

Sunday, April 10, 2022
First Lesson :Psalm 31: 9-16
Gospel Lesson: Luke 22: 14-23
Sermon Series: Pruning Effect
Preacher: Kirstie J. Engel

We are concluding our Pruning Effect sermon series, a series where we have been using the symbolism of a tree, as the main imagery of this sermon series; where just as the idea of actual pruning, means to trim, by cutting away dead or overgrown branches or stems, so that fruitfulness and growth may be increased;

- I am suggesting that there will be times in our own spiritual journey; where the same spiritual pruning process will need to occur, if we wish to bear much fruit in our life journeys.
- And so why we are concluding this sermon series on Palm Sunday, is to prepare for what is to come in the upcoming Holy Week;

- For Palm Sunday in itself, **commemorates the entrance of Christ into Jerusalem**, when palm branches were placed in his path, as people shouted from the streets “Hosanna, Hosanna in the highest;”
- To give a little context from where the word comes from; the word Hosanna has a dual meaning biblically, whereby the first meaning that the Church usually adopts, is hosanna being a word that would **praise God**.
- Traditionally, what typically happens during this time of the liturgical year in our context for instance, is that Judy Lane and Marty Eischied from our Flower Ministry, will reach out to me asking me for a projected count of worship attendance, to ensure that everyone can have a palm branch.

- It is a beautiful tradition in most Church services including our own, where people and children, will wave the palm branches during worship, while singing and lifting up adoration to God.
- In one Church that I served, there was a tradition where children would enter in and wave palm branches in the air, while re-enacting the welcoming parade that Jesus would have encountered in Jerusalem.
- The second meaning of hosanna is the Hebrew phrase that appeared in the 12th century meaning "**Pray, save us.**"
- Before Jesus arrest on Holy Thursday and his crucifixion on Good Friday, this time historically marked the beginning of Holy Week, the final week of Lent; where Jesus

would soon be met with his impending death.

- Thereby making the word Hosanna **become a cry of lament.**
- It was an impending death that Jesus potentially wrestled with all of the way back during our lesson in Ash Wednesday, when he was tempted in the wilderness as he fasted for forty days and forty nights.
- **It was a time of** preparation for Jesus that in many ways served as a time of spiritual pruning for Him at the same time.
- **It was a time for** Jesus to really consider the path that he was about to be baptized into.
- **It was a time for** Jesus to consider the sacrifice of what it would take to set the captives free and what his mission would fully entail; (Luke 4:18)

- **For who knew** that such a message of inclusion would cause so much distress?
- **Who knew** that such a message of helping the blind to see would cause such unrest?
- As I am reflecting over the parables/stories of the barren fig tree, two sons, and Mary and her alabaster jar— stories that both Pastor Caity and myself have covered extensively over this Lenten journey....**who knew that** such a message that would suggest that God loves both the older son and the younger son;
- **That God wants to** give the barren tree one more year;
- **That God loves both** Judas who would betray him and Mary who washed his own feet with her hair and tears and sweet

perfume...**who knew that** such a message would be the reason for Jesus death?

- For there was never a detectable threat that came from Jesus mouth;
- Jesus never for instance, proposed a nuclear war;
- Jesus never threatened one soul;
- But **yet his words** of love posed as a threat for some;
- **Yet his words** of inclusion angered some;
- **Yet his words** that there was an inheritance for both the older and younger son **was too much for some;**
- Leaving Jesus triumphal entry that I chose not to serve as our main gospel this morning, but I still thought it important enough to highlight— the fact that this was not a joyous

occasion, although it has become a bit of a fanfare celebration in our worship spaces...

- **It was a significant** occasion;
- **It was a sobering** occasion;
- **It was a pivotal** occasion for this community and the entire world for that matter;
- But it was not a celebratory occasion from my perspective.
- On the contrary for me, the more and more I really begin to understand the mission of what Jesus was trying to instill, the more I see this as a funeral procession for Him,
- Where the shouts of hosanna will quickly turn into murderous chants of crucification and for what?
- Greed, power, privileged people who benefited from oppression, not interested in

any of this kingdom of God business being accessible to all people.

- So does this mean we should stop the process of ordering palm branches for Palm Sunday?
- Of course not!
- However I would invite us in the act of waving our branches up high today, to think of this action as a form of both personal and communal prayer.
- **Pray for the people** of Ukraine,
- **Pray for the evil** that persists in this Russian leadership to stop.
- **Pray for our** community and those struggling with poverty and food scarcity.
- **Pray for the** children and youth who do not feel safe anywhere!

- **Pray for the** mentally ill to get some true resources and medical relief.
- **Pray for the** people who you wish could be a part of the very community we are striving to plant right here in Lincoln NE;
- A spiritual community who seeks to share God's love to all; **a community who extends** an open invitation to all; to let them know that there is a sanctuary here where you can find rest, purpose, opportunities to transform into the person you and I were called to be without judgment.
- **When you and I raise our palms high in the air,** let this be a prayer of expectation, that God is going to continue to show us the way to the Promise land of today;
- A place where we can sense that the savior is truly here... because we are in fact here,

ready and willing to do our part, to become a part of the solution for better days ahead.

- “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!” (Mathew 21:9)
- Therefore, it is us knowing now the dual meaning of this fanfare celebration, where our gospel of today can be brought into our conversation, with hopefully a deeper understanding;
- For at this point, the full weight in the opening words of our gospel; the hour had come, is hopefully fully realized.
- And for those of my biblical scholars wondering why our lectionary lesson allows us to preach a Maundy Thursday text on Palm Sunday, all I can say to you like the

aspiring good preacher I strive to be... “hang on I’m going somewhere.”

- Furthermore Maundy Thursday will still feel like Maundy Thursday... I promise.
- For now though, we are switching scenes from Jesus riding on a donkey that symbolized his arrival in peace, when a king would have ridden a horse when he was bent on war;
- The scene presents to us now the Son of David treated like a prisoner on death row, for **it was time** for Jesus to take his place at the table with his apostles.
- **It was a time** where Jesus, although eager to eat with his friends one more time, before he would have to suffer; this would indeed be Jesus’s last meal.(v15)

- As I step out of this story for just a second, this is why our sermon series is about to switch after today into the “Passion Effect,”
- Because in my theological engagement with Jesus story, I can’t help but think what passion Jesus must have had for his mission to heal the sick, set the captives free and let the people know that the kingdom of God is coming, because truth be told, I don’t know if I could have or would have done the same... if I knew what the outcome would be.
- Suffering... death....my initial thought is “no, I don’t think I could do it”but **Jesus did do it;**
- So inquiring minds then would ask why did Jesus do it?

- And some of our class participants from our Wednesday night class would probably chime right on in at this point;
- Because in our 4:15 class; Journey through the Bible in a Year, we spent some time studying the different atonement theories of why Jesus did do it;
- And there are about seven theories out there, if not more of why Jesus died on the cross, that are really fascinating and really complex at the same time;
- So I won't go into these different theories now, but would be happy to send you the class curriculum from that week in which we discussed these theories;
- But let's just say that we all as a class settled on the driving force behind the passion of Christ **was love**;

- For **somewhere, somehow**, this message of God's love got grossly contaminated when God's story was told;
- **Somehow, somewhere** in my theological assessment, God's love became convoluted, once humanity got ahold of God's story;
- Making it really murky for those who had been rejected and abandoned on the outskirts to question whether or not God did love them; **if God could love them;**
- So Jesus came as both fully human and fully divine to declare to the outcast, yes God does love you too....**yes this is** your inheritance too...**yes this is** your Church too..... **yes the kingdom** of God is yours too...**it's everyone's;**
- When God in Genesis created humanity... God blessed them and said to them "Be

fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it..." (Genesis 1:28)

- But you see Church, **somewhere, somehow**...some of us got eliminated from this blessing;
- **Somewhere, somehow**, this story got compromised...our story got compromised.
- Furthermore, it is my belief that God was not ok with this miscommunication;
- In fact the clarification was worth whatever sacrifice God would have to endure to let humanity know God's intent...
- An intent that I believe Paul declares it best in Romans 8: 38-39; *For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to*

separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

- Church **this is one aspect of the passion**, that I believe led Jesus in our story to be able to be fully present in our gospel today, at the table with his disciples... and trust me on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday we will unpack the passion effect even further!
- However for now, this **is one aspect of the passion** that I would like to suggest undergirded Jesus paraphrased words “This is my body, which is given for you ...do this in remembrance of me; this is the cup that is poured out for you....it is the new covenant in my blood... to let humanity know that **I love you...I love all of you!**
- And so my aha moment as I bring our first lesson of Psalm 31 into our discussion is this

is why you and I can't afford not to go through this spiritual pruning process, that we have been talking about over these past few weeks.

- It is because **it is this pruning process** that prepares us for the passion work that lies ahead.
- **It is this spiritual pruning process** that will shape us, train us, teach us and inform us who and whose we are, so that we can operate in God's strength fully because of this knowledge.
- You see the psalmist David in our passage that we also have been talking about for a number of weeks, came to an important realization— in fact I submit we are witnessing his own “aha” moment in our psalm this morning.

- For David's moods fluctuated like the weather in early April in Nebraska.
- One minute we witnessed him drenched with fear; the next, warm with assurance.
- Furthermore, sometimes these wavering emotions happened all within the same psalm.
- In this psalm in particular, all of the Wednesday class at 5:15, "Applying the Sermon to Life," a class that reviews the preached word from Sunday and looks at the upcoming lectionary scriptures that will be preached; **all of us were drawn** to a phrase that even in David's fluctuating emotions, we all never read before, found in verse 12, where David said, *I have become like a broken vessel.*

- This imagery spoke to all of us in many ways and brought forth a lot of unexpected emotions.
- Last Wednesday, many of us expressed fear, trepidation, discomfort and more at this declaration from David.
- For many of us, David's expression was similar to the word hosanna, in that it had dual meaning for us.
- For some, David's brokenness represented defeat, hopelessness, frustration and doubt.
- That night, I felt led to share another possibility, that what you and I are witnessing in David's declaration of being "this broken vessel," was an indication that the spiritual pruning process has become complete in David...all which I am proposing is a good thing...in fact this is a great thing.

- For so many times in our lives, my human experience informs me that a lot of us find value in being completely independent.
- In fact, as an example, when you and I become chronologically older, independence is something that many of us hold onto for dear life.
- For as we get older, being able to **live in our own homes, drive our own cars and make our own decisions**; all of this becomes a real value for us; especially when our independence is taken away— even if the aging process makes this necessary for us go through, it isn't an easy process for any of us to endure or witness our loved ones to go through.
- For it makes many of us feel vulnerable, uncomfortable and even hopeless.

- This is why I believe that it is so unnatural for us as a humanity to buy into this concept of fully placing our trust in God, for it is the antithesis of our everyday lived experiences.
- However, can I make a suggestion to us all this morning?
- That sometimes it is ok to ask for help.
- In fact there will be many times in our lives, where you and I will need help.
- Furthermore, owning this truth, owning this reality is not a sign of our weakness, it is a sign of our wisdom!
- So I will say it again for the people sitting in the back... sometimes it is ok to ask for help.
- In order for us to be fully spiritually pruned, it is in fact a necessary requirement, for you and I to come to the realization, that we

cannot do what we do without the help of the Lord!

- You and I cannot preach, pray, serve and lead without the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
- So when David announced once again, that “I am like a broken vessel,” it is in my biblical imagination that the angels started to rejoice.
- For David in his leadership, conned his way in, cheated his way in, lied his way in... you name it he did it!
- But why God still named David as a man after his own heart,
- Was because like the barren fig tree, God knew that all David needed was a little more time!
- God said, as I recall the parable one more time because it was that good...

- God as the gardener said to David's adversaries, "leave him alone... do not cut this tree down... let me fertilize it a little bit longer, let me nourish David just a little bit longer, let me work with David just a little bit longer..."
- Until one day David was brought to his metaphorical breaking point, that allowed the Great Potter to put this broken vessel back together again; allowing David to write some of the greatest psalms that are still transforming our lives to this very day; not to mention David was one of the greatest biblical kings of all days.
- Therefore Church I leave you with this.... You and I...We have to be broken to do this work that lies ahead.
- Broken from our fears;

- Broken from our indifference;
- Broken from our apathy;
- Broken from our trepidation;
- In our work, you and I have to be broken from every misconception, deception, misunderstanding and more,
- So that we can be rebuilt;
- So that we can be transformed;
- So that we can be restored;
- For the passion that lies ahead.
- Jeremiah 18:2 ...we must Go down to the potter's house, (v5) and become Like clay(A) in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand,(B) Israel...the Lord said...
- So are you in God's hand, First United Method Church of Lincoln NE;
- As the song of Michael Card serves as the prayer within our hearts;

Jesus let us come to know you
Let us see you face to face
Touch us, hold us, use us, mold us
Holy let us live in you

- Thanks be to God... Aleluia... Alelulia...

Amen!