

Sermon Notes: **Lent One**

Genesis 9:8-17,
Psalm 25:1-10,
1 Peter 3:18-22

Gospel: Mark 1:9-15 (Parallels = Matthew 3:13-4:17, Luke 3:21-4:15, John 1:29-34)

- This Gospel reading is short and to the point. In preparation for beginning his ministry, Jesus spends forty days of renewal in the desert. Then he begins by preaching that the time of fulfillment of God's promises has come, and the kingdom of God is at hand. We are all called to embrace the kingdom through repentance and faith. This passage is foundational for the whole of Mark's Gospel with which we will engage over the weeks ahead of us.
- John the Baptist completes his work, "proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (v4). Many have taken the opportunity to be baptized by him and start new lives in God.
- Jesus comes to John for Baptism. Mark does not tell us why. The opening of the heavens stands for the start of a new way God will choose to communicate with humankind – through his Son, Jesus Christ. See Isaiah 64:1.
- Nazareth is a small town near Sepphoris which is the capital of Galilee.
- Perhaps "like a dove" in v10 is an allusion to the spirit hovering in Genesis (1:2).
- Mark's, the "voice... from heaven" of v11 confirms the already existing relationship between God and Jesus. Mark has God addressing Jesus where Matthew and Luke have God address all who are present. Word 'beloved' similar to our 'chosen' and echoes Isaiah 42:1 for the connection between Son of God and Servant of God.
- Matthew and Mark describe Jesus' temptation in some detail, but Mark mentions it only briefly: all three say that Jesus overcame the temptation of "Satan" (v13). "Satan probably equates to David's adversary of 1 Chronicles 21:1, see also Zechariah 3:1-3
- "Forty" recalls Israel's 40 years in the "wilderness" and echoes the 40 days of testing Moses endured when the covenant was renewed after the gold calf incident Ex. 34:28. Elijah too spent "forty days" on Mount Sinai (1 Kings 19:8).
- The "good news" (Gk evangelion) probably echoes the LXX of Deutero-Isaiah (Isaiah 40.9). See also Isaiah 41:27, 52:7, 60:6 and 61:1-2.
- The "wilderness" is probably the Judean desert, the home of demons where "wild beasts" may attack Jesus, but "angels" protect him. Consider that 'wilderness' has many forms. For some it will be desert and jungle; for others the urban wilderness where they live and work.
- The fate of John the Baptist foreshadows Jesus' own fate.
- In v15, Jesus returns to Galilee. His message begins with "the time is fulfilled": the time appointed by God, the decisive time for God's action, has arrived. "Kingdom of God" is equivalent to Matthew's "kingdom of heaven" by which Jesus means all of God's past dealings with his creation are coming to fruition. From now on Jesus will speak of both the present reality of God's rule and its future potential.
- "The kingdom of God has come near": the final era of history is imminent. Jesus calls on people to start a new life in God's way, to "repent", and to "believe in the good news".

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Sermon Notes: **Lent Two**

Genesis 17:1-7; 15-16

Psalms 22:24-32

Romans 4:13-25

Gospel: Mark 8:31-38

This text is highly significant for the whole of Mark's gospel and a crucial part of the message that Mark wished his audience to hear. Not only does it correct the understanding of the disciples as to the true nature of the Messiah but as a consequence it also establishes what is the true nature of their calling as the ones who follow the Messiah. The context for Mark's gospel would seem to be one of persecution – perhaps in Rome – and this message would have been one of hope for those who had or were suffering but also a challenge to those who may not have withstood the test so well.

- The disciples are not alone in their refusal to understand that following Jesus was by way of the cross. We, the Church, continue to struggle with the cost that is demanded by discipleship. The Gospel reminds us that, although the resurrection has occurred, God's purposes for creation are still not complete. As Christians, we are called at our baptism to participate in God's mission – to bring healing and hope to the world.
- We are God's agents in the world. Our vocation is not to sit behind closed doors and wait for the world to knock but to go out into the wilderness, where God has gone before and is still to be found. We are gathered together into the community of faith – the Church – to be nurtured and then to be sent forth. "Go in peace to love and serve the Lord". In being sent forth we become the means by which the people of God are gathered up and so the dynamic continues.
- However, to be able to be effective we need to be prepared to deny ourselves and take up our own cross. What is one's own cross? It is made from two related but different woods. The first is our own imperfection – our brokenness, our sinfulness. Without the humility that comes from understanding this, our ability to follow Jesus is substantially impaired. The second is the brokenness that surrounds us – family, friends, church, corporations, governments... War, pollution, corruption, abuse, injustice, inequality, discrimination, persecution, hypocrisy...
- Following Jesus demands of us that we confront our sin and seek to bring the healing of God's love, God's hope and God's justice. The costs may be the thorns, the nails and the spear but these also lead to resurrection and the making of all things new.
- Taking up our cross begins with where we are – our families, churches, work-places but our vision also needs to be broader. The community, national and global levels need to be remembered. As individuals and as communities of faith we do have opportunities and ways both direct and indirect of extending that healing to places and peoples beyond our immediate circle.

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Sermon Notes: **Lent Three**

Exodus 20:1-17

Psalm 19; 1 Corinthians 1: 18-25

Gospel: John 2: 13-22

- The Exodus reading is the ten commandments which establish the sense of right relationships with God and each other and the common ground in the worship and fellowship of the community
- Psalm 19 extols the beauty and glory of the natural world and the law of God which is greatly desired and worthy to be maintained.
- The 1 Corinthians reading focuses on the wisdom of the cross as a symbol of God's power rather than foolishness. In this reversal human wisdom is challenged in the wider context of divine wisdom: whether this is the sign seeking Jews or the knowledge seeking Greeks. Divine wisdom is accessible to both Jews and Greeks through the power of Christ.
- In John's Gospel there is some significant physical movement – Jesus goes up to Jerusalem – in the temple he drives out the sheep and cattle – he pours out the coins and overturns the tables – in response to the desire of the Jews for a sign, Jesus says he will raise up the temple in three days
- The temple is a source of double meaning – there is the physical temple in Jerusalem and the physical temple of Jesus' body
- The Gospel ends with a post resurrection reflection that the significance of this action is remembered and understood by the disciples in the light of the resurrection
- The central challenge Jesus offers in John's Gospel is the true nature of the place of worship and fellowship, as a place of inclusion and equality of access. We are invited to enter into the spirit of this Gospel by challenging what is unjust in our own experience of worship and fellowship
- While this is not explicit in the Gospel, Jesus' reference to the temple of his body connects with our understanding of the Church as the Body of Christ and our participation as members of that body
- The exclusion at the temple gate reflects the custom of exchanging Roman currency into temple currency for the purchase of animals for ritual sacrifice in the temple. These customs had become a source of bureaucracy, exclusion and unfair dealing which was seen by Jesus as denying the core function of the temple as a place of worship and fellowship
- Consider the contemporary equivalents in society and the Church to the situation Jesus confronts in this Gospel. Focus on one or more of these situations and consider the kind of actions which would be taken to respond to injustice and exclusion and the consequences of this response. This could help give emphasis to the courage and risk involved in Jesus' actions as they relate to contemporary examples of responsible civil disobedience or passive resistance which may be considered necessary in response to injustice and exclusion.

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Sermon Notes: **Lent Four**

Numbers 21: 4-9; Psalm 107: 1-3 and 17-22

Ephesians 2: 1-10

Gospel: John 3: 14-21

- several themes of movement in the Gospel reading
 - as Moses lifted the serpent in the wilderness so must Christ being lifted up
- double meaning of Christ being 'lifted up' – crucifixion and exaltation – revelation of God
- the movement from darkness to light.
- we need to know darkness in order to appreciate light

"We thank thee that darkness reminds us of light." T.S Elliot

'If Christ had not suffered,' wrote James Reid, 'there is something in God which would never have been known.' Reid likens the Cross to a crystal which breaks up the light passed through it into its component colours. The Cross of Christ... breaks up the light of uncreated love, and lets us see the myriad-coloured glory. But for the suffering of Christ, we would never have seen the wonder of that love."

From The Armory Commentary, *The Four Gospels*. Ed General Frederick Coutts 1973 Hodder and Stoughton, London.

- saving love of God – Christ did not come to condemn the world but to save it.
 - recalls promise of the prologue
 - prepares for Jesus' coming wider ministry
 - rests on acceptance/refusal of Jesus as revelation of God
 - those who stay in the dark are not condemned by Jesus but by themselves
 - John's emphasis is on response of believer
- Music resource *"You raise me up"* by Secret Garden

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Sermon Notes: **Lent Five**

Jeremiah 31: 31-34

Psalm 119:9-16

Hebrews 5:5-14

John 12: 20-33

“We wish to see Jesus”. What is our response to this seemingly simple request as we, Jesus’ followers stand in the footsteps of the first disciples?

Andrew went first to Philip. Maybe he was unsure if these Greeks were the sort of people who Jesus cared about? Maybe he was just aware of how tired Jesus must have been?

Jesus interprets the coming events of his death, resurrection and ascension as being for the purpose of drawing all people to himself (John 12.32). Here we think back to God’s ‘new covenant’ of Jeremiah 31. A covenant inscribed in the hearts of God’s people, allowing all to know God – from the least to the greatest.

Jesus has removed the gatekeepers and the barriers separating people from God. But people continue to request “we wish to see Jesus”. In one way, answering this request is simple. All of us who have met Jesus have our own story and example to help others to meet with Jesus.

This is the application of God’s mission among ABM’s partners in Fairview in the Philippines (refer to the Rubbish Dump Kids story on DVD). Those who give their time and talents to minister in the Fairview community do so because they have seen Jesus. By living out the transformation of God’s love in their own lives they are enabling other people to see Jesus.

Something to ponder: What do we expect to find when we come to see Jesus? Were the Greeks seeking a wise philosopher; a teacher; perhaps a confident general on the eve of a battle that he would surely win? Instead, Jesus looks towards Golgotha and says “the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified”. How open are we to being surprised and confronted when we seek Jesus?

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Sermon Notes: **Lent Six**

Palm Sunday

Psalm 118:1-2,19-29

Mark 11:1-11 or John 12:12-16

If using Mark:

- Mark's account of the Palm Sunday entry into Jerusalem begins near the Mount of Olives. It is possible that the use of the donkey was prearranged (v2-6).
- The entry on the donkey and the special honors given to Jesus by the people along the way (palms, use of coats, and Messianic greetings) were indications that those present regarded Jesus as King in the sense of royalty. Compare this entry into Jerusalem with that of Jehu and his accession to the throne in the Old Testament (2 Kings 9:13).
- Entering the city in a victory parade, a conquering king would ride a stallion; but this one comes on a borrowed donkey, a symbol of peace. Jesus may have set this up to reveal his humility and so exhibit the true nature of his messiahship. It would also seem that in this instance and in the arrangements for the Passover feast (14:12-16), Jesus had already negotiated with unnamed persons. Or so Mark would have us believe.
- The greeting "Hosanna, blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!" comes directly from today's Psalm 118:26. This Psalm was also part of the Jewish liturgy for the Passover. The word, "Hosanna" is a transliteration of a Hebrew one-word sentence meaning, "Save us, please!" It is likely that both Mark or John intentionally have the crowd meeting Jesus with the words of a prayer the Old Testament addressed to God. In the course of time the Hebrew meaning of "Hosanna" was forgotten and it became a Christian exclamation of praise.
- It is highly significant that Jesus is linked to David at this moment.
- The ending of the entry into Jerusalem is anticlimactic. Jesus just went into the temple and looked around (11:11), then left for an overnight stay in Bethany, a hamlet on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives. That was where the home of Lazarus, Martha and Mary was located.
- The business between Jesus and the welcoming throng was unfinished. It seems that Mark wrote of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem with the Jewish messianic tradition in mind. That tradition has been radically transformed by the later apostolic interpretation of it and was rooted in the apostles' understanding of the words and deeds of Jesus himself.

If using John:

- Most of the forgoing applies. John's version of Jesus' triumphal entry covers the same ground including the details that it was the crowds who greeted him. John continues his portrayal of the disciples not knowing what the celebration was all about until after the resurrection. Thus he links the entry with the Passion and resurrection narratives as the glorifying of Jesus, the Word of God become flesh.
- There is one small divergence from Mark's narrative in that it is Jesus himself who found the donkey to ride on. Anyone who has walked down the Mount of Olives to the Kidron Valley and sat on the steps leading to the Golden Gate into the temple precincts has to wonder why a donkey was needed at all except to fulfill the scriptures. John seems to indicate this in vs. 16. Whatever its origin, the tradition remains and is still to be celebrated in the Liturgy of the Palms.

Sermon Notes: **Lent Six**

Passion Sunday

Readings: Isaiah 50:4-9a

Psalm 31:9-18

Philippians 2: 5-11

Gospel: Mark 14:1-15:27 or Mark 15:1-39, (40-47)

The passion narrative provides a wealth of perspective on God's mission. In Mark 15 the disciples are absent. They fled when the religious and political powers in Jerusalem flexed their muscle. Peter denies Jesus three times and then breaks down weeping. Author Ched Myers suggests that an icon of Peter weeping should be hung in every church.

With parishes and ministries in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, the Anglican Diocese of Jerusalem knows the cost of speaking truth to power. In 2005, armed Israeli security forces overran St George's Cathedral in Jerusalem to arrest Mordecai Vanunu who had been given refuge in the Cathedral close. Vanunu spent more than 15 years in solitary confinement for blowing the whistle on the Israeli nuclear weapons program in the international media. Despite the dwindling number of Christians in the Occupied Territories, the church's presence remains crucial. Schools, hospitals and centres caring for the disabled and the elderly live out the message of hope, love and reconciliation.

Consider Pilate and the crowds. Does power reside with Rome and their occupying army, or with the assembled masses and their chants of "Crucify!?" Similarly we might ask of our own society, whether change results from courageous leadership at the top or a groundswell of community activism that forces leaders to take action.

A story:

During World War II, a group of German students called the White Rose spoke out repeatedly against the evils of Nazism. They were so distressed by the spirit of hatred ruling their country that they openly opposed Hitler. Eventually they were caught and beheaded, but by then they had started a movement that could not be stifled. Here is something one of their members, Sophie Scholl, wrote from prison shortly before her death – at the age of 21:

"Oh, there are very few beasts. The real damage is done by the millions who simply want to survive... the honest people who want to be left in peace... those who don't want their lives disturbed by anything bigger than themselves, those with no sides and no causes, those who won't take the measure of their own strength for fear of antagonising their own shadows. Those for whom passion, truth, freedom, honour and principle are only for literature. And it is all an illusion because they die too – those people who rolled up their spirits into tiny little balls to hide them under their puny lives to be safe. Safe? From what? Life is always on the edge of death. The little candle burns itself out – just like the flaming torch. I choose my own way to burn."

(References: White Rose, Ched Meyer)

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