

March 20 2016 Palm Sunday

Scripture Lessons ~

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

Philippians 2:5-11

Luke 19:28-40

Sermon *Runnin' on Empty*

I don't know about you but normally when I think of emptiness, I think of it as a bad thing. If the refrigerator is empty; it is a really a bad thing. You know we are not going to eat until we go out and fight the crowds at Safeway to find some groceries for the coming week. If the gas tank for the car is empty-how many of you have been left on the road when the gas tank is empty? I have in fact that is one of the first things I did here. I had Pletsch's car, I got left on the road with the empty gas tank. They warned me but I didn't listen to them. That is why you need to stop at the gas station and fill up. Sometimes it is very difficult for us to focus. If somebody calls us empty headed; I will guarantee you that is not a complement.

If we feel empty inside ourselves it means we might be lonely or suffering or searching for some sort of meaning in life.

In his letter to the Philippians, our scripture lesson for today. St Paul instead seems to hold emptiness in a high regard and speaking of how we should see ourselves as followers of Jesus. He said these words. "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus. Though he was in the form of God he emptied himself and being found in human form he humbled himself and therefore God highly exalted him." I am going to repeat that again. As a result Jesus emptied himself and God highly exalted him. And so it seems that God sort of turned the tables on us in what we might see as a negative thing God has been able to use for God's good. I think Jesus entire life was lived in emptying himself for others. In coming into the world he emptied himself of a great deal of what might have kept him from being human in the midst of us. And coming as a child of poor Galilean parents he emptied himself of the wealth and of the power or notoriety he might have received elsewhere in the world. In dedicating his life to helping others, he emptied himself of personal ambition in the acts of feeding, healing, casting out demons, and comforting others. He gave almost every single ounce of his strength, of his time and energy that he had and finally in that very last week of his life, which begins for us today, he emptied himself of everything he had; his free will, his pride, his sense of self perseverance which is part of all part of us as human beings and even his very life.

Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday is the beginning of the final phase of Jesus' process of emptying himself. This is clearly evident is the way as he entered Jerusalem that day and in the way that he conducted himself in the process of

entering. What in the world did he ride into Jerusalem? He rode a colt of the donkey, a second best even in that sense and a little one that he hopped on to. How did he get it? Did he go and buy it? What price? Where did he get it? He borrowed it; he didn't even own that colt. And what did he sit on? Did he sit on a saddle or rich fabric-no on the disciple's common cloaks? What was thrown on his pathway? Not flowers, not rich fabrics, not coins but more common garments and branches off a palm trees which the Gospel of Luke doesn't even mention. If we just read Luke's Gospel this would be Garment Sunday rather than Palm Sunday. Fortunately we read other gospels.

And what did the crowds cry that day? Luke again failed to mention the word which I mentioned with the guys earlier. Hosanna, a word which means God save us. But Luke not only mentioned blessed be the King but also added blessed be the king who comes in the name of the Lord. God's true and only king, that extra phrase makes all the difference.

And finally, how did Jesus reply to the Pharisees when they spoke to silent the crowd? He said no threats, no violence, and no endorsement of the upper crust of society at present but with the endorsement of the God of all Creation. He says, "If these people were silent the very stones of the earth would shout out."

So why would St Paul by implication of this final week, of this final act of Jesus' emptying himself, be any kind of positive thing. Why would St Paul suggest that Jesus' mind, heart, approach to life, approach to faith is worthy of our imitation, as we follow Jesus along on the pathway in our lives. I think he didn't mean that something important is missing from your life. It can in fact mean that whatever is empty has the potential of being filled. And here I think is the key of this whole thing for all of us during this Holy Week. For if we like Jesus, empty ourselves, if we spend ourselves; if we use ourselves in essence for the sake of God and for the sake of others, sharing God's love with others, our time, our talent, our treasure even our very energy of our lives, God can fill us with the things that truly matter in life; love, we have to have room for love, and compassion with kindness with grace and mercy, our heart for others generously, perseverance and all the other positive attributes of faith as the tools we need so that we can live as Jesus calls us to live every day of our lives.

Is this process of emptying ourselves an easy process? You tell me. Of course not! We are taught from birth to fill ourselves to get into our lives every single thing that we can get our hands on. Even Jesus struggled with it until the very last breathe on the cross. But it is a worthwhile goal to work toward in our Christian walk. Absolutely! knowing that we will never complete the task or even come close without the help of God, without the help of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

As we come to this last week of Lent season, this last week of Jesus' life we need to continue in the footsteps of God's unfinished business here on earth. We are God's

imperfect vessels of clay. working at emptying ourselves of both of our resources for ministry and at the same time those negative attributes that block our relationship to God, block our relationship with others; we waiting, waiting waiting to be filled with God's love. You know at this time in our lives, this time in the history of our country, and this time in the history of our world; I am going to say this very boldly, accept no substitutes, accept no knock offs, or imitations because the Jesus we describe is the Jesus we are called to follow, -follow him not only in our Lenten journey but this is the Jesus we are called to follow down each of our pathways. AMEN.