

Sermon: The making of Peace

While you were listening to our Gospel reading today, did anything strike you as strange about that reading? Did it sound like something perhaps there was something missing?

It's the familiar Palm Sunday story about Jesus sending his disciples into the village to retrieve a colt for him to ride to Jerusalem. As he rides along people are "spreading their cloaks on the road" and "the whole multitude of the disciples" are praising God "for all the deeds of power they had seen."

We hear some version of that every year. It's the usual Palm Sunday story. But here's what strikes me today: We call it Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem but the reading ends before Jesus arrives in Jerusalem. We don't hear anything about his entry into Jerusalem. And I think we need to.

I think what happens immediately after today's gospel reading is an essential part of Holy Week and I want us to hear the rest of the story. Listen to what happens next:

"As [Jesus] came near and saw [Jerusalem], he wept over it, saying, 'If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. Indeed, the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you, and hem you in on every side. They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another; because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God.' Then he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling things there and he said, "It is written, 'My house shall be a house of prayer'; but you have made it a den of robbers." That is the next 6 verses of chapter 19.

That is Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. It's an entry with tears, weeping, and a judgment. Jesus enters Jerusalem weeping because Jerusalem has not recognized "on this day the things that make for peace."

And I think that same thing could be said about each of us and our world today. We are Jerusalem. Look at your life today. Look at what is happening in the world today. I don't think there is a person or place today not in need of peace: peace within ourselves and with each other; peace with our past, what has happened to us, and the things we've done and left

undone; peace within countries and between nations; peace with the earth and all creation.

How does that happen to us? How did it happen to Jerusalem? How do we lose our peace? And what are “the things that make for peace”?

I think Jesus demonstrates the answer to these questions throughout Holy Week. I think everything that will happen throughout this week, reveals “the things that make for peace.”

Watch Jesus throughout this week. Listen to what he says. He never defends himself. He never tries to justify himself or offer excuses. He doesn't try to negotiate, or plea bargain a better deal. He doesn't express any sense of entitlement or put himself above others. He neither explains himself nor apologizes. And he does not turn back.

He doesn't do any of those things because he has no need to justify, explain, excuse, or defend himself. Jesus never betrays himself. All through his life and the coming week he remains true to himself. He is at peace with himself, and that lets him be at peace with others and the circumstances he is facing.

And that's true for you and me as well. When I refuse to betray myself, when I remain true to myself and what my life is asking of me, I have no need to justify myself. I'm at peace with myself, and I can be at peace with you and whatever it is I must deal with.

But when I begin justifying myself, making excuses, or becoming defensive it's usually because I've betrayed myself. I've turned away from who I am and there is no peace in my life. I am at war with myself, and chances are I will be at war with someone else. And it won't be because they started it. That war started with my self-betrayal.

I think self-betrayal is why in today's gospel reading Jesus tells the daughters of Jerusalem, “Do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and your children”. Jerusalem has betrayed itself. It's “the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it”. It has made God's house of prayer into a den of robbers. It doesn't recognize the time of its visitation from God. It is living in self-betrayal.

Where is there self-betrayal in your life today? In what ways is your heart at war with yourself or another? What is the conflict that keeps you awake at night or haunts your dreams? What is causing that sick feeling in your stomach or the tightness in your chest, and reminding you that peace is lacking?

I am not asking about only the self-betrayal that results in us doing something we call bad or wrong. I'm also asking about the self-betrayal of denying our own holiness and goodness; the times we diminish ourselves; the ways we turn away from our passions, gifts, or longings; the times we give up on ourselves, our dreams, or hopes; the ways in which settle for being and living less than who we really want to be.

Look for the places in your life today where you feel the need to justify, defend, explain, or excuse yourself and you'll probably find self-betrayal and an absence of peace, a heart at war.

There is a contrast between Jesus' way of peace and the world's way of peace. Jesus' way of peace is really peace-making, and not just peacekeeping. The world's way of keeping peace is really a temporary ceasefire. Keeping the peace is to make sure violence does not erupt, or that people don't hurt each other. It's not really a genuine lasting peace. To make peace, however, requires reconciliation, it requires both parties to change.

Therefore, Jesus' way of peace requires transformation, not just the suppression of violence, or the suppression of enemies, or the suppression of whatever external factor that is disrupting your peace. Jesus' peace begins at home. If we are talking about conflict between groups, or tribes, or peoples, then, peace begins with repentance and cleansing and judgment on our own people, our own tribes, so what have we done wrong?

For individuals, peace begins with our own hearts. Inner peace comes from inner transformation that requires self-cleansing and repentance from our own sins and wrongdoings.

All of this requires humility. Humility to examine ourselves, to cleanse ourselves, to transform ourselves to bring reconciliation for true peace. And this is far from the world's way of posturing oneself to be right or to be righteous. Our world's way of keeping the peace is about suppressing our

own emotions, suppressing or avoiding whatever disruptions there are, and pretending, sometimes even, pretending or posturing that we are okay, and we are perfect, or we are never wrong, but the other side is wrong.

Jesus shows us a better way to peace. Jesus gives us peace, not in the way the world gives peace, but in a way that brings genuine peace from inside out. It begins with humbly confronting and naming our fears and troubles, recognizing perhaps our sins that least increase, our troubles. For Jesus to give us peace, he might have to transform our hearts – from hearts of fear and troubling into hearts of peace and love – but transformation might require cleansing and judgment of our sins. And this inner transformation flows outwards to engage and even change outward conflict.

I've begun lately to think about self-betrayal as our original sin. It's a deep self-wounding in need of healing. What if Holy Week is the start of that healing? What if Holy Week is the beginning of getting ourselves back and healing the betrayals of our lives? And what if it all begins with our tears? Isn't that how Jesus begins Holy Week?

Jesus begins Holy Week looking at and weeping for our self-betrayals. What are the self-betrayals that have robbed you of peace? What are the self-betrayals that have brought you to tears?

Let's not leave our tears behind this week. Let's start this week naming the tears of our betrayals and hurts. Let's offer them each day this week. They know the way. They are the original water of baptism.

Every time we let our tears flow – whether they flow down our cheeks, flow in our memories, or flow through our prayers – every time we let them flow, we return to the waters of our baptism; the waters that cleanse, renew, and give life.

Those tears just might be the only thing that can cleanse the lens of our heart enough to see “the things that make for peace.” Amen