

Palm Sunday 2018

03/25/18

John 12:13 (NIV) *They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the king of Israel!”*

It was a festive occasion, just as it was on this Sunday beginning Passover in 30AD for many observers. But not for everyone who attended this religious festival. For the Jewish common folk – yes, they were excited. But for the Roman guards and centurions who monitored activities and the local religious and political leaders there was grave concern.

Jerusalem had been occupied by the Romans for 80 years prior to this particular event after defeating the Jews and killing their king. Since then, rebellion was always a threat and whispers of uprising always in the winds.

I tell you this because it brings some background to what happens during this week. There had been a history of unrest in Jerusalem and its surrounding areas and so Pilate felt like he had to be there for this Passover with a military presence. History reveals that Pilate headed an imperial procession of soldiers, entering the city from the west entrance. Horsemen and footmen were clad in leather armor and helmets, carrying swords sheathed in their scabbards; spears in the hands of every centurion, and archers with quivers full of arrows hanging across their backs. Banners were waived as

drummers beat out a cadence as Pilate and his contingency entered Jerusalem.

The intention was to send a message, create an atmosphere, intimidate with a show of might and military strength, and invoke their theology. Pilate wanted to let anyone who was plotting against the Romans know that any kind of disturbance was intolerable.

He also wanted to emphasize that according to Roman theology, Emperor Tiberius bore divine titles since his predecessor, Augustus, was given the titles “Son of God”, “Savior”, and “Lord”.

Sometime after this procession, a second procession, a ‘counter-procession’ began at the east entrance to the city. This would be a procession of common people, simple peasants; the procession we are most familiar with. Jesus had his disciples acquire a donkey, a colt of a donkey, and road passively into Jerusalem amidst the roar of the expectant crowd. They expected to be protected and rescued from their oppressors, and they would be wrong.

The two processions could not have been more different: one was meant to squash, belittle, and intimidate through military might, power, and glory. The other was to uplift and bring peace and salvation through love. The people would make a choice that day: to serve the local Roman god and his empire, or they would choose to align with the king of a different sort of kingdom, the Kingdom of God.

So, the crowds welcomed Jesus, not fully cognizant of what they were choosing or celebrating. They would even shout, "Hosanna to the Son of David. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the king of Israel," which were threats to the Roman Empire theology, of which Pilate was a chief agent. This caused fear in the ruling Pharisees' hearts and some told Jesus to rebuke his disciples. He responded, "If they keep quiet, the stones will start shouting."

Palm Sunday is celebration and joy, but for erroneous reasons and false and misguided hopes; and those false hopes would ultimately ignite into fear, which would create an egoistic desire to destroy Jesus.

One lesson we can take away from Palm Sunday is that what we think we want is not nearly as good as the good that God has planned for us. Which kingdom do we choose on a moment to moment basis: the kingdom of man with its ostentatious display of violence, power, might, and glory or the Kingdom of God with its quiet whispers of love, peace, joy, strength, tolerance, compassion, and wisdom?

[Song: Our Journey]

It is our oneness with God that enables all of God's good to flow into our lives. It is through communion with Spirit that we are fulfilled and freed. As this Holy Week progressed Jesus would host what has come to be known as and The Last

Supper on Maundy Thursday, and invite his disciples into this spiritual union, the union with the indwelling Presence.

The spiritual union with God that Jesus offers has these qualities: 1. It is supernatural; beyond our powers to effectuate and comes totally from the Grace and Power of God. It is beyond the intellect, nebulous, and something that we discern “through a glass darkly.” It is at the level of our consciousness. 2. It is a real union and not a metaphor or something imagined. 3. It is spiritual as described in 1Cor 6:19 – “*he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit.*” 4. It is intimate – We are described as ‘one spirit.’ “*I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.*” (Matt 25:40). 5. It is indissoluble – it cannot be broken. “*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ,*” we are asked in Rom 8:35. Even death cannot break this union. As 2Cor 5:8 states: “*We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord*”.

How do we attain this oneness? It is through communion that we find union. We consciously connect with God, communicate with God, and enter into the Presence of God. Our mind comingles with God’s and God’s mind intertwines with ours. Although our union with Christ is fixed, our communion with Christ, the actual enjoyment of our awareness with Spirit fluctuates.

I am not speaking about the Eucharist, The Lord’s Supper, or the celebration of the Communion service; these are rituals that can initiate communion. Rather, I am speaking about the

very intimate and personal connection with God that we find in the quiet. Contemplative prayer and meditation are methods of communing with God, which restores and cleanses us.

In a moment you will be invited to participate in the ancient ritual of communion. Communion, as in Baptism, is an outer symbolic ritual of an inner spiritual process. We do not need ritual to connect with God, but it is often meaningful, and helps us focus and remember.

The essence of the communion that Jesus instituted is contained in His words, “When you pray, go within your closet and shut the door and pray to your Father Who is in secret.” Many people reach out in thought and feeling to a god they think is out in space. But the true God, the Source of Creativity, Intelligence, and Love is within us.

Of course, God is omnipresent, but our place of contact or communion with Spirit is within our consciousness. You do not need to be baptized or be of a certain denomination to participate in communion. It is as meaningful as you make it.

What happens or can happen in a true communion service? The soul can experience a feeling of security and peace even though outer circumstances may seem to indicate turmoil and instability. To state it in another way, our consciousness is raised; our awareness of God within is increased. This is what Christ was inviting his disciples to experience. This is what you are invited to experience now.

[Pass out the bread. Give thanks.]

The bread is symbolic of everything that gives us life: not only food, but the omnipresent substance of God. It is the Divine essence out of which all things are formed, including our bodies. It is the teachings of Christ and the awareness of Spirit within and around us. Our thoughts, feelings, and beliefs give it form. This is why Jesus said, “If you can believe, all things are possible.”

When Jesus says to eat or drink this, he is referring to our taking in, accepting, absorbing into our consciousness, understanding and applying these qualities into our being. It does not mean, as my Anthropology professor insisted, that Christians are vampire cannibals. We must look beyond the physical, to the spiritual nature, significance, meaning, and benefit of the ritual of communion.

Then Jesus said, “Take, eat; this is my body.” To expand that thought, it means “Take this bread that I have broken as physical nourishment for your body, just as I offer my broken human body known as Jesus, to crucifixion. By so doing the example of my life and sacrifice offers nourishment for your spiritual development and that of all humanity.”

He then took the wine, which represents the Divine life-giving energy of God. It is the Light that sustains and warms and emanates from the heart of Christ. By prayerfully bathing in that Energy and Light we are cleansed in the ‘blood’ of the Divine Power that cauterizes our ignorance, bad habits, and

tendencies. He then said, “This is the blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.”

“Drink this, absorb into your awareness the spirit of willingness to sacrifice your attachments to the world so that you can achieve oneness with God. Understand my immortality-bestowing teachings of forgiveness, divine love, unshakable fortitude, wisdom, judgment, willpower, compassion, love, tolerance, and self-surrender of the ego to Spirit’s embrace.”

So, it is my prayer that we can see Palm Sunday as the beginning of a journey of Love, not only by Christ for us, but by us for Christ: A journey of giving and receiving, and knowing that the more we give, the more we receive. It is a journey of letting go and accepting; the more darkness we release, the more Light we retain. I pray that we can choose clearly between the kingdom of humankind and the Kingdom of Heaven.

I pray that although we can, at any moment, enter into communion with Christ, we still will take a moment at meal times to thank God not just for the physical nourishment, but for the spiritual nourishment gained from communing with our Creator and fellow Children of God for just that moment.

So, let’s take a moment and gratefully move into prayer....