

April 9, 2017 at Advent Lutheran Church in Cedarburg, Wisconsin. Palm Sunday. Matthew 21:1-11. Jesus enters Jerusalem in triumph and hope!

Last Saturday morning I awoke like I always do on a Sunday morning, and most every morning at 5:00AM. I quietly, as to not wake Aina, showered and got dressed, made the coffee, and prepared breakfast.

I was here at church, again, as always, by 5:45AM., made the coffee, set up Adult Forum/Bible study chairs and then came into my office to look over my sermon one last time before the service. I noticed that the office calendars were still on March, so I began to flip them over and as I did I saw April 1, 2017, and at that moment it flashed into my mind that it was not Sunday, but Saturday.

In my now 36 years of ministry and leading worship most of the Sundays in those years nothing like this has ever happened before. I decided that after so many people have pulled so many April Fool's jokes on me, finally God herself got me so totally that I was sure that it was Sunday, and as always felt so good about it.

I don't know if it's the pressures surrounding this time of year with multiple activities and services, or my cancer treatments, or a combination of these things – but regardless it was also a reminder that our **spiritual lives** and **persona** are not governed by the **abstract material** realities that govern our lives.

Seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, months and years really do not exist.

That's **why I had no idea** that it was **Saturday**, because my spirit and mind were perfectly ready and happy to conduct worship as usual. **I was ready!**

Last week if you were here you may remember the story of the raising of **Lazarus** in a most **puzzling way**. First **Jesus** was saying that although **Lazarus** is very ill, it's not the kind of sickness that will lead to **death**, just **sleep**.

The disciples said,

“Oh good, then he will be alright.”

To which, **surprisingly**, and rather **bluntly Jesus** retorts;

“Lazarus is dead!”

Having read, heard, studied and preached on this lesson so many times I think I am finally beginning to understand it. Throughout the Gospel stories Jesus talks

about the need to awaken to our **spiritual lives**, our **persona**, our **true self**. That is what being “**born again**,” or being “**born from above**,” means.

He makes it **clear** that we are **more** than our **bodies** and **minds**. Our true self is our spirit, our **spirit** or **soul** that existed **before we were conceived** and will live on long after our bodies, like **Lazarus’** are gone!

When we hear that graphic description about Lazarus’ flesh decomposing that’s the obvious hint that this story is not about the **walking dead**. Jesus uses that phrase in another Gospel lesson when talking about people who are perfectly healthy physically, but **spiritually dead**.

They are **asleep**. Their bodies move and function, but their true self is **asleep**. They need to wake up to the reality that Jesus is talking about, that to be **whole**, and to be **healthy** in mind, body **and** spirit you must be **awake!**

Lazarus did come out of the tomb, but the story is not about his **body**. It is about what **Jesus** means when he says that you are both **body and spirit**, and even though he had died, **he lived on**.

The story is also thought by many to be a **prelude** or **introduction** to what is about to happen to **Jesus**. A parallel story about Jesus who **dies**, but **lives on!**

Jesus uses nature and **stories** and **examples** from life experience that virtually anyone can understand. And many contemporary **artists** and **writers** have captured that message, I believe, at times **far better** than **we** who consider ourselves to be in the business of religion.

“The purpose of life is undoubtedly to know oneself. We cannot do it unless we learn to identify ourselves with all that lives. The sum-total of that life is God.” *Mahatma Gandhi.*

(A fish does not understand or even name water...but it lives in, with and under the water which is its life!)

“Wisdom begins in wonder.” *Socrates*

*(Reminds me of that terribly translated Old Testament phrase: “The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom! The proper word is **awe!**)*

“Every child is born a naturalist. His eyes are, by nature, open to the glories of the stars, the beauty of the flowers, and the mystery of life.” R. Search

(It is no wonder that Jesus said unless you become like a child you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. The life miracle that is the now!)

“Look! Look! Look deep into nature and you will understand everything.” Albert Einstein

And finally using the words of **St. Paul** who writes about finding and experiencing God in your life:

“It was in the forest that I found "the peace that passeth all understanding" Jane Goodall

Don't diminish the power of **Jesus'** entry into **Jerusalem** on a donkey as a sign of the ultimate **humility**. **It was not!** It was an act of **ultimate courage** and **confrontation**. When the people sing and shout;

“Blessed is he that come in the name of the Lord,”

They are expressing that **this** entry into **Jerusalem** is a story about speaking **truth to power!** About confronting that power in an entirely new way. Remember, the crowds of people are in Jerusalem to observe Passover, when Moses led the people out of Egypt and its **oppressive**, enslaving government.

The **Easter story** is about the **spiritual power** of **non-violence** being more powerful than the religious government of the Jewish people that had enslaved the poor, and the voiceless., and even more powerful than **Rome**.

This is a clash between the forces of **spirit** and **matter**, of **good** and **evil**, of **sacred** and **secular**. And ultimately **life** and **death!**

Jesus' **first stop** is the temple where he strikes at the very heart of what I am talking about, the **enslavement** of the mostly **poor travelers** who have come to Jerusalem to offer their sacrifices in observance of Passover.

We miss all of this if we think that the Easter is **only** about a man crucified who through some **supernatural** means comes back to life in three days. **The Easter story** is about how **Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.**, changed the course of **American** history by marching non-violently until the power structure of **America** had no

choice but to accept the civil rights of millions of Americans who had been enslaved and treated as less than human, and even after the **Emancipation Proclamation** were **marginalized** and **oppressed**, and unable to take part in the **American Dream**.

The Easter story is about how far a **powerful, oppressive government** will go to hold on to its **power**. It is about how dangerous it is to confront that power and the risks that go with it. For example;

Referencing the possible ties between Russian hacking and the influences on US elections former FBI special agent Watts said;

“Follow the trail of dead Russians, there’s been more dead Russians in the past three months that are tied to this investigation who have assets in banks all over the world.”

Throughout world history **empires** have come and gone, **evil in the form of greed** has tried to sway the course of history to bend it to its perverted power hungry design, but ultimately to no avail, and even though the trail of terror it leaves behind it never **lasts!**

Greed is a **cancer** with an **insatiable, voracious appetite**, that is not satisfied until the food source is consumed, and then, and only then then, it **dies**.

Easter is proof that light is greater than darkness, good more powerful than evil, and life an eternal miracle of grace!

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