

“The Suffering Servant”

Mark 15:1-23

March 17th, 2013

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Fair Oaks United Methodist Church

Palm Sunday is next Sunday. It is the Sunday before Easter and marks the beginning of Holy Week, the week of events leading up to Jesus’ death. We will celebrate Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem waving our Palm branches. Like the crowd in Jesus’ time, we will welcome Jesus Christ as our King and the new Messiah. But at the same time, we call Palm Sunday as Passion Sunday. There was a great expectation from the people about Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem. But it was also the beginning of the New Messiah’s suffering and passion. After Jesus had the last meal with his disciples, he prayed at the garden of Gethsemane. But on that night, he was accused and sentenced to death by his Jewish religious leaders. On Friday morning, Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor called for his crucifixion. His suffering and passion began on Thursday night and was over Friday afternoon.

For our spiritual journey of Lent this year, we took a different approach. The last four Sundays we already have rehearsed Jesus’ final week. On Maundy Thursday, March 28, we will have a joint Maundy Thursday gathering with our sister church from Rancho Cordova. We will have a soup supper at six o’clock and experience Jesus’ Passover meal at seven as if we were invited to Jesus’ last supper like one of his disciples. Please, join us! It will be a special experience!

This morning, I would like to invite all of us to think about the governor, Pontius Pilate’s attitude and his choice to release Barabbas instead of Jesus. What lesson do we learn from this story? Our Scripture reading describes Jesus’ last hours. There was a reason why Jewish religious leaders handed him over to the Roman governor. Even though they made him guilty of blasphemy and wanted to kill him, they didn’t have any power to execute him because Israel was a colony of the Roman Empire. Capital punishment was a Roman prerogative. So the Jewish religious leaders wanted to use Pilate’s political power in order to fulfill their goal. Please think about this situation in Pontius Pilate’s shoes. Probably, he didn’t care about the charge of blasphemy because he wasn’t interested in their religious argument. Why was Pilate, the governor, involved in this case and decided to crucify Jesus?

Pilate’s question at verse 2 still lingers in my mind. “Are you the king of the Jews?” I imagine that Pontius Pilate was intrigued by the statement that Jesus claimed to be the king of the Jews. As a representative of imperial power, Pilate

wanted to make sure whether Jesus wanted to take political power over his Jewish people or not. He investigated his intent, but he didn't have any answer. Jesus was silent and did not reply to his question. The Jewish religious leaders wanted to kill Jesus because they were afraid that Jesus wanted to take their religious authority. The context between Pilate and Jewish leaders were quite different but there was a common concern. That is a hunger for power, "Kingship." Jesus signified a different power. It was a power to "give life to others."

How do you imagine and understand Jesus Christ as your Messiah? I have a story to share with you. A few years ago a group of salesmen went to a regional sales convention in Chicago. In their rush, with tickets and briefcases, one of these salesmen inadvertently kicked over a table which held a display of apples. Apples flew everywhere. Without stopping or looking back, they all managed to reach the plane in time for their nearly-missed boarding. ALL BUT ONE!!! He paused, took a deep breath, got in touch with his feelings and experienced a twinge of compassion for the girl whose apple stand had been overturned. He returned to the terminal where the apples were all over the terminal floor. He was glad he did. The 16-year-old girl was totally blind! She was softly crying, tears running down her cheeks in frustration, and at the same time helplessly groping for her spilled produce as the crowd swirled about her; no one stopping and no one to care for her plight. The salesman knelt on the floor with her, gathered up the apples, put them back on the table and helped organize her display. When he had finished, he pulled out his wallet and said to the girl, "Here, please take this \$40 for the damage we did. Are you okay?" She nodded through her tears. He continued on with, "I hope we didn't spoil your day too badly."

As the salesman started to walk away, the bewildered blind girl called out to him, "Mister...." He paused and turned to look back into those blind eyes. She continued, "Are you Jesus?" He stopped in mid-stride and he wondered. He gently went back and said, "No, I am nothing like Jesus - He is good, kind, caring, loving, and would never have bumped into your display in the first place." The girl gently nodded, "I only asked because I prayed for Jesus to help me gather the apples. He sent you to help me, so you are like Him - only He knows who will do His will. Thank you for hearing His call, Mister." Then slowly he made his way to catch the later flight with that question burning and bouncing about in his soul: "Are you Jesus?"

Let us go back to Pilate and the Jewish religious leaders. They were hungry for power, but here in this case, the power doesn't mean either political or religious, but means pride, self-satisfaction and self-centeredness. I would like to challenge all of us. Are we able to see ourselves in Pontius Pilate? Or are we

able to see ourselves in the Jewish leaders or in the crowd? Jesus' kingship brought a new and provocative challenge to those who were used to seeking political importance. But it was a different one that was caring and loving. Jesus' power means kindness, 'a twinge of compassion' that one salesman felt in his heart and 'doing good' that gave life to everyone, even the oppressed and marginalized. It was the power for others, life and strength for the dying, no matter what the reason for struggling and suffering. We come back together in church every week. I believe that we all at least for one hour want to experience God and the desire to follow Jesus. Jesus Christ is the Messiah who has the power. But it is not for him, but for you. He will give you strength and boldness to continue your journey in the midst of many challenges and difficulties in the storms of your life. Our Messiah, Jesus Christ is coming next week on Palm Sunday. I hope that we are able to have eyes to see and find Jesus and welcome him as our Messiah. Amen.