

Sermons at Christ Church

Love Re-Imagined

Palm Sunday

Reverend Emmanuel Ato Mercer

Today we begin Holy Week with a Holy Walk-a kind of walk that strikes at the heart of human contradiction. Ours isn't so much a question of yes, no or maybe so. It is one of a mixture of yes, no, and may be so. At the heart of who we are is a chasm-a disconnect with our own selves, and so we can cry and laugh at the same time, we can hug and stab with s knife at the same time, we can lift up and bring down at the same time, and we can be both good and evil at the same time. We can be all things at the same time. And today begins not only our initial steps towards our discovery of our deepest contradictions but the blessing of knowing that unlike humpty dumpty, we can be put together for the glory of God..

A friend's father visited him here in the United States from Ghana, and having never been driven through a tunnel before, as they entered a tunnel and kept driving in the tunnel, he said to his son, "It is only in America that you see a roof over the highway." He didn't know it was a tunnel. Today, we stand at the threshold of a tunnel, holding high our branches of palms, our garments spread on the dirt road with the Savior riding on a donkey that has only our garments to walk on. We hear joyful and enthusiastic shouts of hosanna, hosanna to the Son of David, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. But even in our enthusiasm, we still cannot contain within us the same song of hosanna. Indeed, we have made our entry into the tunnel, where we see nothing but darkness-because there's a roof over the high way. Human contradictions. Yours and mine.

In a few days, our songs of hosanna will fade away as we betray him. Yes, a friend with whom he walked the length and breadth of the dusty roads of Galilee, Jerusalem and surrounding towns. A friend with whom he broke bread. A friend with whom he drank from the same cup. A friend he had known for close to three years. A friend who saw at first hand the lives that Jesus transformed. A friend who heard the insightful and fulfilling teachings of Jesus, but deep within felt so empty that the only way he could find some semblance of fulfillment wasn't by way of the eternal word, but by thirty shekels of silver- that which symbolizes all things material, fleeting

emptiness and greed. We are still in the tunnel, where we see nothing but darkness. Human contradictions. Yours and mine.

In fact, his betrayal led to a denial by another close friend. He was the one who called him the Messiah. He was the Rock upon which the church will be built. He had even promised to stay with him through thick and thin. He had vowed to offer his own life for the sake of the one who offers true life. And when he was confronted with the reality of his betrayal, he didn't believe it, until it happened. The one who was willing to offer his life for the author of life couldn't even take the accusations of a poor little maid servant. Life in the tunnel, where we see nothing but darkness. Human contradictions. Yours and mine.

A few days after the cry of hosanna, we will deliver to be crucified him who knew no sin but emptied himself to die on the cross. This act of love was not to appease a blood thirsty God, but to express the profundity of love itself. For if forgiveness needs to be paid for, then that forgiveness lacks authenticity. Love and forgiveness must be freely given or else they cannot accomplish the transformation and healing that they seek. Our shouts of hosanna turned sour as we screamed crucify him, crucify him. Pilate wasn't amused. And when he asked the question, well, what evil has he done? Why must he be crucified? They shouted even the more. The problem is when we are in the tunnel, and covered by utter darkness, nothing else matters. Life loses its meaning, depth and substance. And our songs of praise and triumph becomes one of spite, anger and disillusionment. Human contradictions. Yours and mine.

All through his life he debated the religious leaders at every chance. Not on the substance of the law, but its interpretation and application. They knew there was something special about him. They knew he was from a peasant background, his father was a mere carpenter. But he spoke wisdom with authority. And so they wondered, where did he get all this wisdom from? We have never heard anyone speak like he does. Yet, what they heard and acknowledged to be full of wisdom, and in fact life transforming was not enough for them to rethink their hostility towards him. Life in the tunnel, where we see nothing but darkness. Human contradictions. Yours and mine.

Part of being human then is to feel this contradiction burning within you. Paul captures this dilemma in a beautiful way when he says "For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing." Our contradictions always come to its peak when we find

ourselves in the Garden of Gethsemane, where we are confronted with the question of choice-my will or God's will. Jesus screams in agony knowing that whatever choice he makes must ultimately reflect the will of God.

For that reason Paul encourages us to let that same mind which was in Christ Jesus be in us. For those who have the mind of Christ are those who embrace the idea that there's a roof over the highway, and so life in the tunnel is dark, scary, gloomy, horrendously fleeting and unbelievably cold, but yet they do see a flicker of light so far away at the end of the tunnel, but also so near.

For that reason, although we may be in the dark, light is much closer than it seems. And the more we inch closer to that light the more we recognize the impermanence of darkness- and that as attractive as darkness may be, it lasts but for a moment. The more we inch closer to the light, the more we come to recognize the power of light over darkness.

On this day, we also stand at the threshold of the tunnel, our Holy Week is also our Holy Walk in the tunnel. There is roof over the highway, and as dark as the tunnel may be, we can grope but also walk with confidence, and with the abiding hope that God not only hold our contradictions together, but our glory is that bright sunlight that appears at the end of the tunnel. Come let's walk out of darkness of the tunnel into the sunlight of God's glory. Amen.