

“Palm Glimpses of Easter”

Philippians 2:5-11 & John 12:12-18

Pastor James York

April 5, 2020

Prayer for Understanding Holy God, Word made flesh, let us come to this word open to being surprised. Silence our agendas; banish our assumptions; cast out our casual detachment. Confound our expectations; clear the cobwebs from our ears; penetrate the corners of our hearts with your word. We know that you can, we pray that you will, and we wait with great anticipation. Amen.

On earth our grandest moments give us glimpses of Easter. A loving hug a snippet of Easter. A spectacular mountain top sunrise a morsel of Easter. The birth of a healthy baby a minuscule prelude of Easter. Festive, laughing, dancing, soul tingling joy a fragment of Easter. A moment of pure, peace, wholeness, completeness a bit of Easter. Invigorating love a shred of Easter.

A growing crowd followed Jesus. Initially it was an eclectic crowd of twelve, consisting of single and married men, some poor, some prosperous, some worked as tradesman, others skilled labor, other's fishermen. The crowd included a thief, a political revolutionist and a tax collector. In those days it was customary to only name the men. The crowd also included women. The Samaritan woman declared Jesus as the Messiah then spread the good news of Jesus, resulting in an entire town celebrating the power of Jesus' love. Jesus' gracious aura drew people to follow Jesus before he even spoke, healed or served. As Jesus traveled, taught and healed the crowd grew. It was a diverse crowd including children, roman soldiers, religious leaders and outcasts. There were people from every class, status, race and group. There were people from other religions.

Jesus' miracles revealed glimpses of Easter. People were made whole who suffered from mental illness, deaf, blind, lame, lepers, a variety of diseases, abuse, loneliness, isolation. Jesus graciously healed every form of brokenness, every, hurt, pain and sorrow. Jesus nourished people physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually. Jesus met every need, quenched every thirst and fed every hunger. The crowd witnessed how Jesus saves us. Lazarus died and was buried. Jesus brought Lazarus back to life. This crowd merged with an enormous crowd that was in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. The eyewitness accounts of Jesus' gracious love that saves everyone quickly spread. The gospel of John explains.

John 12:12-18 “The next day the great crowd that had come to the festival heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Jesus, shouting, “Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord—the King of Israel!” Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it; as it is written: “Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion. Look, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!” His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written of Jesus and had been done to him. So the crowd that had been with Jesus when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to testify. It was also because they heard that Jesus had performed this sign that the crowd went to meet Jesus.”

“Hosanna,” the people shouted. “Save us. Save us now.” In Jesus they saw a glimpse of Easter. They were filled with hope. They knew Jesus will help them. They rejoiced that Jesus will save everyone from everything that diminishes life and Jesus will resurrect all that enhances life.

For most of us this Lent has made us aware that we need saving. A virus can make anyone sick and kill some. An invisible virus can disrupt the world's economy and drive us into quarantine. God is with us. Jesus will save us. Jesus will save us from corona virus and all things and actions that hurt us, wound us, cause us pain and suffering. Jesus will save us from every form of fear, hate, death and darkness. The crowd celebrated Jesus who save us. A man in fine clothes giving a high five to a child in rags. A person dirty, stinky from walking for days hugging a person freshly bathed, both smelling resurrection. A roman soldier dancing with a religious leader. A moral person sharing a smile with habitual criminal. A wise woman teaching an uneducated man to sing. A Samaritan and a Jew waving a large palm branch together. The crowd was a glimpse of Easter. All people equal. All people laughing, rejoicing, worshiping God. Each person, all people, free of their burdens and worries, able to glimpse the light that is dispersing every form of darkness.

Martin Luther wrote about the jubilant scene. “Jesus sits not upon a proud steed, not an animal of war, nor does Jesus come in great pomp and power, but sitting upon a donkey, an animal of peace fit to help a person. Jesus indicates by this that he comes not to frighten us, nor to drive or crush us, but to help us and to carry our burdens for us.”

The Apostle Paul wrote. **Philippians 2:5-11 NLT** “**You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. Though Jesus was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal’s death on a cross. Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.**

Have the same attitude that Jesus had when he took on human flesh. Jesus had the attitude that God is always with him, that he was, is and will always be God’s beloved child, that love will overcome every division and brokenness, that joy will overcome every sorrow, that eternal life will overcome every form of death.

Jesus the Redeemer has always existed with God the Creator and God the Sustainer, the holy Trinity. The joyful love shared between God the Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer is so intense that their love for each other infuse them into one, and their love honors the uniqueness of each person of the Trinity. God knows each and every thought and feeling of each and every person. Therefore, God knew that every human at times is afraid, feels abandoned by God and doubts that joy, love and life will triumph. Even the great heroes of the Bible felt afraid, alone and doubted the resurrection power of God’s joy, love and life. Jesus knew that the moment he took on human flesh he would feel afraid, alone and abandoned. God’s love for each of us is relentless, resolute, tenacious. Jesus took on human flesh. Jesus did not cling to the love of the Creator and Sustainer so Jesus could unite with us in love, save us and bring us all back together, united in the harmony of God’s eternal, joyful love. Whenever we are unable to perceive the love of someone we grieve. God the Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer grieved that while Jesus was on earth the Redeemer was not able to perceive their love. Each person of the Trinity knows that God has infinite power. God knows that God’s love will save us all. And each person of God, the Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer mourned the Redeemer taking on human flesh because Jesus willingly gave up his ability to fully perceive God’s love. Jesus knew the moment he gave up that loving connection by taking on human flesh that he would be afraid, feel alone and abandoned. Jesus cried from the cross Matthew 27:46 NLT “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?” God never abandoned Jesus. And we know how Jesus felt that sometimes earthly life gets so messy that we become afraid, feel alone and abandoned by God. Jesus came to earth to fully, completely, perfectly unite with each us through love. God the Creator and Sustainer resurrected Jesus removing the veil of Jesus’ human flesh, so Jesus once again realized that he never left the perfect love of the Trinity. And we are all united with Jesus in love, so we are all united in joyful love with each other and our God the Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. However, on earth we live in this veil of human flesh that distorts our perception of God’s loving presence. Our human flesh confines, restricts and hampers our joy, love and peace. Our best moments give us glimpses of Easter. On Palm Sunday the crowd saw a glimpse of Easter, so they rejoiced, sang, danced, hugged, laughed, paraded. Jesus glimpsed the familiar Easter as well. That glimpse filled Jesus with a snippet of God’s love which enabled him to endure the betrayal, agony, isolation, darkness and death that God carried Jesus through to get to resurrection. At 6:45 pm on Maundy Thursday we will livestream the entire biblical account. Next Sunday we will celebrate Easter.

Earthly life is wonderful, glorious, marvelous giving us glimpses of Easter. And earthly life is brutal. Walter Brueggemann wrote. “Holy God who hovers daily round us in fidelity and compassion, this day we are mindful of another, dread-filled hovering, that of the power of death before which we stand thin and needful. So, we come in our helpless candor this day remembering, giving thanks, celebrating but not for one instant unmindful of dangers too ominous and powers too steady and threats well beyond us. It is in your power God and your promise that we take our stand this day. We dare trust that Friday is never the last day, so we watch for the new day of life.”

Strive to have the attitude of Jesus. An attitude that Easter is coming. An attitude that God is with us, that God will save us, that God will heal, perfect and resurrect us, everyone, everything and all of the cosmos. Amen.