

Epworth Chapel on the Green
April 5, 2009
Palm/Passion Sunday
Rev. Dr. Brook Thelander

Isaiah 52:13-53:12
Psalm 22:1-11
Philippians 2:5-11
Mark 14:32 - 15:47

If I were to take a vote today and ask you to list the top five passages of Scripture in all the Bible, I would not be surprised to find this passage from Isaiah on your lists. It is, in my view, one of the most poignant and powerful texts in all of Scripture.

Now in the ancient world the Hebrew people thought differently than we moderns do today. One of the ways they thought differently involves what scholars call the concept of “corporate personality.” Simply put, this involved the notion that many persons could be integrally bound together with the actions of a few, or even one, person who preceded them.

The concept of corporate personality is at work, for instance, when Moses instructs the children of Israel to teach their children about the Exodus experience, even though they themselves are many generations removed from the actual event itself. But through the notion of corporate personality, moms and dads were to instruct their kids and say, *we* were slaves in Egypt, and God delivered *us*.

The concept of corporate personality is also at work when the apostle Paul writes in the letter to the Romans, “in Adam all sinned, and therefore all died; even so, through Christ’s death shall many be made righteous.”

And the idea of corporate personality is at work here in Isaiah. The Suffering Servant is innocent and pure, and yet is wounded and crushed beyond recognition. He is led away to death like a lamb is led to slaughter. He is abandoned and alone.

And yet the source of the Servant’s anguish and pain is not *him*, but *us*.

Isaiah tells us, “he was wounded and crushed for *our* sins. He was beaten that *we* might have peace. *He* was whipped; *we* were healed” (v. 5)

“*We* have strayed like lost sheep. God has laid on *him* the guilt and sins of us all” (v. 6)

Who among the people realized that he was dying for *their* sins? That he suffered *their* punishment?” (v. 8)

And finally: “he had done no wrong; yet he was buried like a criminal” (v. 9).

It is this One who entered Jerusalem on that fateful day amidst palm branches and shouts of “Hosanna.”

The heading in most of our Bibles above this section of Scripture in our Gospels reads, “The Triumphal Entry.” But I sometimes think that heading is a

misnomer. In some ways, Jesus' entry into Jerusalem was anything but triumphant. Let me offer you some reasons why.

First, Jerusalem was filled with hundreds of thousands of people preparing to celebrate the Passover. They were not expecting Jesus. In Matthew and Luke's version of the story, people ask, "Who is this?" as Jesus enters the city.

And the answer is, "he is a prophet from Nazareth in Galilee." That may sound like an innocent answer to us, but in truth it was a blatant put-down.

And it is easy to read this story and imagine the whole city of Jerusalem coming out to welcome Jesus, but that simply isn't true. The crowd was not as large as we might imagine, and even those who waved palms and shouted "Hosanna" turned on Jesus soon after they discovered he was not the kind of king they were expecting.

A second reason why Jesus' entry into Jerusalem was not triumphant was his method of entry into the city.

Think about it. If you were planning on making an entrance into Boise and really doing it up right, how would you do it? If you were going to make your presence known and really throw your weight around, to make an entrance with real pomp and circumstance, what would you do?

Would you come into town in a beat up old Ford, or would you arrive in a stretch limousine?

If you wanted to make a real show of force, would you come into town in a tank wielding assault rifles and rocket launchers, or would you ride into town on a bicycle carrying a water pistol?

Let me remind you how Jesus made his entrance. The people expected him to arrive on a white stallion, the symbol of war. And they expected him to arrive with an escort of spears and weaponry.

But Jesus didn't send his disciples for a white horse. He sent them for the symbol of peace and meekness, the donkey. And it was borrowed at that. A loaner! A rental! And the only spears with him that day were the leaves on the palm branches. Seen in this light, Jesus' entry into Jerusalem was hardly triumphant.

But perhaps the most important reason why Jesus' entry into Jerusalem wasn't triumphant comes to us from Isaiah, and his notion of corporate personality. The reason is simply this: *how could Jesus' entry into Jerusalem be triumphant, when it was you and me who caused him to go?*

Brothers and sisters, we are now plunged into that time of year when the reality of this dawns on us with great power. Whatever else this week may hold for us, this week should not be like other weeks on our calendars. For this is the week which finds us looking in the mirror at the reflection of history, and what we

see there is a bloodied, beaten, disfigured man of peace making his way up a hill outside Jerusalem, staggering under the weight of *our* sin and rebellion as he goes.

Now I don't share this truth with you today in order to make you wallow in unproductive guilt. We embrace this truth so that we may appreciate the fact that when Jesus carried our sin and guilt to Calvary, he did it *willingly*, because it is God's will not to let our sin have the last word.

In that sense, Jesus' entry into Jerusalem was truly triumphant.

We share in that victory this morning as we come to the Lord's Table. As we come, let us come in humility and contrition, knowing that it was *us* who drove our Lord into the city on that day.

But let us also come with great joy, knowing that he went willingly in response to God's will, and in so doing defeated sin and death and made us heirs of eternal life.

In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.