

March 9, 2014 “A Certain Lack of Patience” Matthew
21:23-27

Since the beginning of January I have endeavored to bring before you, numbers of Scripture passages in the 4 gospels which made the point that Jesus said and did things which made the point, with great clarity, He is the Son of God, the Saviour promised by the prophets, the Messiah. He made that claim and He made it often. He taught the people about Him, and He taught the priests when they asked Him, what the prophets said about the Messiah and He showed them, by His deeds, that He is the One they should be expecting.

Now it is just as important (and I am underlining this statement by saying it twice....it is just as important to respect that the Scriptures make the point, over and over again He is at the same time as human and normal as you and I. As there are some who would deny Jesus divinity, there are also some who so stress that truth (He is God's only begotten Son) as to shroud into question whether or not Jesus is actually a man. I could have chosen any number of passages to stress, the disciples, and the gospel writers represent the experience and the position of the disciples on this, that Jesus was at one and the same time God's Son and yet a man. Divine and yet flesh and blood.

A friend of mine is dying. It is the plague of the 20th century...cancer. My friend may or may not pass quickly. I can't predict the timetable any more than the physicians can. What we and I do understand is that the clock is ticking. Some time, perhaps as little as a couple of weeks, perhaps as long as a season or more, my friend's body will give out. The disease will win. And I will feel that loss, along with others very deeply. I will grieve. I will battle an old foe, depression. I am in a stage of life as are many of us where this happens repeatedly. Grief is not weakness. Feeling loss is not weakness. Missing your friends is not weakness. It is part of being human!

The only way you can avoid feeling the loss of friends and family is to not have friends or family. And then one ends up suffering from another very human condition related to grief...loneliness. We are called by the Lord our God to enter into relationships. To not live in isolation. It is noteworthy the disciples with all the trials of living in the earliest days of the Christian era...it was a hostile environment....never once considered withdrawing from the world so as not to have to cope with what the world did to them. They kept the faith, and they shared their faith. In fact it is only because they did that we have faith in our time and our place.

The portion I read to you this morning underlines that Jesus is very much human. A man. He experienced a

certain lack of patience. He proved stubborn. Knowing exactly what his enemies and opponents were trying to do to Him, He refused to play their game. He refused to help them to destroy Him a moment too soon. His conduct is delightfully recognizable. Knowing they are asking questions not to get the answer but to build their case against Him, He refuses to share the information, which He has shared so openly on previous occasions.

The incident took place in Jerusalem. Jesus was in the temple courts. He was teaching there. To put it on a timeline....it is during the last week of Jesus life. Palm Sunday has occurred. It is now early in that last week. We call it Holy Week. As Jesus was teaching the chief priests and some of the elders approached Him. The Sanhedrin has met. It has been decided that Jesus should die for the wellbeing of the whole of the Jewish people and what is left of their nation. The fear is that if they let Jesus continue, the Romans will lose patience. They do not understand the faith of this people. They do not believe in a living God of any kind. They do not understand why any people would be willing to lose their lives rather than change religions. The Romans built an Empire....one of the greatest Empires....based on this fact. No God is holy, holy, holy. They don't question that there are gods. They just do not believe you really have to change your ways to serve them.

The chief priests and the elders understand that fact. They understand how fragile the relationship is between the conquerors and people of the occupied province of Judea. So when they asked their question of Jesus here on their turf, in the Temple courtyards, they are trying to pin Jesus down so that they can get the Romans to eliminate Him, in order that they and their people might continue to survive. The Romans have no patience with rioting, with demonstrations, with protests. We have seen the Russian reaction to demonstrations in the Ukraine. To us their conduct is baffling. Troubling. We find it hard to understand them.

The chief priests have decided that the key question to put to Jesus has to do with authority. If He says something controversial or provocative they will have a case to take to the Romans. By what authority Jesus, do you do these things? Teaching the people, even poor people. Even sinful people. Even sick people. By what authority do you heal the sick, these marvelous things that are attributed to you....sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, cleansing to the leprous, and Lazarus, never forget Lazarus....life to the dead and buried? Who gave you this authority?

When we read this portion, you can almost hear Jesus smiling. He is not dumb. He told the disciples why He was returning to Jerusalem. Matthew chapter 20 verse 17 and

18. “Now as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, He took the 12 disciples aside and said to them, ‘We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the Law. They will condemn Him to death.’” And Jesus told them in verse 19 that the Romans would be involved. “And they will turn Him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the 3rd day He will be raised to life.” Jesus knew what was going to happen. He recognizes that the chief priests are trying to control the board....this game of theirs....they are manoeuvring for control.

Jesus said to them, “I have a question for you. Answer my question, and I will certainly answer yours. Remember John the Baptist? It is now about a year and a half since John was beheaded by Herod, Rome’s puppet King. His baptism...some of you were there at the Jordan. Where did it come from? Was it from heaven or from men? Was it from God or just John’s creation?

Were the issue not so important, their immediate response would be really humourous. Uhhh! Time out! We need to discuss this before we try to answer....it is complicated. The huddle gathers. It really is a huddle. It is like Grey Cup game. Someone takes charge. Here’s the problem...if we say it was of God, He will ask us why we did not endorse it officially....and God help us if we say it was John’s invention!

These people could riot over that one. Some of these people went through a life change as a result of that baptism. They were convinced God was in it, that John was a prophet of God. The safe answer is that we don't know. And when the huddle breaks that is exactly what their spokesperson said. We do not know! Which means we cannot say.

Remember that Jesus was there. Was baptized by John. Could probably point out some of these priests and elders who were not only watching but were baptized by John. I think Jesus is still smiling. Not a happy smile. A disgusted smile. A smile that says, "Right. You are not going to play the game with integrity. So I will not play at all. And what He says and is heard to say is, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things."

Jesus has lost patience with them and their manoeuvring, their playing games. They know who He claims to be. They know in whose name He heals and teaches. And the fact is He will not contribute to their taking Him one minute sooner than the moment God provides. He is not their pawn. This not their game to play, win, lose or draw. This is God's plan for the saving of sinners. And Jesus the man is committed to leaving the timing to His heavenly Father.

It is hard when a friend is dying. It is not easy when we are dying. It is hard to remember that in all things,

the critical time is the time of God's making. The time of God's choosing. But Jesus, the man chose to do just that. To leave it in God's eternal hands.

Let us pray.....

Lord there are times when we come to the conclusion it was easy for you. After all, you not only knew God, you are God. In remembering your humanity, every bit as complete as your divinity, we almost begin to appreciate something of the manner in which you suffered for us. Help us to remember moments in which we have broken your heart, our words, our deeds, our lack of both. Help us to remember that it was because such moments are so real, you came, and suffered, and died and rose again....to keep us alive and to hold us in your loving and merciful embrace. Amen