

Palm Sunday 2023

Here we are at the beginning of Holy Week and we have just read and heard sung the many angles, emotions, and impactful events of the original, first, and only Holy Week so long ago. It is impossible to encapsulate everything from that week in a book, let alone a homily. Which is perhaps why music is such a powerful aid to us on days like today, conveying through tempo and sound a wide, even unspoken, array of feelings about these events.

I think the personhood of Jesus shines through when we take such a broad glance at the week. And I am not speaking theologically of his humanity, though make no mistake we see that too as he is beaten and killed. I am speaking more of his personality. What was Jesus like as a person you might talk to?

And as we hear the readings, an amalgamation of all the Gospels, we hear how he is angry, turning over tables, using the fig tree and a curse as an illustration to bear fruit in and out of season. He is strict as he scolds his tired disciples who do not see the gravity of the night when he is betrayed. He is cryptic in his teaching, even obstructive with the stubborn pharisees. And if this was all you heard, you might think Jesus a hard man, even a mean one. But we also see in Holy week that, at other times, he is perfectly plain and open with his teaching. He is joyful and friendly as he spends time with his friends in their home. He is compassionate as

he blesses those who prepare him for burial, and who will be scattered as he is arrested. He is afraid and depressed as, not just physical death looms, but also the wrath of the Father for sins he never did. He is so forgiving from the cross, even to those who wound and kill him.

Yet in spite of all these wildly varying emotions and reactions, I think, especially as you read the Gospels themselves (which perhaps might be a good exercise for us this Holy week) as you read them, I don't get the picture of someone disjointed from reality, un-self-aware, or unable to cope. I think, just the opposite we see someone brave when necessary, who will not shirk the truth, who understands how unfair life is, and trust me, no one's life is more unfair than the sinless Son of God dying for what he doesn't deserve. We see someone who can connect with people, indeed, who *people are drawn to* and certainly not because of riches or false delusions of grandeur, but solely because he connects with people personally and their cares and worries and joys.

Jesus is not an unrelatable God condescending on us peasants and unable to sympathize with us. Nor is he another sinner unable to save. No, Jesus is true man, true God come to accomplish a mighty salvation for people he genuinely cares for and has compassion on.

Which means you, no matter how you find yourself this morning on a broad range of emotions or faithfulness (or seeming lack there-of), no matter where you are there is a God who understands you.

Now let's be clear. That doesn't mean he agrees with you. Or wants you to stay where you are. But it does mean he genuinely understands and can sympathize.

When you think there is no hope, he would disagree, but he understands. He prayed for another way, but submitted to the will of the Father to die. When you think God is distant, or uncaring, or not good, he disagrees, but he understands.

"My God my God why have you forsaken me?" When you think God should lighten up and "why care about all that theology?" He disagrees, but he understands, so he taught his disciples. When you think there is no forgiveness for what you've done. He disagrees, but he understands. He would reinstate his disciples when he saw them again. When you think that all that matters is an assent to the facts, he disagrees, but understands. So he bids us, like fig trees in season, to bear fruit. When you think all this happened a long time ago and doesn't matter anymore, he disagrees, but understands. And so he saw his apostles through scary times with serpents, and persecution, and poison, he will see you through your days. When you think the pain and suffering will never end, he disagrees, but he understands, he felt those nails and whips and punches, but he would bid you look forward to a resurrection.

Go to that Savior. He understands. And then perhaps we can lean on *his* understanding, not ours. And find reasons to believe in forgiveness, hope, compassion, strength, and a very real resurrection to celebrate next Sunday.

Yes we covered a lot today. But I think one aspect, again, it shows our Savior's ability to sympathize. So let us follow him this week, to a cross, and an empty tomb, and journey our Savior really took in real time in real history for you. And as you journey with him you will find someone who doesn't shirk the truth (He is the Truth!) but is oh so compassionate he would shed his blood that you might be his forever.

God be praised for that Hope. In a real Savior who really died and rose, and who really, truly, understands you and loves you. Amen.