

April 13 2014

Scripture Lessons~ *Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29*

Philippians 2:5-11

Matthew 21:1-11

Sermon *Discovering the True Jesus*

One of the best laughs which I had during a Wednesday Lenten study in a previous church came one night when we were studying the Sacraments and talking about the Lord's Supper, Holy Communion, we noticed Leonardo ad Vinci's painting of this event in Jesus' life on what we called the corner classroom wall and in discussing the event on that Maundy Thursday evening. The class seemed to come to a strange consensus. Jesus last supper had to have happened as the way it was portrayed in the painting; after all Leonardo was right there at the time to paint it when it happened. It had to be accurate. I am not kidding you they came to that conclusion and finally somebody said, "What are you saying here, Leonardo wasn't there and all of you get on the back side of the table so I can get a picture of when this happened." They had forgotten all sense of context and place and time when we were talking about the painting. Leonardo Last Supper in fact has been was described by the Metropolitan Museum of Art as the most popular painting in the entire world. In its original setting maybe some of you have been to Italy. It is a mural painting high on a dining room wall in a monastery in Stana Maria delle Grazie in the city of Milan. Leonardo took three years to complete this 14 X 30 foot work of art but when in twenty years after he finished his masterpiece the painting started to deteriorate because he chose not to paint it as a fresco, mixing the color right in with the fresh plaster. Rather he simply covered the it with a lead based paint on dry plaster and then it painted on it like wood or canvas with tempera paints with some oil and some binders so consequently through the humid summers, the flooding of canals, icy winters, fog and smoke pollution it started flaking and fading and blurring of details and patching occurred over the course of history as if nature herself had not

already done enough. History revealed that the most the monks that lived there in that dining room decided to do a wonderful thing in 1056. They chose to enlarge the kitchen door and in so doing they cut Jesus legs off in the process. Then in 1796 during the course of a war, French troops decided to use the painting as target practice and shoot arrows into the disciples and then covered the whole thing with a tarp and used the room to store hay for their horses. Then the pace picks up and 1943 Allied bomb blasted through the ceiling and destroyed most of the building except for the mural which had been covered by sandbags and a tarp. During the last five hundred years there has been at least six attempts have made to restore the painting. Most art critics today think the restorers did as much damage to the original as nature and history did. The so-called restorers always added something to the pictures. They tried to remake something of what they thought was in the original so there has been layer upon layer of paste, glue, paint and grime. In 1819 one of those wonderful restorers destroyed Jesus left hand in the process and then in 1924 another restorer did something pretty strange too. He painted six fingers on St James' right hand. Well a few years ago in the land of Italy a scientist process was under taken to discover just who true Leonardo in this painting was true and in turn who the true Jesus in the Last Supper mural was. A woman named Pinin Brambilla Boreillon from foremost art restorer had been at work for nearly nine with little scalpels, tweezers, magnifying glasses and all kinds of delicate instruments to t uncover the original painting. What was different about her approach was she removed everything from the picture that was not part of the original. Her approach was pretty unique and pretty revealing in the process. While working on the face of Jesus she said these words, "Jesus' face had been encumbered so many years that what people had been seeing had been little more was a kind of mask of whatever remained of that original painting. The uncovering of the new face was expected to make the most drastic change in a religious image in the history of Art. It will shed new light on that Leonard intended for the painting a subject which had been debated for ages and ages." And all of this is done in an attempt to find that true Leonardo. When her tiny scalpel lifts layers of the grime away, light rushes in to

reveal a soft rose color on Jesus' face that which had been buried for centuries which became finally visible. She said now you see the color, the one that Leonardo really gave Jesus this way the whole face should return with a dramatic change the value of the color.

Now why do I bring all of this up today because you and I are involved in a similar project; the life long process of discovering the true Jesus; the same quest which engaged the people in Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday morning so many, many years ago. As we seek to be faithful to God's call to us in Jesus we find ourselves at times looking to see his face and listening carefully for his voice. Will it be through our time of devotions or Bible Reading? Will he make himself known to us in our daily conversations with our friends? or family or our co-workers? Will he try to reveal himself through one of the great events of our day as seen in the evening news? Or will he show himself to us in the shape of a brother's or sister's need that we encounter perhaps day by day.

Whether we like to admit it or not there are almost two thousand years which separate us from the time of Jesus' life and Jesus' work; layer upon layer of history stands between us and Jesus 'day. Know to be sure even the people own day were confused about the kind of Messiah that Jesus came to be. Would he come on that white charger with a sword and save them from their Roman overlords. Would he come on that lowly donkey demonstrating the power of humility, the power of service, power of love for other people? If even the people closest to Jesus were confused about him, then certainly centuries of filters can prevent each of us in modern day to see Jesus as Jesus really is. Filters created by the translators of the Bible. Filters created by the church in its attempt to interpret Jesus for us. Yes, I must admit this I even filters fashioned by well meaning Sunday School teachers and even pastors, parents, and grandparents that can prevent us from experiencing Jesus first hand and so we too must learn ever in that process of discovering the true Jesus. Like Dr. Brambilla, no stone unturned as we look through small cracks of light to reveal Jesus' essential nature and will to each one of us. We ought not settle completely for Jesus which somebody has remade for us. In fact the very detail that person may

have overlooked or covered over may be just the ones that can bring Jesus the complete light for us. Those may be the very insights we need to allow the light to his love to flood into our lives. It might be the very revelation to make the Jesus of history who walks life's pathways with us day by day. I don't have to tell you about those little scalpels to remove but rather willingness live with God's revelation in scripture as often as we can. The desire to return to the basis of our faith with new eyes and the willingness to open our hearts that long to tune in the living Jesus with a discerning spirit capable of sensing and discovering the places in the world around us with face of the true Jesus may be found. As people who live by faith let us then during this coming holy week continue in that lifelong challenge and discovery not just a masterpiece but rather in an older language, the master. The Master who comes into our world to point out the way we must go. The master who humbles himself as we learned in Philippians to remind us to walk the pathway of life with humility as we search for that true Jesus; as we walk with dusty pathways with him in this week to come. We wish you God's blessing during the course of this week as you continue that search for the true Jesus.

And together we say AMEN.