

April 14, 2019 Crosswords Pt. 6 John 20:19-29

It may seem strange that I would skip the crucifixion scenes that are in the Gospels. The truth is there is just too little time in the whole season of Lent to deal with everything. And the premise of this particular series is that if we did not have any narrative describing the cross, its pain and agony, we would still have the words of Jesus about both, HIS death and resurrection as the bedrock of our redemption. Always the Gospels and the letters of the New Testament bring us back to this. We are saved from our sin not because of what we do, but because of what Jesus did to make the grace of salvation possible for us.

Once again, several things must be said on this morning. By the lunar calendar in use at the time, this is the anniversary of Palm Sunday in 2019. The calendars that mark significant dates for the whole of the year, in our time, remind us this is the Sunday on which the world remembers Jesus entry into Jerusalem. There were thousands of pilgrims in Jerusalem because it was Passover season. Jews had come from all over the Roman Empire to celebrate liberty from bondage in Egypt, the miracles of Moses, and the passing over of the angel of death which caused the Pharoah to set the Hebrew slaves free. A reminder to us that the Jewish celebration of Passover and the crucifixion of Jesus coincide.

The Jewish pilgrims in Jerusalem had heard of Jesus ministry. They had heard of sick people that were healed,

blind whose eyes were opened, the chains of bondage of those who were demonized being broken. They had heard about the raising of the dead man Lazarus in Bethany, not far from Jerusalem. The question on their minds was, "Is Jesus the Messiah?" So when word spread that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem huge crowds of people flowed to the city gates to have a chance to see HIM. Hosanna, means "Save us!" The cries of "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord," means they were eager to grasp at the possibility that Jesus was and is, God's promised Messiah. On the world's calendars that is the significance of this day. The Jewish world greeted Jesus as HE entered Jerusalem, as the promised one, and Jesus did nothing to persuade them it was otherwise.

I chose a second reading for this morning: John 20:19-29. It is a reading that could have as easily been chosen for next Sunday. It is the evening of the first day of the week. And I encourage you to take a look at your calendar in your own home when you get home after service. It will reflect what we are taught here. Sunday is the first day of the week even though we think of it as part of the end of the working week. So powerful has been the effect of the resurrection of Jesus that calendars still reflect that fact. The weekly anniversary of the resurrection of Jesus is the first day of the week. And here in John chapter 20 we see the humble beginnings of a tradition we keep as disciples of Jesus in our time. We gather together.

The disciples (up to a number of about 120) are gathered in the upper room. They have come together and they are afraid. Once everyone was in, they locked the doors. They were fearful that those who had engineered, organized and fought for the death of Jesus, might now turn their anger on the followers of Jesus. They have been trying throughout the day to make sense of the facts of the open and empty tomb. In spite of the quick dismissal of the testimony of the women that Jesus is risen, that word, that rumour has galvanized a coming together of those who followed Jesus from town to town during his ministry in Galilee, and his determined journey to the capital and the awaiting cross. They tremble in fear. And yet in the name of Jesus they gather. And John says, Jesus came and stood among them, and said to them, "Peace be with you!" The fact is Jesus gives peace, to those who call on HIS name. Here is the important part.

When Jesus said, "Peace be with you!" He immediately proceeded to show them HIS wounds. His nail pierced hands, which means HIS wrists. He shows them HIS side, pierced by the spear of the Roman soldier, a great and gaping wound. And here is the point. Jesus told them throughout his ministry he was going to die in Jerusalem, the Messiah must die for the people. And Jesus first act, beyond blessing them with peace, and oh how they needed that blessing at the time, was to remind them in the most dramatic fashion, that HE is Jesus, the crucified, the dead and the buried, who has now been raised. The mortal wounds are visible.

Everyone present gets a chance to see. John testifies that their worry and fear was transformed into joy. And again, Jesus blessed them with those words, "Peace be with you." By the way, it is Luke, the most careful historian among the Gospel writers who tells us at the beginning of the Book of Acts, his second letter to Theophilus, that they gathered in the upper room about a hundred and twenty in number.

And of course John's second point in John chapter 20 is that everyone was not present that first Sunday in the evening when Jesus came and stood among them, pronouncing peace, and showing them His cross wounds which verified His many crosswords. Thomas was not there. And the second Sunday the disciples of Jesus gathered again in the upper room. And this time Thomas was present. And those who had been members of the 12 and the others whom Thomas knew were so eager to tell him they had seen the Lord and the Lord is risen. And Thomas is a thoroughly modern man. A man of faith? Sure he is. But a man of faith who believes what he can see and touch and taste and smell. He disappoints the rest of them because he declares that unless he is able to see the wounds and touch them with his own fingers, put his own hand into that gaping wound in Jesus side, he will not believe the Lord is risen.

It is just like the Sunday on which the resurrection occurred. The doors are locked, Jesus comes and stands among them. He turns to Thomas and says, "Put your finger here. See

my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Stop doubting and believe.” We are not told whether or not Thomas touched Jesus, I doubt he did. What I do know and do believe is the response that came out of Thomas mouth as he stands facing his obviously wounded, obviously alive, Lord. “My Lord, and my God.”

Here is something to remember. According to Jesus own example, faith in HIM as the risen from the dead, begins with acknowledgement of the terrible reality that came by means of the crucifixion. Whether they were in number 12, or 120 or 75...beyond HIS assurance of peace, the first thing Jesus did was confirm the marks of HIS death, which had led to HIS being entombed for 3 days. HE said HE would die. We affirm that HE did. Crucifixion was a death sentence. HE was dead and buried. And the third day. HE rose. And by so many different roads, experiences, we have come to this place, this upper room. And it is part of our believing that we affirm what Jesus said about HIS death and dying. The nail prints. The gaping wound in HIS side. HIS shed blood and broken body, redeeming us from our sin. The crosswords are part of how we got here, on this precious first day of the week.

Let us pray;

Once again the prayer is adapted from the words for a hymn in our Book Of Praise. I confess I do not know this hymn but the words are precious. I have adapted the words that they might apply to us all.

O dearest Lord, your head with thorns was pierced for me. Pour out your blessing on our heads, that we may think for thee.

O dearest Lord, your sacred hands with nails were pierced for me. Pour out your blessing on our hands that we may work for thee.

O dearest Lord your sacred feet with nails were pierced for me. Pour out your blessings on our feet, that we may follow thee.

O dearest Lord your sacred heart was pierced O Lord for me. Pour your spirit into our hearts that we may live for thee.

Amen