

Holy Week 2010 Reflections

Monday: John 12:1-11

- The word about Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead has spread quickly.
- Crowds coming to Jerusalem for the Passover have been looking for him (11:56). They want to see this Jesus, and Lazarus as well.
- By the time Jesus does approach Jerusalem, the city is in turmoil about him (Matthew).
- No wonder the religious authorities are worried. After Lazarus' raising, they had determined to kill Jesus. They can't risk him leading a riot and attempting to overthrow the roman rule. The repercussions against the Jewish nation would be swift and cruel. Better to kill Jesus and rid themselves of the threat; better to kill Lazarus too –he's as much a drawing card as Jesus at this point.
- People are drawing in around Jesus with different motivations:
 - to get rid of him, and maintain the status quo;
 - to check him out –could all this rumour be true?
 - To hang around to see another spectacular miracle. The ones who had been his followers – the larger group of disciples, keep on following –they recognise something special,
 - some hope –some hoping for liberation from oppression,
 - some hoping for things they may not be able to articulate.
 - Some hoping he'll do something for them.
- In the middle of all this build-up to Jesus' entry to Jerusalem, we have the vignette of the dinner given for Jesus.
- Here, too, amongst his close band of disciples, different motivations are evident.
 - Mary has some sort of sense that things are coming to a climax, and could turn against Jesus. Through her love for him, her appreciation of his raising her brother Lazarus and through her general intuitive sensitivity, she bathes his feet in expensive nard.
 - Judas' motivations are made known here, too. Thief and deceiver.

As we, too are drawn around Jesus, where do we fit in this cast of characters?

- We mightn't want to kill him, but is maintaining the status quo –keeping things under control, just as they are, more important than change Jesus might bring if we let him into the city of our lives, or into the status quo of our church life?
- Do we sacrificially give, like Mary of Bethany, with no thought of the cost of our giving of self?
- Are we hanging around, drawn to Christ, but still waiting; waiting for what we're really not sure about?

Allow yourself to enter this Holy Week, offering your thoughts to God. Allow yourself time to listen and respond.

Tuesday of Holy Week. John 12: 20-36

Jesus is speaking to the crowds in Jerusalem: Jews and Gentiles – even Greeks – foreigners, “the world” are seeking him. He’s pointing to what he will be going through.

He talks about being “lifted up”; about this being for God's glory; how **this** – his crucifixion, not his deeds of power -will draw all people to himself. That’s not something the people want to hear – “the Law tells us that the Messiah remains forever” they say.

He talks about himself as being the light.

And he tells the people that “those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it forever”

We understand that “life in this world” refers to living lives of self-interest under the influence of the dynamics and values of this world; contrasted to the eternal life that Christ gives us, which speaks of a person’s self-surrender to God in trust and in loving service of fellow creation. To love one’s own life is the opposite of Jesus’ own action.

Jesus says that whoever serves him must follow him – the ask here is to surrender our lives of self-focus. Completely – just as Jesus gave his life for us.

It’s not easy –in fact, it can be very painful to let go of our self interests. It’s very painful if it becomes evident that we need to change some things in our lives.

Even where we may give much of our time and self and resources to serving others, this is also a call to consider our motivations. Would we still do what we do if we got no thanks or recognition? Would we still do it if we were ridiculed or ostracised for it?

Do we hold back from surrender because of fear, distrust, or uncertainty?

Do we hold back because letting go is letting go of our control?

Do we hold back because of our own needs that we can’t let go of, that mightn’t be satisfied in the way we want them to be?

And for those of us who know what losing your life means and have walked that path, are walking that path, the reality can often mean one step forward, two steps back, or two steps forward, one step back. There can be a lot of discouragement in the Christian journey. Losing one’s life is a reality of ongoing self-confrontations. What can we do for ourselves and each other in the face of discouragement?

For all of us; wherever we are in this: what does it mean for us to lose our lives; to surrender our self?

Wednesday of Holy Week: John 13: 21-32

Judas Iscariot, had been receiving the teachings of Jesus for more than three years, and yet still could not get his core values right. Although one of the twelve, with a sensitive portfolio like finances, Judas places more importance on monetary value than eternal blessing.

Some Gospel accounts –like this one - excuse the action of Judas by reporting that Satan had entered into him and had embarked on the diabolical mission. Blaming Satan can be a pretty good cop-out instead of taking responsibility for our actions. Rather than see this as a personified devil entering Judas' person, this is a pointer that the drama about to unfold belongs to the cosmic battle between good and evil. The extraordinary power of the influence or seduction of the world to capture one of his closest companions caused Jesus to be troubled; but it did not deflect him from continuing on his path towards overwhelming those forces of evil with the life-giving force of love.

We don't know the extent of Judas' motivations. We know, from the account of the dinner at Bethany where Judas complained about Mary's wasteful use of expensive nard, that he was a thief. It's possible that 'the love of money' has ruled the life of Judas. What we do know, however, is that he was leading a double life even though he pretended to be part of the team.

We may not lead double lives on the scale of Judas. We may never have indulged in leading a secret other life sinful by anyone's standards- cheating, stealing, extramarital affairs and the like. There's far too many examples of all of these in the life of the Church and its leaders and adherents to pretend this can't happen in the lives of those who are or have been faithful Christian folk. If living like that has been a part of any of our lives, and remains unconfessed, or glossed over or blamed on something or someone else, the Holy Week invitation is to bring that before God, name it as sin, and take a no-excuses full responsibility for it. But I suspect, for most of us, grand scale double living is not the case.

Yet, with God's gaze upon us this Holy Week, and "surrounded by so great cloud of witnesses", we're invited to consider our human capacity and weakness for double living: to consider how we live and how we think, how we talk and how we act, and where these don't meet with what we confess as our faith in Christ. Are we more motivated by the love and pursuit of something that makes a lie or mockery of our Christian faith, than we are by the love of God in Jesus Christ? To name a few: status, recognition, money, possessions, body image....

Or are we captured in another sort of double living, where we have substituted good works and desire for appreciation, for our love of God, for putting God before anything else? That's possibly the more insidious trap –flattering ourselves that we're doing good for Jesus, when really, we're feeding our own needs. It's a question any of us –myself included – must continually ask in order to keep ourselves honest, and truly humble and to allow God to work through us without having to do battle with our egos.

Rule of thumb: if there's any part of our lives, our living that we would not like to put on show –ie, to be seen in public; then there's some business to be done with God about this sin of double-living.

The good news is: God is more than ready to receive that part of our lives as an offering to him; as the writer to the Hebrews puts it: So then, like people running a race, we must take off everything that is heavy. We must put off all wrong, wrong things that get in our way - The sin that clings so closely; and so to be able to run with perseverance the race that is set before us.

The invitation for this evening; examine ourselves for signs of double-living. Confess and ask for God's spirit and strength to lead you in paths of light.