

Holy Monday Service, March 29

Call to Worship: Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

Hymn: 210 Man of sorrows, wondrous name

Prayer: Almighty God, Your name is glorified even in the anguish of your Son's death.

Grant us the courage to receive your anointed servant who embodies a wisdom and love

that is foolishness to the world. Empower us in witness so that all the world may recognize

in the scandal of the cross the mystery of reconciliation. We pray in Jesus name. Amen.

Scripture Reading:

Isaiah 56:1-7

This is what the Lord says:
“Maintain justice and do what is right, for my salvation is close at hand
and my righteousness will soon be revealed.

2 Blessed is the one who does this— the person who holds it fast, who keeps the Sabbath without desecrating it, and keeps their hands from doing any evil.”

3 Let no foreigner who is bound to the Lord say, “The Lord will surely exclude me from his people.” And let no eunuch complain, “I am only a dry tree.”

4 For this is what the Lord says: “To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths,
who choose what pleases me and hold fast to my covenant—5 to them I will give within my temple and its walls a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters;

I will give them an everlasting name that will endure forever.

6 And foreigners who bind themselves to the Lord to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants, all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it and who hold fast to my covenant—7 these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer.

Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.”⁸ The Sovereign Lord declares—he who gathers the exiles of Israel: “I will gather still others to them besides those already gathered.

New Testament: Mark 11:27-12:12

27 They arrived again in Jerusalem, and while Jesus was walking in the temple courts,

the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders came to him. 28 “By what authority are you doing these things?” they asked. “And who gave you authority to do this?”

29 Jesus replied, “I will ask you one question. Answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. 30 John’s baptism—was it from heaven, or of human origin? Tell me!”

31 They discussed it among themselves and said, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will ask, ‘Then why didn’t you believe him?’ 32 But if we say, ‘Of human origin’ ...” (They feared the people, for everyone held that John really was a prophet.)

33 So they answered Jesus, “We don’t know.”

Jesus said, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.”

The Parable of the Tenants

12 Jesus then began to speak to them in parables: “A man planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a pit for the winepress and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place. 2 At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants to collect from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. 3 But they seized him, beat him and sent him away empty-handed. 4 Then he sent another servant to them; they struck this man on the head and treated him shamefully. 5 He sent still another, and that one they killed. He sent many others; some of them they beat, others they killed.

6 “He had one left to send, a son, whom he loved. He sent him last of all, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’

7 “But the tenants said to one another, ‘This is the heir. Come, let’s kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.’ 8 So they took him and killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard.

9 “What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others. 10 Haven’t you read this passage of Scripture:

“The stone the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;
11 the Lord has done this,

and it is marvelous in our eyes'[a]?"

12 Then the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders looked for a way to arrest him because they knew he had spoken the parable against them. But they were afraid of the crowd; so they left him and went away.

Message:

My hope and prayer for you this Holy Monday is that the profound depth of God's love for you in Jesus Christ will begin to settle over your heart as we begin our observations of the movement of Jesus towards the Cross this week. Our texts today come from what happens on the Tuesday morning, but they are a result of what happened on the Monday. A brief review of Monday's events is important for the readings we are focussing on today. On the Monday morning, Jesus came into Jerusalem fresh after a nights rest in Bethany with Mary, Martha and Lazarus. Bethany is the small village on the southeastern slope of the Mount of Olives, just a mile and a half east of Jerusalem...2 hours by car or 20 minutes by donkey as our Israeli tour guide joked. Palm Sunday had been an amazing day. A Triumphal Entry into the Holy City, riding on a donkey over a royal "red carpet" of palm branches and cloaks, hailed by his disciples and the Galilean pilgrims as the messianic king.

The Monday had been a profoundly different day. Even the disciples could not have expected what Jesus did on that day. As Jesus walked down the hill that morning, Jesus was hungry and went to eat some figs from a fig tree on the way...but there were no figs on the fig tree. He called down a curse on the fig tree, declaring that it would never bear fruit again (Mark 11:12-14). if the disciples were viewing the tree through spiritual eyes, they would remember that in the Old Testament, Israel was often referred to as a "fig tree" (Jer. 8:13; Hos.9:10, 16; Joel 1:7). Judgment needs to begin at home. Then Jesus entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. (Mark 11:15)

There was nothing soft and tender on display when Jesus, in Jeremiah-like fashion, pronounced a resounding judgment on Israel. In no uncertain terms, his rebuke fell on their worship. "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations' [Isa. 56:7-8]? But you have made it a den of robbers [Jer. 7:11].

Sure the rank capitalism of the temple hucksters was a problem, but that wasn't the only thing, or even the main thing, that Jesus was addressing. The real scandal was how out of sync Israel's worship was with the great end-times vision Isaiah had prophesied—the new age that Jesus had come to inaugurate. As he overturned the

tables yesterday, Jesus quoted a portion of that vision from Isaiah 56: “My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations.” The context of Isaiah 56 tells us more. According to Isaiah’s vision, eunuchs would keep God’s covenant (Isa. 56:4), and foreigners would join themselves to him (Isa. 56:6), and the outcasts would be gathered with his people (Isa.56:8).

And that is not the worship at the temple that Jesus entered into that day. The court of the Gentiles, the place designed all along for foreigners to congregate, for the nations to seek the Lord, for those who were physically “unclean”, this very place of refuge and belonging was overrun with opportunists trying to turn a profit. And the Jewish leaders had let this happen.

Their crass materialism, and their false security in the temple as an emblem of blessing (Jer. 7:3–11), had crowded out space for the nations to draw near. The great sadness of this scene was that there was no room for the Gentiles and outcasts to come to God. And look at how angry Jesus is over someone not being allowed to worship God and experience God’s blessing.

This evening’s text have the Pharisees, the chief priests, the elders and the Teachers of the Law coming to Jesus and asking him “by what authority are you doing these things?”, and “Who gave you authority to do this?”. And in the very asking of these questions, they show their failure as Israel’s faith leaders. The one job they had as leaders, as shepherds was to protect the people from false prophets and foreign gods.

For three years this delegation had been hearing about – or had seen for themselves – the life and activities of Jesus of Nazareth. They would have known of the blind seeing and the deaf hearing; the crippled beggar has been leaping for joy; the leper cleansed; a child possessed by an evil spirit had been delivered; hundreds of cases like that. The dead had been raised; thousands of hungry men had been fed from five loaves and two fishes; the teaching of Jesus had filled the land. People were repeating to one another his aphorisms and parables. This is what the women talked about at the well, and the elders as they sat at the gates of the cities. There had never been a phenomenon like this – ever. People had been amazed at his authority; that is one of the themes of Mark’s gospel. Many are saying that he must be the promised Prophet, the Messiah. The land was buzzing with discussion about Jesus of Nazareth, and now he has arrived at Jerusalem after a long and much publicised journey there. The city has been waiting for him and they have given him a ticker-tape welcome, but his first action has been this total disruption of the temple in his righteous indignation, and back he’s come the next day.

The truth of this text today is that the religious leaders had no need to ask the question because they had already long decided that Jesus was not from God. And previous to this they had already rejected John the Baptist for his criticism of their

position and authority. They only cared for the preservation of their own status quo. They did not care for anyone but themselves which is what Jesus' parable showed. Our question throughout our Lenten study of Mark's gospel has been the question Who is Jesus? Who is Christ? The religious leaders of his day had already answered the question in their hearts. Jesus was not of God. But Mark's audience isn't the religious leaders, it's the people...the people who already know in their hearts who Jesus was, and it's the people anywhere and anytime who will take Mark's gospel in their hands and read it, and answer the question in their hearts Who is Jesus? Who is Christ? As we can see in the text tonight the answer is building up and is straining to be let loose...Who is Jesus? Do you have an answer in your heart? Is it burning a bit to get out? Who is Jesus? Is it right there on the tip of your tongue? Are you just about to say it?....shhhh..... don't say it yet....hold it in a little while yet....let it build...let it marinate some more....Who is Jesus? Jesus is....

Prayer:

Perfect and Holy God, we bow our knees before the wisdom of the cross. The death of your spotless Son is the only and entirely complete sacrifice and satisfaction of our sins. It is of infinite value and worth, more than enough to cover not only our sins, but the sins of the whole world. Amen.

Closing Hymn: 677 My faith looks up to Thee