

Palm Sunday 2017

May your spirit dwell in us as we contemplate your love

The gospel lessons for today made me remember. My first trip to Ontario

50 years ago in the summer of 1967, we were visiting Warren's family in Windsor Ontario when the race riots broke out across the river in Detroit. The border was closed and you could see the smoke rising in the sky from the fires and we could hear the scream of emergency vehicles roaring around the city even where we were in Windsor. When the border was opened a few days later we went across the river to visit Warren's aunt and uncle who lived in the suburbs. While there Uncle Alec had to go downtown to pick up something at the post office so they took us with them to see the sights. We went through the area where the riots had taken place. It was a war zone. Buildings were still smoldering and burning. The army was patrolling the streets with rifles slung over their shoulders. Tanks were sitting at street corners, Side walks were littered with glass and debris, and some store fronts had been hastily boarded over with plywood. It was an unbelievably shocking sight for a small town girl from Nova Scotia.

The crowd violence I heard in our lesson today was focused on one person, Jesus, not the systematic injustice people were fighting in Detroit. Yet **is it** just the other side of the coin. People with influence were inciting the crowd to protect the status quo; to get rid of this person who was disturbing their peace and wanting to change things. Jesus was demonstrating by his love in action that God was for all people, not just the few inside their elite group. It threatened their power.

It makes me question why crowds act the way they do. The first crowd, singing and welcoming Jesus, seemed to be a happy bunch, so what happened. The next crowd he had to face was not nearly so welcoming I wonder what turned them into a hateful mob.

Checking out studies made on crowd physiology it seems that it may take only a few strong leaders to redirect energy to a less than noble purpose. When in a crowd, it seems humans will easily give up their own sense of what is right and think; if everyone else is doing it must be ok.... NOOOO. We know in our gut, that is not so.

So how big does this crowd have to be, before the people in it lose their own sense of individual responsibility and accept the line the leader is promoting for good or bad.

I think about how easy it was and is for people to say; O the Jews crucified, Jesus,

Or the Romans nailed him to the cross, they killed him

Or it was Pilate who didn't have the guts to let him go free....

Maybe it was that first person in the crowd that yelled ... crucify him.

WE would all like to disconnect ourselves from such horror. We would never do such things, surely...

As we ask in Godly play

. Where are we in this story? Which crowd are we in?

So much of life is a paradox, we all live with our own personal tug of war, trying to choose the right. Sometimes what everyone else is doing is the easy choice. What a group of people sees as true, what our culture dictates as normal, might seem the logical choice, but is it the right one. Sometimes we give up trusting the value judgments we have been taught by following Jesus... Does the outcome of our choices display the divine spirit within, that spirit of love, peace, joy, patience, trust, goodness and self control.

In the world today we are all part of one crowd or another, sometimes many, we join clubs and sports teams, and political parties and churches, we march in support of causes we believe in, gather to see famous people, or watch rival teams fight for top billing in their favourite game. So much of our world is divided into us and them. It's so easy to forget we all inhabit this planet together; that our choices affect others.

Whenever we go along with the crowd, without thinking, without weighing the right and wrong, without taking responsibility for our actions, we are in great danger of crucifying Jesus anew.

But, whatever the situation, we have an indwelling spirit that tugs at our heart and moves our will to express God's will in the world. Paul tells us Let the attitude of Christ be in you.

Jesus came on a donkey with none of the trappings of power, he came as a servant, to heal, protect and give birth to a unity of spirit in all of creation. To restore our connection to God and the strength we need to endure whatever life throws at us. This week we remember the horrors he endured but we also cannot forget that love won out in the end.

So when we are going through some trial or seeing the horrors we humanly perpetrate on each other, our response must be to love each other as best we can and know where our help comes from. Know God is for us, Christ walks beside us, and the Spirit is within us.

Amen