

## “Feeding the hunger”

April 5, 2009

Text: *Psalm 31:9-16, John 12:12-16, Philippians 2:5-11*

### I.

Today is Palm Sunday, of course; but in the tradition, it's also known as Passion Sunday. However we call it, it's the sixth Sunday of Lent and the Sunday that marks the beginning of Holy Week.

However, these two names for the Sunday before Easter arouse a creative tension in us: What are we supposed to do on *Palm Sunday*, or *Passion Sunday*?

As we're doing this morning, are we supposed to celebrate Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem, waving our palm branches and placing them proudly and boldly before our altar of worship and singing celebratory songs of praise?

Is it a day of celebration? Certainly, the celebration ... the excitement ... the image and idea of a victorious Jesus is appealing.

Or, as *Passion Sunday*, are we supposed to take pause and reflect, with compassionate and tearful hearts, because we're reminded of Jesus' awful suffering and the darkness that surrounded his excruciating death?

- As *Passion Sunday*, we're touched by Jesus' sacrifice. And we can identify with the Psalmist in Psalm 31: *Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am in distress.*
- And the Psalmist goes on about his years of struggle and turmoil ... his many years of *sighing*. People sigh when they're distraught, worried, or conflicted about whatever.

However we observe Palm Sunday—or Passion Sunday—what's important is that we get drawn in to the passion of the moment. CHECK IT OUT! Jesus doesn't have to leave the relative calm of Galilee for the tempest that Jerusalem surely will bring. He has a choice. He has other options.

In a sense, Jesus goes to Jerusalem to test the limits of love. He wants to find out who he is and to do that he has to go to the center of Jewish power. No doubt, to some extent, Jesus is conflicted about his future. In any event, these are tough times, difficult times.

If we tell the truth, friends, isn't life like that—difficult? No matter anything about us ... any of the measuring sticks for life, life is difficult. It's not easy making our marriages work ... and raising our children ... finding success in the work place ... and being a responsible member of our community.

## II.

In his best selling book of a few decades back, *The Road Less Traveled*, author **Scott Peck** starts the book with those very words, *life is difficult*.

But what amazes Peck is that, so often, we don't see it—that life is difficult—and instead we get caught up in the notion that somehow whatever stress or difficulty we're going through is totally unique and unusual ... a burden that no other human person has ever gone through before ... at least not in the way that we're going through it.

Peck's point is that, *hey, life is difficult*. It's not easy. But it was never supposed to be easy. He has a name for this common reaction people have to their life struggle. He calls it the **Law of Exceptionalism**; how we think that somehow our experience is the **exception** and that what we're going through has never happened before, at least not to the degree that it is happening to us.

Easily, we can get caught up in the *woe is me* syndrome, can't we? And yet, suffering and struggle and difficult times are in many ways relative matters; and perhaps all we can say in these tough economic times, is that there's a lot going around.

I like the cartoon I saw some weeks back showing a huge desk and a huge CEO sitting behind the desk, looking noticeably tired and troubled in his huge leather chair. Standing in front of him is a man in work clothes, obviously a lowly employee in the corporation.

The worker says to the boss: *If it's any comfort, it's lonely at the bottom too.*

But you know, no matter how tough the times, how grim the circumstances, still, at the end of the day, at our best, we're people of hope and people of faith; and we will NOT be defeated by a few bad days or bad weeks, or by a few set backs or experiences of discouragement.

Why? Because in our faith story, darkness and death and despair are NOT the final chapter. NEVER. That's the powerful message of Easter morning that we'll be celebrating a week from today.

So, how do we get there? Through the stressful times ... the job losses and the fear and anxiety about what tomorrow will bring ...

## III.

We get there by staying close to God and to one another, and by *feeding the hunger* for passion in our lives—the passion for meaning, truth, justice, and love. Are you a person of passion? A person who cares deeply about things?

On some level, I think there's a passion that burns in the heart and spirit of all of us. It's more quiet and contained in some of us, perhaps, but it's there. Think about your life! What are you passionate about?

There's an element to Palm Sunday—to Passion Sunday—that feeds this passion—the passion for life and truth and justice ... the passion to be fully alive to the best God has given us ... and to seek to be the person God calls us to become.

- It's all about a hunger for meaning.
- We're not meant to be bored or oppressed, living on the margins of life.

Check out the way John's gospel talks about Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem. It's a humble entry, as the tradition tells it, with the crowds coming out in celebration. But what's going on?

#### IV.

You'll remember that Palm Sunday happens in John's gospel *after* the raising of Lazarus. No matter how you understand this event (I understand it as metaphor, pointing to a deeper truth, that the forces of life are more powerful than the forces of death) ... no matter how you understand it, it's empowering.

*Lazarus, come out, said Jesus. Out from the grave.*

And soon, Lazarus comes out; and Jesus says, *Unbind him and let him go.*

And everywhere, people are amazed. The raising of Lazarus from the dead is a story of tremendous passion and appeal because it's about life and it's about hope. It's a story where darkness is turned into light, despair into hope; a story where the long night turns into a glorious morn.

And so now, a short time later, when Jesus is approaching Jerusalem, the crowds go out to greet him. And they're excited because they've been energized (they'd heard about Lazarus); and their hopes have been given a new face.

And, of course, the Pharisees, who see Jesus as a threat to their power, are frustrated by all of this. They're beside themselves about what to do. For them, Jesus has become a huge problem. Clearly, they're losing the battle. Finally, as the people come out in droves on Palm Sunday, the Pharisees begin to say to one another,

*See, there's nothing we can do; the world has gone mad after him.*

***Feeding the hunger ...***

## V.

Don't we, too, know the hunger? The hunger for meaning and truth; the hunger for beauty and love; the hunger, deep down, to be alive to the promises of God; the hunger for a closeness to God and a oneness in Christ that can stand up to any difficult times?

So, again, how do we get there?

The Apostle Paul wrote his letter to the Philippians when he was in prison, probably at Ephesus. In prison, no doubt, he had time for serious introspection and reflection on the deeper meaning of his life and on his faith commitments.

That's one of the things that tough times do; they help us sort out who we are ... and what are our lives about—our deepest commitments, our deepest longings and yearnings.

Tough times help put us in touch with what's really important in our lives. They knock all the fluff and superficiality out of us and hammer home what's real and what's important.

And so, in Philippians, Paul is laying it all out. He's always had a good relationship with the Philippians; but, still, he wants to encourage them in every way. And so he says ...

*Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus. Looking not to your own interests, but to the interests of others, do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit but in humility, have regard for others.*

Certainly, this is our calling as Christians—to put on the mind of Christ. To approach life with a humble and gracious spirit but also with a passion for life.

Always, in our lives, if we're awake, there are things we need to do. Jesus needed to go to Jerusalem. What do we need to do ... to feed the hunger? The hunger for meaning and truth ... the hunger for joy and a warming from within?

It's Palm Sunday—Passion Sunday—time to decide.

**All praise be unto God! Amen!**

Dr. Jeffrey E. Frantz  
Miami Lakes Congregational Church, *United Church of Christ*  
6701 Miami Lakeway South  
Miami Lakes, FL 33014  
On the web at [www.mlcchurch.com](http://www.mlcchurch.com)

