompted you to come?

I believe the way things played out did not represent God's deepest desires for Him...or for you  
either...

that *He or you* be crucified when you stand up  
for justice in the world.

But the world's response to anyone who threatens the status quo...who truly cares, seeking  
justice, speaks truth to power...who is willing to enter life through *those* gates...

the world's response is often rejection...  
sometimes literal, sometimes figurative, crucifixion!

Jesus is crucified because he is willing live and die for divine justice.

He dies for the sake of his *and our* personal integrity and devotion to a new world order. In his death, we are lifted up!

He wasn't going to play by their rules...  
you don't have to play by their rules!

I'm not sure those at the betrayal and death  
thought anything they had done needed to be forgiven.  
They had religion and the courts on their side.

And still...God extends grace...  
because of God, not because of them/us.

Jesus died to show us once and for all that nothing we can do will ever make God go away or  
box God into our thought world...for God does not play by our rules.

Offered, *as* we live through turbulence and face truth...is Grace...do-overs. The hope and  
peace this brings is real.

This is true at-one-ment.

Jesus has been teaching us this all along.

This basic understanding is at the heart of all Jesus' teachings and encounters with people--  
people who are just like us.

It's Palm Sunday! Come and in-joy the parade.

Jesus did! Join the crowd...but through your Easter eyes see in Palm Sunday the beginning of  
something new in you...

a realigning of your life...a redefining of *your* crowd.

Know you will indeed get nailed by the culture if you stand up for justice!

But you can't be stopped!

You will live to love in unimaginable ways right through  
the turbulence, the crucifixions of life.

Yours will be a...resurrected life!

Beyond cars, houses, vacations, parties, bills,  
and Easter eggs!

And, do beware of those Gates of Justice you must pass through on our way to life. That truth!

Because, if **what** you are passionate about **sits you on your high horse**, well...you'll lose your

head going through those gates.

Be passionate and just the right size riding a donkey through life and through those gates...

**in the name of justice, it's OK to make a donkey  
out of yourself!**

We are not asked to live as if we are not hurting...  
but we are asked:

How are you going to live the truth that is there,  
right under the surface of our brokenness, the turbulence!

When turbulence knocks on the door of your life,  
glimpse its truths and eventual gifts.

And, hear Jesus' words to you:  
Be still. Peace. Be still.