

Readings and Sermon for Sunday 10th April 2022 Evening
Palm Sunday

Collect

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, who, of thy tender love towards mankind, hast sent thy Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, to take upon him our flesh, and to suffer death upon the cross, that all mankind should follow the example of his great humility: Mercifully grant, that we may both follow the example of his patience, and also be made partakers of his resurrection; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Isaiah 5:1-7

Let me sing for my beloved
my love-song concerning his vineyard:
My beloved had a vineyard
on a very fertile hill.
He dug it and cleared it of stones,
and planted it with choice vines;
he built a watch-tower in the midst of it,
and hewed out a wine vat in it;
he expected it to yield grapes,
but it yielded wild grapes.

And now, inhabitants of Jerusalem
and people of Judah,
judge between me
and my vineyard.
What more was there to do for my vineyard
that I have not done in it?
When I expected it to yield grapes,
why did it yield wild grapes?

And now I will tell you
what I will do to my vineyard.
I will remove its hedge,
and it shall be devoured;
I will break down its wall,
and it shall be trampled down.
I will make it a waste;
it shall not be pruned or hoed,
and it shall be overgrown with briars and thorns;
I will also command the clouds
that they rain no rain upon it.

For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts
is the house of Israel,
and the people of Judah
are his pleasant planting;
he expected justice,
but saw bloodshed;
righteousness,
but heard a cry!

Luke 20:9-19

He began to tell the people this parable: 'A man planted a vineyard, and leased it to tenants, and went to another country for a long time. When the season came, he sent a slave to the tenants in order that they might give him his share of the produce of the vineyard; but the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. Next he sent another slave; that one also they beat and insulted and sent away empty-handed. And he sent yet a third; this one also they wounded and threw out. Then the owner of the vineyard said, "What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him." But when the tenants saw him, they discussed it among themselves and said, "This is the heir; let us kill him so that the inheritance may be ours." So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others.' When they heard this, they said, 'Heaven forbid!' But he looked at them and said, 'What then does this text mean:

"The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone"?

Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls.' When the scribes and chief priests realized that he had told this parable against them, they wanted to lay hands on him at that very hour, but they feared the people.

Sermon

On the evening of Palm Sunday, I wonder whether there is any need for me to provide an explanation of the parable of the wicked tenants. As we enter into Holy Week, it's really rather obvious what Jesus is telling the scribes, pharisees and anyone else listening as he recounts this parable. Jesus has spent his time praying intimately to God as his father – as his Dad – and now he tells this story. A vineyard owner is seeking to recover his share of the produce of the vineyard from his tenants. First he sends a number of slaves, each one of whom is beaten, insulted, wounded and thrown out, so finally he sends his son, making the assumption that the tenants will respect the son and heir. But instead they put him to death, hoping that they can then keep the inheritance for themselves.

Jesus has been talking about his imminent death for some time now. It's obvious, isn't it, that he is talking about himself. That he is the son and heir who will be put to death.

And of course on one level that really is all that needs to be said. There is something about Holy Week that is very familiar. Year after year we know as we set out on Palm Sunday's service, walking around the church with our palm crosses and celebrating Jesus's arrival in Jerusalem, what lies ahead of us. In fact the Palm Sunday liturgy anticipates this. First we celebrate; then we hear the Passion Narrative of the trial, crucifixion and death.

And we really do know what is to come. The Last Supper at which Jesus washes his disciples' feet on Thursday; time spent at the foot of the cross on Good Friday; and then the waiting.

So why do we do it? What is it that brings us back year after year?

Perhaps we find a starting point if we consider our roots in Judaism. The Passover is a meal celebrated year after year, and it is a foundational story for the community. Each year the youngest child asks the elder to recount the story, and in doing so the community enters into that story, becoming a part of it themselves.

The same is true for us. Early Christians were referred to as people of the Way. Part of the Way comes from following Jesus to the cross. Many of us will have used the Stations of the Cross, walking from one to the next, meditating on Jesus's journey. We do it especially during Lent and Holy Week, but being part of the story of the death, and of course resurrection, of Jesus is what it means to be Christian. Each time we enter into the story, we become a part of it. We understand it in new ways. We position ourselves differently. Our identity continues to be formed.

There is something powerful about continuing to enter into a story – and enter into it faithfully – when we know how it will end. If you're anything like me, you will have a range of memories of Good Fridays past. Those years when the weather matches the mood precisely – grey, cold and damp. And those years when you have emerged from three hours in church to glorious sunshine and perhaps the sound of people enjoying the glorious

weather, and you have somehow felt out of sync. Displaced. Each experience deepens and enriches our reflections, however incongruous and unhelpful they may feel at the time. And for us, entering into the story is *always* done in the knowledge of resurrection.

Which brings me back to the parable of the wicked tenants. When Jesus told this story, those who had been listening carefully might have understood its significance. But the events of Holy Week were yet to come.

I wonder whether it is worth reflecting just a little on that final sentence. “When the scribes and chief priests realized that he had told this parable against them, they wanted to lay hands on him at that very hour, but they feared the people.”

There is something about this reading that seems to contrast calm level-headedness and more angry and emotional reactions: Jesus very calmly tells a story – a story in which he predicts his own death. And the response of the scribes and chief priests is emotional. “They wanted to lay hands on him at that very hour.” It seems that two emotions have been aroused in them. Anger against Jesus. And also fear of the people.

And right in the middle of that sentence we have those words “at that very hour”. The scribes and chief priests are enraged and want to respond. And yet for Jesus, as we know, his hour has not yet come. Because his connection is with God. That is where he finds his direction.

Emotion isn’t wrong. It is a core part of the people we are – the people God created us to be. And in fact on Thursday, when we find ourselves in the Garden of Gethsemane, we will see that Jesus is not always level-headed either.

The difference is this. The wrestling that Jesus will engage with is centred on God and includes God. He will cry out to his father in anguish and pain.

The scribes and chief priests have forgotten about God entirely. They are angry with Jesus who threatens their power. And they are scared of the people – whose approval secures their power.

So as we enter into this familiar story of Holy Week, we bring the people we are, with the emotions that we have. Indeed, unless we enter into the story with the whole of ourselves, we are going to miss something. And we aim to enter into it with our eyes firmly fixed on God. So that when we are in pain, we share it with God; when we don’t know which way to turn, we call on God for guidance; and when we celebrate on Easter morning, we do so because we know what is really important. And that is the love of God for all God’s creation.

Amen