

LENT: A TIME TO FOLLOW JESUS TO THE CROSS

Sunday of the Passion

Palm Sunday

March 16, 2008

Procession with Palms: Matthew 21:1-11

Liturgy of the Passion:

Isaiah 50:4-9a

Psalms 31:9-16

Philippians 2: 5-11

Matthew 26:14—27:66 or 27:11-54

I Am a Broken Dish

There is no story more important to Christians than the Passion. There are no more central Messianic prophecies than the “suffering servant” songs of Isaiah. And there is no better summary of Christ’s role than the Christ-hymn of Philippians.

With so much going on in these great texts, we might easily miss what God is saying as we pray this Psalm, in the midst of these proclamations of Christ.

For the Passion, the suffering servant, the Philippians’ hymn, all describe one who is an outcast. Insults, bullying, gossip, layoffs, illness, divorce, aging, scandal, rejection. There are so many ways to be out, not in. Everyone I know has been in this position, though it is one we would all rather flee.

Yet this Sunday, this Holy Week, in fact every Sunday and every week, God directs us again and again to attend to the one who is suffering. In the Passion, we look to Jesus as his life becomes this Psalm: “My enemies insult me. Neighbors are even worse, and I disgust my friends. People meet me on the street, and they turn and run. I am completely forgotten like someone dead. I am merely a broken dish” (Psalm 31:11,12, *CEV*).

The most ubiquitous ancient artifact in biblical lands, found in uncounted millions, is the potsherd, broken pieces of the clay vessels that were used in every home and palace. When a dish broke, there were no super adhesives, so from the dawn of civilization, broken dishes were thrown away, the broken pieces of pottery littering ancient cities.

At several points, Scripture refers to us as earthen vessels. No matter how good the clay or how talented the potter, sooner or later, pottery breaks.

In looking to Jesus, perhaps we may also attend to our own experience of suffering. “Have pity, LORD! I am hurting...” (Psalm 31:9a, *CEV*). Like broken dishes, the pieces of our lives are scattered, as are the fractured parts of our families, churches, towns, nations.

This week we will hear how Jesus is broken. His Passion is not only the violence wrought upon his body. He suffered also in the way his friends turned and ran; the way even God seemed to abandon him to his fate.

Yet, in his Passion and the days which follow, listen too for the Word, which we'll hear again and again, how God, in Christ, gathers up the broken pieces.

Jesus has been gathering broken people into a community of hope. Better than holy super glue, his life creates a new community, bringing outcasts together, repaired by love. And in his kingdom, in the church, in the presence of God, and with our neighbors, suffering need not be magnified by isolation.

This week's Reflection was prepared by Paul Bellan-Boyer, Parish Deacon at St. Matthew Lutheran Church, Jersey City, NJ.

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This week we remember to pray for the work of the Bible Societies in: Hungary – With thanks to God for the Bible Society's ability to play a significant role in organizing the youth festival of the Reformed Church at Sarospatak and that the mobile Bible exhibition has become more popular, and with prayers for the Year of the Bible 2008; **Austria** – With thanks to God for the increasing number of groups visiting the Bible Center and for the increasing demand from refugees for free Scriptures in many languages; **Slovenia** – With thanks to God for last year's Year of the Bible and this year's celebration of the 500th anniversary of the birth of Slovenia's first Bible translator, and with prayers for the translation of Luke's Gospel into contemporary Slovenia and for the launch of *The Living Word*, a portion of the New Testament on audio CD; **Italy** -- With prayers for the launch of the revised Common Language Interconfessional Bible, for the new Protestant Bible, for the new literary ecumenical translation of the Gospel of Luke, and for the promotion and distribution of the revised Catholic Bible.

Activity Corner: Relive the Passion Story

Supplies needed: Bible, bookmark

Throughout the week, re-read the story of Jesus' Passion as recorded in Matthew's Gospel. Invite a different member of your household to read the assigned passage each day, or consider reading the passages dramatically by assigning parts to members of your household (narrator, Jesus, Judas, Peter, servant girl, Pilate, high priest, chief priests, soldiers) and having everyone together reading the words of the crowd.

Sunday: Matthew 21:1-17
Monday: Matthew 26:1-16
Tuesday: Matthew 26:17-46
Wednesday: Matthew 26:47-75
Thursday: Matthew 27:1-26
Friday: Matthew 27:27-56
Saturday: Matthew 27:57-66