

Sermon for Palm Sunday, March 28, 2021

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Today we celebrate Palm Sunday and move into Holy Week, a week in which we remember the divine work of God in Jesus Christ - God come among us: the divine walking around in human flesh, performing miracles, healing people, loving the unlovable, sinless – undeterred from his mission, dying on the cross to free the world from sin and separation, conquering death and rising to new life that we may have eternal life with God. Almighty God! Divine saving deed!

But there is a fullness that is missed if we do not stop and encounter all of Jesus. Listen to this list of some of the Holy Week texts from our Gospels that speak of Jesus, God with us, God in the flesh:

On the following day when they came from Bethany he was hungry.

Then looking at a fig tree that bore no fruit, he cursed it.

Jesus said “Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!”

Then they came to Jerusalem and he entered the temple and began to drive out those selling and buying in the temple; he overturned tables...they were afraid of him.

And as he came near and saw the city, he wept over it...

Jesus said: “Truly I tell you one of you will betray me...You will all become deserters....”

He began to be distressed and agitated and he said to them “I am deeply grieved...”

He threw himself at the ground and prayed “Abba, Father, remove this cup from me;”

At three o’clock in the afternoon Jesus cried out with a loud voice “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

Then he breathed his last.

Can you hear it? Jesus’ flesh. Jesus was hungry. He cursed. He got angry. He wept – sad over a city that would not come to him. He became distressed and agitated. Jesus grieved. He struggled, prayed fervently that things might change. He cried out to God. He felt betrayed and deserted by friends. Jesus felt forsaken by God. He felt alone, abandoned. Jesus – God in the flesh - breathed and died.

Jesus was human.

In Lutheran theology we say Jesus was simultaneously fully human and fully divine - one of the many mysteries we confess - Fully human...like us.

This is easy for us to forget, especially during Holy Week as we know the divine power of resurrection is just around the corner. But I think we miss some of the power of Holy Week, the power of God's saving work in Jesus, if we forget Jesus' full humanity.

Debi Thomas in her article "Be Opened" states: *The Jesus who appears in the Gospels is not half-incarnate. He is as fully human as he is fully God. Which is to say, he struggles, he snaps, he discovers, he grows, he falters, he learns, he fears, and he overcomes. He's real, he's approachable, and he's authentically one of us. The "Good News" is not that we serve a shiny, inaccessible deity who floats five feet above the ground. It is that Jesus shows us — in real time, in the flesh — what it means to grow as a child of God. He embodies what it looks like to stretch into a deeper, truer, and fuller comprehension of God's love.*

Jesus is authentically one of us. If Jesus, God in the flesh, can get angry, weep, grieve, struggle... what is the message to us?

These emotions, these responses to life, are not bad – they are not signs of weakness or failure – they are human. They are real responses to the reality of the flesh. We were created this way to hunger and thirst, to long for and grieve, to get mad sometimes and become distressed by the world around us, to wrestle with things, to cry out to God with our hopes, in our times of feeling abandoned, to honestly speak to God. And God our Creator, has experienced all of these feelings, all of our humanity in Jesus - Fully human, fully divine.

There are times in our lives where this feels central to our faith. Three years ago as I awaited surgery to remove tumors, I found little comfort in the divine God who brings resurrection. I found comfort in God who knew flesh, who wept, who longed for what seemed out of reach, who grieved what would not be, who cried out "My God, my God – where are you?"

As the church of God – the body of Christ – we are a resurrection people, but we are also a people of the cross. We speak hope, but we also know God with us in suffering. We follow Jesus who walked the whole road from Palm Sunday praises to Easter – the whole road – including the scene of weeping over the city, the scene of anger in the temple, the scene of grieving over relationships that would falter, the scene of struggle in the garden, the scene of yelling out to God – abandoned on the cross, the scene of last breath and death. So we must recognize our call to go where there will be weeping, to go where there will be anger and accountability, to go where there will be grief and broken relationships, to go and struggle with the hard stuff, to cry out to God for those who feel abandoned, to bring our breathing presence into places of death. We know God through Jesus who knows the mess of the flesh and calls us to God's authentic presence through our flesh.

In my Clinical Pastoral Education training we were given a seven page list of feeling words. Seven pages! Just the "a" words include: abandoned, adamant, adequate, affectionate, agitated, agonized, ambivalent, amused, angry, annoyed, anxious, apathetic, ardent, arrogant, ashamed, astounded, awed. When we talk to someone we often say "How are you?" and the majority of the time we hear and respond with only one word "Good." Really?

There are seven pages of feeling words to choose from and we have been created in a way that we are capable of feeling them all. We confess a faith in our God who can receive them all –

embracing our humanity. We need not hesitate to come before God and admit we feel more than “good” – we may feel abandoned, adamant, adequate, agonized, ambivalent... or seven other pages of options. God can take it – because God literally took on our flesh.

Can we be this church – this body of Christ to one another? Where it is safe to say more than “good” and know we will be received? Can we be a people who embrace the reality of the mess of the flesh? Can we meet and love one another where we are at in our anger, our grief, our weeping, our struggle?

Fully human...

Philippians reads “let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, although being in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited but relinquished it all, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross.”

This Palm Sunday let us lift our palms to praise the fullness of Jesus, God who travels the whole road from Palm Sunday to Easter, enabling us to strive to be God’s people willing to follow Christ into the fullness of humanity, undeterred from the mission that the whole world, **all** messy flesh, know God’s love in the fullness of their humanity.

Amen.