



Parramatta
Mission



uniting
church
in Australia
Synod of NSW & ACT

Lenten Devotions 2020

Week 6

Parramatta Mission

Uniting Church in Australia



Lent commenced on Ash Wednesday, 26th February, preparation the church for Easter. From Ash Wednesday to Easter is 40 days, not counting Sundays, and correlates with Jesus being in the wilderness for forty days after his baptism, tempted, yet found without sin. Christians the world over give attention during this time to their relationship with God, reflecting upon growth in faith, how the faith is expressed in relationship with others. This year the pastoral team are encouraging Lenten devotions through providing a daily set of Bible readings and reflections. A Bible reading is chosen for each day, and a member of the team will write a brief reflection for that day. You are encouraged to use these reflections as part of the daily devotions, using prayers of your choice. If you have other devotional material, you might like to either suspend, or augment that material with what is provided through the newsletter. The daily prayer guide from the Uniting Church is also included, for those who wish to take this up.

Reflections will be written by:

The Old Testament: Rev Dr Clive Pearson,

Psalm: Rev Dr Amelia Koh Butler,

Epistle: Rev Dr Manas Ghosh,

Gospel of John:

Rev Christine Bayless Kelly,

Gospel of Matthew: Rev Keith Hamilton

Collated by : Coral Harris

Monday, 30th March:2020

Isaiah 50:4-9a

⁴The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. Morning by morning he wakens— wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught. ⁵The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I did not turn backward. ⁶I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting. ⁷The Lord God helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame; ⁸he who vindicates me is near. Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who are my adversaries? Let them confront me. ⁹It is the Lord God who helps me; who will declare me guilty? All of them will wear out like a garment; the moth will eat them up. (NSRV)

Reflection

The lead up to Easter turns attention to the four servant songs to be found in 'second' Isaiah (chapters 40-55). The third is found at Isaiah 50:4-9a. The servant here is portrayed as a 'teacher': the servant has the 'tongue of a teacher' and 'knows how to sustain the weary with a word'. One might imagine then that his teaching would be welcomed and much appreciated. But that is not the case.

The servant faces more sustained opposition. In the face of such he does not turn back from what he is to proclaim: he is not rebellious; he sets his face like flint; he is insulted and spat upon. He is struck but he does not turn away and is thus not put to shame. It is not surprising that Matthew makes use of these songs to help his audience understand who Jesus is: Matthew is the only gospel that bids the weary to come to him and they will find his yoke gentle.

There is often pressure brought to bear on those whose teaching and insights go contrary to what others want. Crowds, groups, committees don't necessarily 'teach' what is right. The servant song shows that it takes great strength and courage to teach what is right and maintain integrity.

Prayer

Let us give thanks to the God for those whose words comfort us, inspire us, strengthen us with teaching that is true; let us give thanks to those who stand firm for what is right despite the words and deeds of others who oppose them.

Clive Pearson

Tuesday 31st March 2020

Psalm 130

1 Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD.

2 Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications!

3 If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand?

4 But there is forgiveness with you, so that you may be revered.

5 I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I hope;

6 my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning, more than those who watch for the morning.

7 O Israel, hope in the LORD! For with the LORD there is steadfast love, and with him is great power to redeem.

8 It is he who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities.

Reflection

When you are your lowest point, who is able to respond? While friends and relatives may want to help, perhaps it is the Spirit of God who is able to open us to comfort and hope. Sometimes we do not have anything – no energy nor imagination – to be able even contemplate seeking or receiving help. Sometimes help and cope break through the fog of despair to remind us that God is the source of goodness and healing.

Prayer

In Silence, allow God to work inside you...

Amelia Koh-Butler

Wednesday 1st April 2020

Philippians 2:5-11

⁵ Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

⁶ who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,

⁷ but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.

And being found in human form,

⁸ he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.

⁹ Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,

¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

¹¹ and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Manas Ghosh

Reflection

In these few verses Paul gives us a thumbnail sketch of the very nature of Jesus – his divinity and his humanity. Jesus' existence did not begin in a manger in Bethlehem, for he was present from the very beginning with God. The one who came and dwelt among us is the Son of God, and the mystery of the incarnation which we celebrate at Christmas, is fully realised during this Holy Week as journey to the cross with him.

Jesus, as the Son of God, had every reason to enjoy his divine status and rights. But Paul is emphatic, he “did not regard equality with God, as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave... He humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross.” And then God exalted Jesus to the highest level –“that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bend . . . and every tongue should confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” This seems incomprehensible but the fact of the matter is only when Jesus loses his life for our sake that he receives it back again. It is when Jesus humbles himself that he is most highly exalted.

This is where the rubber hits the road for any follower of Jesus. To be his follower, Paul says, be humble like a slave; be obedient to the will of God; and if necessary be prepared to sacrifice yourself. Not easy. Even sounds outrageous. But that's the way to follow Jesus.

As we enter the Holy Week and reflect on Jesus' passion may we focus on his self-emptying and radical obedience in the light of both his humanity and divinity, that we too may set aside all pride and selfish ambition, that we may have the heart of a servant so that God would be glorified in us.

Prayer: Together in Song 609 (You may sing it or reflect on it as a prayer)

May the mind of Christ my Saviour
live in me from day to day,
by his love and power controlling
all I do and say.

May the word of God dwell richly
in my heart from hour to hour
so that all may see I triumph
only through his power.

May the peace of God my Father
rule my life in everything,
that I may be calm to comfort
sick and sorrowing.

May the love of Jesus fill me
as the waters fill the sea;
him exalting, self denying,
this is victory.

May I run the race before me
strong and brave to face the foe,
looking only unto Jesus
as I onward go.

Manas Ghosh

Thursday 2nd April 2020

John 12:9-19

⁹When the great crowd of the Jews learned that he was there, they came not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ¹⁰So the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death as well, ¹¹since it was on account of him that many of the Jews were deserting and were believing in Jesus.

¹²The next day the great crowd that had come to the festival heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. ¹³So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord - the King of Israel!" ¹⁴Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it; as it is written: ¹⁵"Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion. Look, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!" ¹⁶His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written of him and had been done to him. ¹⁷So the crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to testify. ¹⁸It was also because they heard that he had performed this sign that the crowd went to meet him. ¹⁹The Pharisees then said to one another, "You see, you can do nothing. Look, the world has gone after him!"

Reflection

Jesus' arrival into Jerusalem followed on from the raising of Lazarus, the anointing of Jesus' feet with oil by Mary and Jesus' teaching around the country. It precedes some more of Jesus' teaching and the meal when he washed his disciples' feet. Unlike Matthew and Mark (*where people used branches*) and Luke (*where people simply called out*), the gospel of John has the same crowd who had witnessed the resurrection of Lazarus picking up and using **palm** branches. All 4 gospels speak of a triumphant entry into Jerusalem. All speak of Jesus riding on a colt/donkey. All use words of praise. Interestingly in John we also hear the words of the Pharisees. In verse 9 and 10 we read of how they planned to kill Jesus and Lazarus as well- to quench the rising movement of people following Jesus. By verse 19 they realise that such plans are useless. Nevertheless, we know Jesus was killed on a cross- the sign of shame, yet it follows on from a time of triumph. Such a turn-around from triumph the grief to the glory of the resurrection. What a week!

Christine Bayliss Kelly

Friday 3rd April

Luke 19 : 28-40

²⁸After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. ²⁹When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, ³⁰saying, "Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. ³¹If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it.'" ³²So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. ³³As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?" ³⁴They said, "The Lord needs it." ³⁵Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. ³⁶As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. ³⁷As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, ³⁸saying, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!" ³⁹Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, order your disciples to stop." ⁴⁰He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out."

Reflections

Ride on, ride on the time is right

Iona Community Tune: Winchester New TIS 348

1. Ride on, ride on, the time is right
The roadside crowds scream with delight;
Palm branches mark the pilgrim way
Where beggars squat and children play.
2. Ride on, ride on, your critics wait,
Intrigue and rumour circulate;
New lies abound in word and jest,
And truth becomes a suspect guest.
3. Ride one, ride on, while well aware
That those who shout and wave and stare
Are mortals who, with common breath,
Can crave for life and lust for death.
4. Ride one, ride on, though blind with tears
Though dumb to speak and deaf to jeers.
Your path is clear, though few can tell
Their garments pave the road to Hell.
5. Ride on, ride on, the room is let,
The wine matured, the saw is whet;
And dice your death-throes shall attend
Though faith, not fate, dictates your end.
6. Ride on, ride on, God's love demands
Justice and peace lie in your hands.
Evil and angel voices rhyme:
This is the man and this the time.

Keith Hamilton

Saturday 4th April 2020

Matthew 21:1-11

1 And when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage to the Mount of Olives then Jesus sent two of his disciples 2 saying to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey that has been tied and a young donkey with it. Untie it and bring it to me. 3 And if anyone says anything, you shall say, 'the Lord has need of them.'" And he will immediately send them. 4 Now this has happened in order that what was spoken through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying 5 "Tell the daughter of Zion, behold your king comes to you humble and riding on a donkey and upon a colt the foal of a donkey". 6 And the disciples went and did as Jesus directed them. 7 They brought the donkey and the young donkey and put their outer coats on them and Jesus on them. 8 And a very large crowd spread their coats on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 9 And the crowds going before him, and those who followed him cried out, saying, "Hosanna to the son of David. Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest. 11 And the crowd said, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee.

Translation by Keith Hamilton

Reflection

Palm Sunday marks the start of Holy Week. The week commences with Jesus, a prophet, riding on humble animals into Jerusalem, the centre of the then religious world. There is irony in the text referring to Jesus as a prophet from Nazareth of Galilee. The preceding words "Hosanna to the Son of David", and "Hosanna in the highest", are a statement of praise to someone more than a prophet. "Hosanna" means 'save us now'. It is Matthew's subtle way of saying this Jesus from Nazareth, who is a prophet, points to a monarch or royalty, blessed by God. Yet within a week, he will be crucified, some welcome. Jesus takes on the violence directed at God, even to the point of death, yet God's response is not violence but love expressed in the Christian affirmation that Jesus rose from the dead on the third day. Here is a model for us. I am reminded of the vision of Wayside, love over hate. Here is a message of hope. Easter is a witness to the good news that even when humanity does its worst in crucifying the Son of God, God never gives up. Never give up on hope seems timely with the COVID-19 ramping up.

Keith Hamilton

Sunday 5th April 2020

Matthew 21:12-17

¹² Then Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who were selling and buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. ¹³ He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer'; but you are making it a den of robbers." ¹⁴ The blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he cured them. ¹⁵ But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the amazing things that he did, and heard the children crying out in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they became angry ¹⁶ and said to him, "Do you hear what these are saying?" Jesus said to them, "Yes; have you never read, 'Out of the mouths of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise for yourself'?" ¹⁷ He left them, went out of the city to Bethany, and spent the night there. (NSRV)

Reflection

While all four gospels include a narrative of Jesus cleansing the temple, each locates the narrative in a different place. Matthew is the only one who locates it immediately after the entry to Jerusalem. Mark locates the cursing of the fig tree between the entry and the cleansing. John has the cleansing very early in his gospel. Luke inserts a narrative of Jesus weeping over Jerusalem between the entry to Jerusalem and the cleansing of the temple. There is more to this than just the whim of each writer. Each shapes the particular message. Matthew has a theme of judgement running through the gospel. The kingdom of God is arriving. It upturns tables and upturns economics. People are divided into those who rejoice and those who are offended and angry. The prophet of God has arrived. A new era has begun. Nothing can or will be the same thereafter. It would be a stretch beyond the bounds of reasonableness to suggest the COVID-19 is the judgement of God, given it started through the consumption of wild animals. Nonetheless, it is upturning the present order of things, and the world will be irrevocably changed. The cry, 'Hosanna' – which means save us – 'to the Son of David' – the messiah of God is good news. Even in times of trouble, God is near, and Easter points us to salvation in this time and in the kingdom coming on earth. This is not magical thinking, nor escape. It is a further reminder that in good times and ill, in life and in death, God is with us.

Keith Hamilton

