

Palm/Passion Sunday Year B 9th April 2006; Rebecca Newlands

Isaiah 50: 4-9a

Psalm 31:9-18

Philippians 2:5-11

Mark 15:1-14 (27)

God knows

May the words of my lips and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you our lord and redeemer...

Well I am glad Rob thinks I need the preaching practice. It shows he is thinking of the best for this place even though he will be leaving us for a while shortly! It is truly wonderful to be back here. The Philippines was an awesome experience for David and I. Over the next few months you will probably hear a fair bit about our trip one way or another but it is good to be here again amongst familiar faces and places. We are so looking forward to our time here with me as locum and David as locums husband.

One of the things that always strikes me when I visit an Anglican church overseas is how alike they are to us. In a little village, high up in the mountains the people on Sunday morning pray the same prayers, sing the same songs, believe the same good news, struggle with all that means. They listen to the same readings and hear some preacher rabbit on about what they might mean. They gather after the service to talk, eat and drink. Of course there are some differences – like the women wear traditional dress, the men all sit down the back, and the music is unaccompanied and sang loudly and with beautiful harmonies. Everyone sings.

Today they will be hearing the same readings as us. They will be hearing about the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, they will sing Hosannas and then they will move to the story of the crucifixion. They will hear the story as it moves from joy to sadness, from light to darkness, from life to death – and then the silence of the cross.

This journey pulls us in one-way and then in another. At the start Jesus and his disciples are preparing for the Passover celebrations in Jerusalem. Jerusalem was the site of the Passover pilgrimage and at the time the population tripled. 50,000 people crowded into the streets. Jesus rides into the crowd, into the streets seated on a donkey, a colt. And the crowds go crazy. They are waving bits of plants they have cut from the fields. They are spreading their cloaks before him on the ground. Probably waving their cloaks as well. They are

shouting out, crying out, Hosanna! Hosanna! We often think of Hosanna as a cry of praise but it actually means “Save now”. So here they are crying and shouting, cheering and waving, yelling “Save now, Save now”. Can you imagine it? Picture it in your mind?

They must have really believed that Jesus was going to be able to deliver on the Messiah rumours. What hope! What need was being expressed in those cries. Jesus was going to change everything. He was going to lead the onslaught that would drive out the Romans, liberate the Hebrews and usher in an era of abundance, justice and plenty for everyone. He was going to set the wrongs right and wipe the tears from every eye.

But all the cheering, all the hope, all the expectations, all the cries of “Save Now” dwindle to nothing and finally die in the horror of the crucifixion. All expectations and hopes disappeared when Jesus was nailed to a tree and breathed his last breath. Today we have the two extremes of being human – We have the heights of joy and hope, exaltation and happiness and then we have the pain and suffering, the abandonment, the torture, the blood and death. The crucifixion brings us up violently and painfully short. It is like a brick wall that confronts us with the depths to which humanity can sink - the depths to which a mob can sink, to which we all can sink.

And Jesus takes this roller coaster ride of joy and suffering, life and death. He could have just walked away, opened a carpenter's shop, settled down and got married. He had complete freedom and many choices. With his skills and abilities, his learning and contacts he could have been extraordinarily successful in human terms. But instead he takes the path laid down by his father in heaven. He fulfils the mission he was sent to do.

The Philippians reading tells it beautifully:

“Though he was in the form of God, he did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross.”

Jesus takes the great human journey that we are all on. And the journey involves not just the extreme highs and lows that we have here of today. It is the everyday of being human - of waiting for the donkey to arrive, of sitting and eating with friends, of walking in the evening, of preparing meals and cleaning up, of coping with difficult relationships and everyday disappointments. In all of this Jesus does not run from his humanity. He

does not avoid all the many parts of being human. In fact he is totally present to every moment of existence, totally at one with reality. And we find in the readings today that he does not try to avoid the suffering that must come if he is to fulfil his life's mission.

Instead he lives with the shadow and the fear. Shadow, darkness, despair, pain and fear are part of life. We all know that but it is through the shadow and the fear that Jesus will rise triumphant on the other side of Easter. It is through taking the full journey of life in obedience to his creator that he experiences life to the full and fulfils his purpose. By doing so he opens up the gates to a new life for us.

You know another thing that is the same between people everywhere is that everyone suffers in some way or another. In the Philippines we saw people suffering in ways that we could not comprehend. We also saw people living lives that were rich in ways we could not comprehend. They had nothing by our standards but they had joy and thankfulness in their hearts for what they did have.

I have heard it said that no-one can ever understand or know some one else's experience, their joys and their suffering. No one can comprehend truly what some else is going through, what their life is like. I can never really know what it means to be a mother of 8 children. To spend my life in a rice paddy, bent over with a child on my back, walking to and from the fields an hour each way, to loose a child in some tribal conflict. That same mother can not know what my life is like, or the life of any person in a rich, western country. So much of what we know about any one is pure assumption and conjecture.

But the message from God in all of this is that God knows. In Jesus, God knows what it means to be one of us, any of us. God knows with every part of God's being what being human is all about. God doesn't just know, he shows us how to be the best possible humans we can be. And he takes the journey with us. He suffers with us. When we think or imagine that no-one knows what it means to be us we can remember that God knows, totally and intimately. He understands completely and teaches us always that the way to life is to embrace who we are, to suffer the fear and shadow, to die to our ego selves, to love and serve, to forgive and to give thanks unconditionally.

May this Easter bring us face to face with our humanity, Jesus' example and God's love. Amen