

## Palm Sunday – March 20 2016

Philippians 2:5-11

Psalm 31:9-16

Luke 22:14-23:46

### A Child's Question: Why Did Jesus Die?

*A sermon preached by The Rev. Dianne Andrews at St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Port Townsend, WA*

Holy Week has begun. Jesus has entered Jerusalem and we have heard the painful story of his death. Knowing that our children would be here in the service this morning I want to address the child's question "Why did Jesus have to die?" because I believe we all deserve more than a simple: "Because God loves us." The story is big and it is hard. The story of Holy Week and Good Friday are inextricably imbedded in the meaning of Easter.

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There were children in the crowd excitedly waiving and shouting "hosanna" at the top of their lungs along with the fathers and mothers, neighbors and friends. Some of the children had never heard of this man Jesus but they jumped and shouted all the same. Others had heard their parents speak of "Jesus of Nazareth." They had heard that he grew up in the north had been travelling south from town to town with a group of friends. As they travelled Jesus would tell stories to teach about how we should be kind and caring one another, and about how much God loves us, and that God's kingdom is grand. God's kingdom is more than we can see in our imagination and even in our dreams... In God's kingdom we are invited to grow, and then grow some more, into the people we were born to be... Henry's job is to be the very best Henry he can be. Henry is not to be a Jim, or a Lucas or an Ethan. He is not to be anyone else but Henry. Olivia is to be the very best Olivia she can be... not a Sarah, or a Kimberly, or an Abigail. Jesus taught that the hope and dream that God has for all of us, in very generation, is that we will be caring, and honest, and truthful... that we will feed the hungry, care for the poor, visit those who are in prison, and care for one another because we love God back by caring for one another, by caring for our neighbor, including those who are new in town, and those who look differently, or think differently, or believe differently than we do.

The children had heard that Jesus healed even people who had horrible skin diseases like leprosy. Lepers were forced to live in the shadows because of the sores on their skin and the prejudice of the community. The children had heard another story about Jesus taking some mud, and mixing it with his own spit and rubbing it on the eyes of a man who had been blind all of his life. After the man washed he could see for the very first time. Jesus wanted people to feel well and cared for in mind, body and spirit. Jesus spoke to large crowds and fed them all with bread and fish when it seemed that there was hardly any food at all.

As Jesus travelled from town to town with his friends, he showed them a better way. The Roman emperor used his power and his soldiers to put people in their places and to keep everything under strict control. The Romans... and even the religious officials... didn't care much for the way that Jesus treated everyone like family... Jesus was a man who showed God's love in the most powerful way... welcoming little children, the crippled, the elderly, the foreigner, the homeless... Jesus welcomed them all as sisters and brothers.

[When you think of a "king" what do you think of?] On this day that we call Palm Sunday the people are welcoming Jesus and calling him a "king." It doesn't make sense! He doesn't wear a crown. He doesn't have fine clothes. And, look, he is riding on... a small donkey... That is not what kings ride on, is it? And

maybe that is the very point. God's kingdom is very different, it is full of blessings...and peace... and life that is rich with the feeling that we belong, that everyone belongs because we are all beloved of God. Wealth and riches in God's kingdom are not measured in gold and jewels, but in caring for one another. Jesus came to show us a much better way.

After three long years of travel, and teaching, and healing, Jesus enters the great city of Jerusalem. Now what? It will be a busy week for Jesus. On Thursday he will celebrate the Passover meal with his friends around a table. The Passover meal recalls how thousands of years ago God saved the children of Israel from slavery and death under Egypt's Pharaoh. At the table on that Thursday night, a mere two thousand years ago, Jesus told his disciples to break bread and drink wine, together, in his name. Jesus promised that when we do that... when we break bread and share the cup... as we do here every Sunday... Jesus promised, and still promises, that he will be present with us in this gathered community.

On next day, after Jesus' very special meal with his friends, on Friday, the children of Jerusalem will once again be on the side of the road. But this time they will see Jesus, not being welcomed, but being teased, and mocked and made to wear a silly purple robe and a crown of thorns. He will walk slowly through the streets carrying a heavy cross. The officials of Jerusalem would not allow Jesus to continue to challenge their power by teaching about God's dream of a beautiful and peaceful kingdom in which no one is left out and everyone feels that they truly belong. What happens on the day we call "Good Friday" is sad and it is painful. The term "Good Friday" does not mean that it was a "good" day. Some say that the term comes from middle English "God" Friday. Others believe that the use of word "good" means "holy" as in "Holy Friday."

In the story that we know as "Good Friday" we hear that at about noon, "darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, while the sun's light failed, and [the curtain of the temple, the curtain of the heavens] was torn in two." Then, as Jesus was hanging on the hard wood of the cross, he breathed his last. Jesus died on that sad, sad day. His body was taken down from the cross and laid in the family tomb of a man named Joseph of Arimathea. It was the custom in those days to rub dead bodies with ointments and oils that were fragrant with the smell of sweet spices. But it was the Sabbath, a religious day of total rest, when no work was to be done between sunset on Friday and sunset on Saturday. So the women who had travelled with Jesus for a long time, and had prepared spices to anoint his body, went away. They plan to return to finish preparing Jesus' body on Sunday when the Sabbath is over. For the time being, a big wheel of a rock was rolled over the opening to the tomb and the women headed home. All was quiet. It was a sad, sad day. But the story is far from over.

The spiritual writer Henri Nouwen has written, "There is never love without sorrow, never commitment without pain, never involvement without loss, never giving without suffering." This story about Jesus death is about sadness and sorrow. But more importantly it is about love. And more important than that... the story is far from being over. Next Sunday is...[ ] and we are going to celebrate mightily! But for this week we share together the journey of Jesus' last days with his friends and we will be sad, together, when he dies on Friday. Next Saturday will be a day of great silence. Jesus will be gone. Absent. But on Easter Sunday...Christians around the world will celebrate being a family of the Christ who overcame death and the grave... our risen Christ who is the promise of new and ever more abundant life. Next Sunday we will celebrate being a people of the resurrection, an Easter people, a family in Christ whose hearts are filled with new life and joy. Until then, I pray us all a very blessed Holy Week.

*Amen...*