

It's Enough

Today is the most solemn of all Sundays.

Today, we listen in as Jesus prepares his friends for what is coming.

And yet again, we hear the central truth of our faith: if you wish to be great, serve the least among you; if you wish to be my follower, renounce violence in all its forms, if you want to experience real life, be willing to die.

But for the disciples, little has changed, and they continue to miss the point – over and over again.

Which is no criticism of the apostles; most Christians continue to miss the point, over and over again.

Jesus moves low, close to the ground, close to those at the bottom of the ladder, close to the grave; but the disciples, like us, want to fly high.

They, and we, have the gleam of riches and power and authority over others sparkling in their eyes; even as Jesus approaches the tomb, his followers can't see what's coming, so high are they flying.

Are we, in our Monday through Saturday lives, any different?

This past week is the tenth anniversary of the beginning of the Iraq war.

This past week, our president is in Israel, and among the topics on the front burner is the potential invasion of Iran.

And the apostles, this day, have only revolution on their mind.

We human beings, it seems, love violence.

And so it is that today, we hear the heart wrenching story of Jesus preparing his friends for what is coming, and for the last time this side of the grave, he tries yet again to bring them low enough to understand about being servants rather than rulers, as he warns them yet again of the sifting that is coming right around the corner, even as Jesus tells them that his fate is to die as a condemned criminal – that it's all about giving up, all about surrender; despite these last, insistent teachings, still, it seems, the love of violence wins the day.

When he tells them that the times will now be hard, to be prepared for hardship, using the metaphors of picking up one's purse and selling one's coat to buy a

sword -- -- they don't hear that it is in surrender and death that violence will finally be defeated -- (which is the very meaning of the prophecy: "He will be counted among the lawless") -- they only hear from the heights that they occupy -- "Take up the sword!" -- which is what they'd always been waiting for -- armed revolution -- victory through violence -- the same thinking that so infects our world today.

And so the response: "Look! We have two swords!"

Some read this and say: "See, Jesus wasn't all about non-violence!"

But every single commentary on this verse says the same thing: even though we can't hear the tone of Jesus' voice, the unanimous consensus is Jesus is either being ironic (and we saw last week how irony fills scripture) -- along the lines of, 2 swords among 12 men?, 12 men about to face the wrath not only of their own elites but the power of Rome as well? Oh yeah, that's plenty; or closer to home, Jesus knows that more words won't crack them open.

And so he says: "it's enough!" as if to say, "You still are deaf, you still are blind-it will take my death, it will take my resurrection, for you to finally see, for you to at long last hear."

We gather this Sunday of the Palms, this Sunday of the Passion, to remember that we indeed are the shouting crowds who love the parade -- and we also are the shouting crowds yelling out with all our might to crucify him.

A woman left just such a service and whispered to the priest bidding everyone goodbye "I just can't say: 'crucify him.'"

She may have thought she was saying something admirable, but in fact she missed the truth of this day.

When GK Chesterton was asked to write a magazine article entitled What's Wrong With The World, he submitted a two word reply: "I am."

The passion of our Lord reminds that we are each of us the problem.

Only getting down low, so we can say yes to that truth, allows us to be set free.

We are, after all, natural born fighters -- we are, after all, whether with words or knives, natural born killers as well.

There is only one remedy for people like you and I.

It is to surrender.

“The only thing that stops a fight is surrender; since it takes two to fight.

Surrender eliminates rivalry.

Plenty will scoff at the idea of surrender; whether by an individual, a clan or a nation, but this is precisely what we are called to do:

“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God ... emptied himself, taking the form of a slave ... even to the point of death.” Phil. 2:5-7.

The great poet W.H. Auden was asked once why he was a Christian, instead of a Buddhist or a Confucian, since all these religions share similar ethical values.

And Auden said, “Because nothing in the figure of Buddha or Confucius fills me with the overwhelming desire to scream, “‘crucify him’.”

Just imagine if we believers took the gospel of Jesus Christ into the Pentagon planning rooms!

Just imagine if we took the gospel into our corporate board rooms!

And, Lord have mercy, just imagine if we took the gospel into the councils of the church!

Not the watered down, me and my personal pal Jesus; but ***the real gospel***; the gospel that insists that the foolishness of God ***is*** the narrow gate through which we might find life.

When we honestly confront the upside down and inside out nature of God; when we honestly confess that “letting go” and “giving up” define God, who isn’t standing side by side with Mr. Auden, screaming with all of our might: “crucify him!”

But we are Christians, and surrender is ***the*** key principle of the gospels:

“unless a seed dies, it remains but a single grain.”

"unless you lay down your life....."

“unless you take up your cross.....”

Surrender is the cornerstone of our theology and of our sacraments.

Surrender is love in action.

When we acknowledge, together, that yes indeed, ***we killed*** Jesus, we then become the community that can also stand under his word of forgiveness.

“This is my blood, shed for many for the forgiveness of sins.”

We are the many.

If we can embrace this truth, and be thankful for the forgiveness we receive, then perhaps that thankfulness, that sense of gratitude, can allow us to forgive those who have hurt us, as individuals, as communities and as a nation.

It is in the circle of surrender meeting forgiveness, that we encounter the mystery that is God, in which all of creation lives and breathes and has its being.

And that, indeed, is enough.

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