

April 9, 2017

The Invitation of Palm Sunday and Passion Sunday

PRAYER

May the words of my mouth be meditations of our hearts and be always acceptable unto Thee. O Lord our strength and our redeemer. AMEN

SERMON

About forty days ago, I stood before most of you and invited you to the observants of a holy lent. We now are beginning the last week of that lent season. I hope that you have found it to be meaningful. I hope that you've found in the call to repentance an invitation to draw closer to God not out of fear but out of love. If you have been attending the services on Sunday here or elsewhere. I hope that you have heard several invitations that have come from Jesus to individuals and I think ultimately to each of us and to all of us.

I think that when Nicodemus came to Jesus asking about who he really was. He heard Jesus' invitation to be born again. To be born of water and the Spirit. An invitation that went far beyond this one Pharisee Nicodemus but was extended to every person. That to truly come to the kingdom of God, we must each be born anew. Born of water and the Spirit. To come to know God more intimately. To come and allow God's spirit to be a part of our life and our living. And that is a new birth, a new way of seeing life. A new way of seeing our own lives.

I hope you remember as Jesus was traveling through Samaria. The Samaritan woman came to the well and a conversation between the two began. And he offered an invitation, "If you would have asked, I would have given you living water, so that you would never thirst again." Well give me that living water, so I don't have to come back to this well anymore. I don't have to thirst anymore. An invitation that was accepted. Give me that water that wells up within the person who believes. Jesus also said, the time is coming when the true worshippers will worship in Spirit and in truth for that is such that God wants for worship. She went and she invited the people of her village. And the ones that she was separated from because of her own living of her life. And invited them to come and see, could this be the Messiah? The invitation that Jesus extended to her is extended to us.

A living water, a living stream that nourishes us, that quenches our thirst for what is right. For that intimate relationship with God, that God desires for us and with us. To go and to share the invitation with others. Come and see. Come and experience. Come in Spirit and in truth. And know the presence of God. Not as one who is out there somewhere but one who has deemed to come to us. To make his home with us and in us.

The invitation to Martha and Mary to believe, to believe in life. To believe in resurrection. When Martha came to Jesus while he was still far off. Lord if you would have been here my brother would not have died. "Your brother will live again; do you believe this?" Yes, Lord I believe that at the resurrection on the last day he will be raised again. "I am the resurrection and the life. The one that believes in me will never die, will never die." An invitation to life, to new life. To know a new way of being alive in God, in Christ, in the Messiah. Sends for Mary. Invitation to come and see and witness. Remember the invitation to Lazarus to live again. To be prepared, to know, to understand that a new life is coming. That death bonds will be broken. Lazarus come out, an invitation to be alive again. To know that death will no longer hold sway over him or anyone else. When Jesus has completed his path, when he has completed being obedient to God. The humanity of Jesus being obedient to the divinity. To go and to give himself the life of the world.

In the liturgy for today, we have two different invitations. Jesus coming to the city of Jerusalem. Time of the Passover, hundreds of thousands of people there. They've all come to be at the temple. They've all come from not only Judah and Israel but from the known world. Coming to celebrate the Passover, coming to celebrate what God has done before. In bringing the people of God to this promised land. To remember what God had done for them. And to pray for the time when God would lead them again to the place where they are to be. And Jesus comes and he is a symbol of the new kingdom. And he is an invitation to this new kingdom. A kingdom not based on power and authority over others but a new kingdom that is based on the love of God. And the love that the citizens of this kingdom may share with one another. Based not on power and authority but love and servanthood. To be servants to one another. To witness the servanthood of Jesus the Messiah. As he is obedient to God, obedient even to death, even death on a cross. An invitation that spreads to all, to everyone.

We just finished the passion narrative and there we have another invitation. Jesus fulfilling his role. The humanity in Jesus being obedient to the divinity. Coming even though he dreads the pain of the passion. Even though he dreads that journey through death. And yet knowing that this is the way to invite everyone to receive forgiveness and reconciliation with God. This has been his purpose. This has been his journey from the very beginning. From his conception until this very moment. To be lifted up. To have his arms spread wide. To invite the world to come to be forgiven. To be reconciled to God. And to take on the punishment that is ours because of sin. To take it on because we cannot bear it. Because God does not wish us to be separated from God. And so, he says, "I will take it for them. I will receive the punishment that they deserve. I will experience the death that they deserve. And I invite them to come, to come into God's kingdom."

It is an invitation to know that in the eyes of God and in the eyes of Jesus Christ you are worthy of forgiveness. You are worthy of reconciliation. You are worthy of God's ultimate love. That he has had for you from the beginning of time. You are worthy in God's eyes. Even when we are not worthy in our own eyes. Even if others are not worthy in our eyes. In the eyes of God, you are worthy and you are invited to participate in what Jesus does in his passion and in his death.

That is the great invitation of Good Friday. To know that you are forgiven. To know that the punishment that should be yours has been dealt with. To know that the way has been cleared for you to come into God's kingdom and be a citizen forever.

I invite you once again to participate in the services of Holy Week. In them we go one step at a time through Jesus' invitation to us. That invitation to come and know the love of God. And the commandment to love one another as God has loved you. That will be Maundy Thursday. To come again on Good Friday at noon and hear the passion again. To be reminded of that great invitation. To be reconciled to God not through our worthiness on our own but through what God and Jesus Christ has accomplished for us. To walk the stations of the cross on Friday evening. To come together on Saturday, that darkest of days when Jesus is hidden from our sight. But to see as the darkness comes a light is kindled. A new fire is burning and the pascal candle is lit where we sit with the light of Christ in

our hands. And we begin to remember the story from creation to resurrection. That final and greatest of invitations. That invitation to eternal life that is made clear as Jesus is raised from the dead. This is a week of remembering. It is a week of invitation. May we walk it knowing God's invitation to us. May we gather again next Sunday to celebrate the greatest invitation of all. That invitation to the life eternal that only God can give.