

Palm Sunday 2015

Mark 14:1-15:47

Rev. Deacon Eric Johnson

- ✘ In today's Passion Story from the Gospel of Mark, we just heard one version of the story we hear every year:
  - ✓ The woman anointing Jesus with nard, and the supposed waste of money this represented, which was the culminating reason for Judas to betray Jesus
  - ✓ Jesus telling all his disciples that they all will be deserters (which they did, on the Mount of Olives)
  - ✓ The trial and crucifixion—and in Mark's Gospel—in which he has been totally abandoned by his disciples...Only the women remained, looking on from a distance.
- ✘ As we hear this story every year during Holy Week, we have the opportunity to ask, "What do people see when they look at Jesus on the cross?"
  - ✓ Persons around the world generally see a reflection of themselves: They make the person of Christ hanging on the cross look like their own faces. (Malaysian, Japanese, Somali, Semitic, Scandinavian)
    - The wood of the cross is also indigenous: As I was told by a Filipina at Clark AB during the Ferdinand Marcos regime, "Our Filipino crosses are made out of bamboo, and that represents the Filipino people: we bend, but we do not break."
  - ✓ In Christ Episcopal Church we have, as one of our processional crosses, the Christos Rex: the Christ who died on the cross but, at the same time, Christ the King who will come again at the last day to judge the living and the dead.
  - ✓ Today, some people see the symbol of the crucifix itself having some sort of magic power in itself: Jesus on the cross as a good luck charm, a Saint Christopher medal that will save one's automobile from being smacked by a Peterbilt semi-articulated lorry...
- ✘ We might also ask ourselves, "Let's suppose a passerby walked off the street and came into Christ Church, and asked themselves, I wonder what these Episcopalians believe about the crucifixion story?"
  - ✓ Where would they get their first clue?
- ✘ The first object that would particularly attract their attention is our stained glass window:
  - ✓ Where we find (in the border) the usual symbols of the passion story: hammer; three spikes; threw lots to see who would win his garment; sour wine on a sponge; the ladder to take him down from the cross; purple robe that was mockingly placed on him at his trial; (Mary and John (who were there, in John's Gospel; whereas in Matthew/Mark/Luke, the disciples and women are at a distance)
- ✘ What's missing:
  - ✓ Where's the Skull?
    - In many stained glass icons in Europe you'll often find a skull at the base of the cross
    - Indeed, the place where Jesus was crucified was named "Golgotha," or place of the skull.
    - A bit of common European folklore held that the place where Adam died and was buried in the Garden of Eden later became the hill where Christ was crucified.
      - Not only that, the legend holds that Cross on which Jesus was crucified was actually made from the wood of the Tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden

- (therefore, presumably, the cross was made from an apple tree, if you think the fruit Adam and Eve ate was an apple).
- So the skull at the base of the cross represents the skull of Adam.
    - Paul makes the parallel in 1 Corinthians: “For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.”
    - Jesus reversed the Fall of Adam and Eve
    - The redemption gives humanity a new start...so it’s appropriate to pair Jesus with the old Adam, even if the legend is entirely spurious.
  - ✓ Where’s the Blood?
    - Here in our stained glass picture, everything is very sanitary and antiseptic:
      - Latin American crosses, on the other hand, are running with blood: Example is Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Colorado Springs, an Hispanic church where mom brought us four pre-teenage boys for a Sunday Mass. A topic of conversation during church, in the car on the way home, at dinner...we never went back. There’s only so much blood that twelve-year olds Scandahoovian boys can take...at least in the years before cable TV)
      - Why so much blood?
        - ◆ For the indigenous Latin American population that suffered for centuries in subjugation and servitude, the incarnation means more than just God coming into the world in a manger in Bethlehem
          - ✦ The incarnate God is one who submerges himself in a world of misery.
          - ✦ God is found not only in beauty, power and wisdom;
            - God is also found on the crosses of the oppressed.
    - Here we have the conviction that God does not remain outside of history; God is not indifferent to the present course of evil events
      - Rather, God reveals himself through the authentic medium of the poor and oppressed
        - ◆ By the work of this community in this world that the Kingdom of Heaven will be manifested.
  - × But there is a certain other peculiarity to this crucifixion scene: the face of Jesus
    - ✓ Jesus has two faces:
      - The one on the left; the eye looks upward: it’s hopeful; it is fixed on the next world; the mouth on the left is smiling. It’s all good.
      - The one on the right; the eye is looks out at the world; the mouth is certainly not smiling.
      - On the left, his body is pierced (to prove that he was dead), but clearly he isn’t.
  - × This two-sided face of Jesus fully realizes the suffering and fear in this world, but holds it in context of the next.
  - × This ability to hold the vision of heaven and earth is the culmination of the prayer of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, “Not what I want, but what you want.”
    - ✓ And what does God want?
    - ✓ What God wants was well said by Pastor Rick Warren’s (of *The Purpose Driven Life* fame)
      - “God is looking for people to use, and if you can get usable, he will wear you out. The most dangerous prayer you can pray is this: ‘Use me.’”

- And the only way that I know of to understand this, to feel that I'm being used and not abused is by keeping this two-faced attitude in balance...The balance between this world and the next.
- ✘ Jesus on this cross is fixed between those two worlds, the herein and the hereafter;
  - ✓ This cross certainly occupies the thinnest of places between heaven and earth
  - ✓ And Jesus lives in both worlds at the same time.
    - And we get an inkling of that during Holy Week, which is deeply rooted in the things of this world (the Maundy Thursday meal, the objects in the Stations of the Cross) but is, at the same time, also focused on the next.
- ✘ This crucifix, then, reminds us that this is the proper place for all Christians to be: one eye on earth, one on the next world; one foot in eternity and one on shaky ground.