

“The Day of Unleavened Bread”

March 16, 2008

Palm Sunday

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Scripture: Luke 22:1-13

The night before, there had been a brutal, howling storm. Branches were torn from trees, roads flooded, power lines crashed to earth. But the summer Sunday morning dawned and the world was still here.

It was my previous church's Sunday to lead worship on the beach in Westport. At 7:00 a.m., I made my way past downed trees, around flashing lights, and over muddy roads to a strip of battered sand and a stunning sunrise. A goodly crowd—maybe 200 of us—were there, together, to celebrate and sing and take communion together.

We weren't the only of God's creatures interested in the bread and the Welch's grape juice that day, however. The storm had apparently disturbed many nests of many, many wasps, and, as soon as we opened the grape juice, they began to swarm. The swarms were so dense that one deacon had to stand and wave wasps away while another held the cup. At one point, there must have been 30 or 40 wasps hovering around each cup.

My heart was pounding. I was holding a cup, serving person after person who braved the wasps to dip the bread of life into the cup of salvation. Christianity had never seemed so imminently dangerous to me—so powerful--so lovely. It was dangerous, and powerful, and lovely.

We've forgotten. We've forgotten some of the danger and the power and the loveliness, you know. The danger and the power and the loveliness that must have reigned over that first Holy Week, that last week of Jesus' life on earth.

Do we dare? Do we dare to feel what they felt? What Jesus' followers felt during that most joyous and most horrific and most amazing and most holy week?

“Can you keep a secret? I'm not supposed to say a word, but I have to tell someone! They can't expect me to keep this to myself: the man they call Jesus of Nazareth is coming here--to this house--today! To eat the Passover feast with his disciples.

The whole day has been frantic--my master woke me up early and told me to clean the upstairs guest room and set a table for thirteen people. Thirteen people! We didn't have enough chairs, so I had to run over and borrow chairs from the neighbors, and clean the room, and then start the cooking. Now, I need to bake the unleavened bread. Lord, please let me get everything ready in time!

Meanwhile, the master called my husband, who also works in this house, and he told him to take a jar of water and go out into the city and find two men--one named Peter and one named John. Do you know how many Peters and Johns there are in Jerusalem?

But he went out and eventually he saw two men, dressed not so nicely, and somehow he just knew it was them--and it was. He brought them back to the house and they said to my master, "The teacher asks, 'Where is the guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?'" And he takes them upstairs to the room I fixed up--they said it was perfect and just as Jesus had told them it would be.

Now, Peter and John are supposed to be helping to prepare the Passover feast, but to be honest, they aren't much good in the kitchen, so I'm doing most of it. I don't mind. It's a kind of a miracle, isn't it, Jesus coming here?

I hear he's been doing lots of miracles, all over. He cured a leper; he casts out spirits. He made a paralyzed man walk--he was lying there on a bed, and Jesus said, "Take heart, son, your sins are forgiven...Stand up, take your bed, and go home." And he stood up and went to his home.

I heard he even raised a girl from the dead--but I'm not so sure I believe that one. There has been such hype about Jesus, especially since that huge crowd and the procession on Sunday. People were screaming, crying, waving palms, climbing trees just to get a look at him. I'm not sure what I believe. Some say he's the Messiah we've all been waiting for--the one the prophets talked about--the one who will deliver us from our oppressors and restore Israel. Some say he's a total fraud.

Lots of people want him dead--which is why you can't say a word about this--we could be in a lot of danger if anyone knew he was coming here. What if they want to kill us too? What if they come here and find him and take him away? What if he's not the Messiah? What if he is?

I worry a lot. My husband tells me not to worry so much. He says that Jesus says, "Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today..."

Speaking of today's worries, what if we don't have enough bread for our family plus all thirteen of them too? Peter and John say they've been traveling up from Bethany and will all be hungry. I heard that Jesus fed a thousand people at the Sea of Galilee with only five loaves of barley bread and two fishes, and still had enough crumbs left over to fill twelve baskets--but I don't think you can count on that happening every day. What was that that Jesus said we should pray? Lord, I'm praying: Give us this day our daily bread. Unleavened bread today, Lord.

He's coming here. I wish I could talk to him and hear what he says to his followers. I wish I could sit right down there at his table and eat with them. I'd just like to drop everything and follow him, but of course, I could never do that. I'm just a servant—a slave. I mean, one hundred years from now, who's going to remember the bread they ate at that Passover in our upstairs guest room?

You know, my husband told me that Jesus is the friend of the poor and the people without power--that he chides the Pharisees and says the meek shall inherit the earth. If that's what he preaches, where do I sign up?

He said that he is the “bread of life, and that whoever comes to him will never be hungry, and whoever believes in him will never be thirsty.” He also said, she said that if you are weary, he will give you rest--I am so weary.

But I don't have time to be weary today. I'll be weary tomorrow. Today, I'll get this bread into the oven, put the wine out, get the oil lamps ready.

Lord, one last prayer, and then I really have to go: I have heard that Jesus said, “Ask and it shall be given; seek, and you shall find; knock and the door will be opened.”

Lord, I'm asking, I'm seeking, I'm knocking.
Please let him be the one we have been waiting for.
You know how long we've been waiting.
Please let it be true.

Let it be true.
Let it be true for us this Holy Week.
Let it be immediate.
Let it be dangerous, and powerful, and lovely.

Let us dare.
Let us dare to resist our very human temptation
To skip
Straight from Palm Sunday Hosannas
To Easter morning Alleluias.

Let us gather as disciples on Maundy Thursday--
Here—or, if you're elsewhere, with Christians around the world—
To hear the familiar words of Jesus as he ate his Last Supper
As if we were hearing them for the very first time.

On Good Friday, let us experience--
Here at this place and with Christians around the world
For real—the terror of Gethsamane
and the agony of Golgotha
And hear again,
As for the first time,
How Jesus knew what it was to feel forsaken by God,
And how his only request was that we be forgiven.

Let us join together on Saturday here
To celebrate the life and mourn the death of
Andrew Hedlund--
A beautiful young man full of ideas and life—
Who died
And who is now, we believe, with God.

And then
Then
We will know more truly
And feel more fully
And experience more gratefully
The miracle
The mystery
The new life
The gift
And the triumph of grace that is Easter.

Easter.
Dangerous, powerful, and lovely.
Amen.