

SERMON – PASSION SUNDAY A – APRIL 5, 2020

Text: Jn. 12:20-43, especially 23-24

INTRODUCTION – explain relationship between Palm Sunday, Holy Week, and Good Friday & Easter

-Our text today come from the Gospel of John... the most theological of the four gospels... the eagle... no birth account... leaves Christmas story to Matthew and Luke. Instead He introduces Jesus as the Word of God become flesh and the light of life that was coming into the world.

-John's gospel records John the Baptist's testament to Jesus at His baptism, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world"

-It is in John's account of Jesus' crucifixion that they soldiers did not break His legs to hasten his death, so that the scripture from Exodus and Numbers should be fulfilled. The Passover Lamb was to be roasted whole. This is a theological observation. It makes the connection between Jesus and the Passover Lamb. It confirms Jesus as the Lamb of God. It makes the inference that just as the blood of the Passover Lamb saved the Hebrews from the angel of death, so Jesus' blood saves His followers from eternal death.

-Our Gospel lesson for today is a theological view of Jesus' Passion and death. The theological principle is this: the death of the Son of God means eternal life and the forgiveness of sins for those who believe in Him.

-That's why John uniquely reports Jesus saying: "Truly truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies; the bears much fruit".

...If it dies, it bears much fruit"... What fruit?

-A lot of fruit... One of the fruits or products of Christ's work was that people should believe in Him and through that faith find forgiveness of sins and a new and eternal life. One way we could measure how many people might believe in Him is to count the number of crosses in the world. So... how many crosses have you seen in

your life?... in how many countries?... suspended on gold or silver chains around how many people's neck's?... pinned to how many lapels? Situated on the top of how many buildings? ...Embossed on how many book covers?

-I know there are some people who say a cross is just a piece of jewelry and doesn't necessarily mean that the wearer believes in Jesus as their savior and lord... but still... a lot of people who wear the cross or cross themselves or go into the buildings that have crosses on them or read or sing out of the books that have crosses on them... they do believe in Jesus... even in today's secular age... people all around the world, speaking many different languages. Multiply that by all the people in past 80 generations... that's a lot of people.... Or you could say... it's a lot of fruit.

-This body of all different kinds of people who believe in Jesus... this is the Holy Christian Church on Earth. They are the literal fulfillment of Jesus words we just read from the Gospel of John... "When I am high and lifted up, I will draw all people to myself." You and I are part of that great and glorious innumerable crowd.

-I say "glorious" not because we especially good looking or famous or nice. We are glorious because Jesus has graciously shared His glory with us. He has declared us "forgiven", "righteous", inheritors of heavenly glory. He just gave it to us. We didn't earn it... He did.

-Our gospel lesson this morning talks about that glory... did you catch that when I read from John? Jesus' soul was troubled, it says... because His hour had come. By that He meant that He knew He had to die that horrible reviling, the humiliating trial, the brutal scourging, the taunting of the torturing soldiers and some in the crowd that watched with glee. Finally, there was the excruciating death on the cross. And Jesus says, this is the hour of His glory. The very voice of God boomed from the sky declaring that He will glorify His name by glorifying Jesus.

-The glory of the cross is a peculiar kind of glory. It is glorious because of what it produced not by what it looks like in the eyes of ordinary secular, spiritually dull people.

-The prophet Isaiah saw the glory of Jesus over 700 years before He was born. In our Old Testament lesson for today Isaiah foresaw that Jesus would "give

his back to those who strike... would not hide his face from disgrace or spitting” He did that and more... because He has his Father love the world... even in the face of people’s sin and cruel rejection, He loved that world so that He gave His life on the cross. In the 53rd chapter of his book, Isaiah record His vision of what Jesus would accomplish through His suffering... “Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows... He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed.” About 800 years late the Apostle Paul says it more clearly and succinctly in his letter to the Colossians: “He has delivered us from the powers of darkness and has transferred us into the kingdom of His dear Son: in whom we have redemption through His blood even the forgiveness of sins” (I Col. 1:13-14)

-Can you imagine the kind of love of humanity that would motivate that great saving act? What courage! What faith Jesus had in His heavenly Father to vindicate Him... faith that He would raise Jesus from the dead... take Him into heaven to plead for us and to judge the world at the end of time. Just think... He shares that glory so hard won... with us! Because of Him, we too have a resurrection from the dead... we too are righteous because our sins are forgiven... we have too have faith in the grace and power of God because of Jesus. Nobody can beat the deal Jesus gives us for the price we pay.. or don’t pay. There are no other gods before Him. He’s the best.

-Oh... you think there are no other gods? There are... true, they are illusionary, impotent and deceitful, but they want us to worship them instead of Jesus. Satan wants to be our god. He sends many other intermediary forces and people and spirits to act on His behalf to tempt us into a destructive life of sin and condemnation... things like earthly delights that lead us into addiction and exploitation of others... selling our soul for money, for power and control or fame or accommodation to the spirits of time to impress our neighbors. These are the dark forces around us. They want to trick us... to lead us into sin that undermines the goodness of our own lives; our neighbors’ lives and worst of all... spiritually distracts us and undermines our love and grateful worship of God. “Selling your soul to the devil” is what they call it on the street. You never want to do that.

-Do exactly the opposite Jesus says our gospel text from John, “believe in the light and become sons and daughters of light”. You know that Jesus is the light of the world don’t you? The best way to nurture your belief in Jesus is to serve Him. Worshipping Him is part of it. We know that Word and Sacrament nurture faith. That’s the essence of Christian worship. The other part is the follow Him... follow His will and way when we leave the worship services and resume the ordinariness of daily life. This is when it is most important to walk in the light of Jesus and reject works of darkness.

-Jesus calls us over the tumult and noise of the busy world to love our neighbor... even our enemies... and to love Him most of all. He coaches and encourages us, reassuring us that sufferings and disappointments are not signs that God has abandoned us. They are opportunities to give glory to God that His Spirit sustains us even in hard and desperate times... even right now the middle of a pandemic. We are reminded in the 46th Psalm, “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in times of trouble”. That Psalm was the inspiration for Martin Luther’s famous hymn, “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God”.

-I can’t think of a better way to close this meditation that with the words of our second lesson in today’s lectionary from Philippians, “Have this mind among yourselves... which is yours in Christ Jesus... He humbled Himself, taking on the form of a servant... God exalted Him... so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow... and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father”

-So I say to you in closing... bow to Jesus... confess His Holy name... and serve Him to the Glory of God.

-Amen