

Sermons at Christ Church

Be a Joyful Gift to Others.

Palm Sunday

The Reverend Emmanuel Ato Mercer

On Palm Sunday, we celebrate Jesus who rides into glory on a borrowed colt. He said to one of his friends, go the village ahead of you, and you will find a colt tied that has never been ridden, untie it and bring it. And if anyone asks why you are doing this, tell the person that the Lord needs it. Yes, the Lord needs it because the Lord is about to ride into glory in all humility.

And as he rode on the colt, people pulled down branches of trees and spread their garments on the way as they shouted, hosanna to the Son of David, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. The ride to glory began for Jesus a week of twists and turns which ultimately led to his death.

Riding to glory on the dusty roads of ancient Palestine may not have the same feeling like being on a 4th of July parade. There's a story of a 4th of July parade on Main Street in a small town. People had lined up on both sides of Main Street. There was music and excitement all over. The mayor and his wife sat at the back of their open top vehicle and waved to the crowds.

As they drove down Main Street, the mayor saw the ex-boyfriend of his wife who stood on the side and waved. He managed the only gas station in town. Upon seeing the ex-boyfriend, the mayor said to his wife 'Thank goodness you left him, you would by now be managing a gas station. "The wife wasn't too happy about it and so she snapped back "He would've been the mayor if I had stayed with him.'

Both remarks by the wife and the husband reflect the flaws that we see in each other and in ourselves. Our lives are full of flaws-we can sing hosannas to the son of David and then in a few days scream crucify him. It is for this reason that Jesus rides into glory, that we may not only be able to recognize those paradoxes that often shape and destroy our lives but to overcome them.

To overcome those paradoxes, Paul encourages us to let the same mind which was in Christ Jesus be in us. That mind is not given to hatred, anger, revenge, selfishness, mischief, cruelty, violence and evil. That mind is not given to the darkness of sin.

The passion story is riddled with anger directed at Jesus by those who profited from the people and so felt that he was not directing the people to uphold the law. Envious at Jesus, that a peasant could speak wisdom with authority.

That he could heal the broken and restore those who had fallen. Power hungry people who only sought to control the people. Betrayal by two friends, one for money and the other for personal security. False accusation leveled against Jesus over claims that he didn't make. Mocking of Jesus by the very people who heard his cry of anguish on the cross. Death to them was the final act. And his death and burial was to mark the end of the sorry saga of a man who was accused of trying to usurp power.

They knew he was no threat. After all he rode on a borrowed colt. Apart from his clothes, Jesus owned absolutely nothing.

But they understood that to change the mind is more potent than to reach for the sword. And they detested him for giving people something to think about.

Come to think of it, you and I are not any different from the power hungry zealots we read about. And each part of the narrative reflects all that you and I are capable of doing-but we pretend that we can't do any such thing. I once read this line: "Save me from the Pharisee in me." The Pharisee in each of us can be contemptuous and evil.

There's a story of two evil brothers who were very wealthy. One of them died. His brother said to the pastor, I will make a large donation to the church but under one condition, if you said that my brother was a saint. The pastor thought about it for a moment, and then said sure, I will make that deal. So the brother made a large donation. During the service, the pastor said this man was an evil man, he lied, cheated and did all sorts of things against others. But compared to his brother, he was a saint.

Remember, to overcome evil, you would need to have the mind of Christ. You would need to be like that person who simply agreed to have the friend to Jesus take the colt away. You would need to believe against all odds that that person would bring the colt back.

Those who have the mind of Christ understand that life can be treacherous, uncompromising, gloomy and cold. They believe that friends do betray friends. They believe that we all harm each other. They believe that addiction can take control over our lives. They believe that our first instinct is almost always towards destruction. Those who have the mind of Christ can attest to our helplessness, that when push comes to shove, we are a helpless people. But we are not hopeless people. We may be helpless but we are not hopeless. And we are not hopeless because we believe that God is trustworthy.

You would wonder why Jesus would ride into glory when he was clearly aware of the danger that awaited him. The point is, when you ride into glory, you don't do so because of the absence of danger, you don't do so because your very life is at risk, you do so in spite of the danger-like a soldier who goes into battle, you believe that that is part of the sacrifice that you have to make.

You assure yourself, I am not scared of what will or can happen because I know that God is trustworthy. And because God is trustworthy, my vindication lies in the hands of God. Because God is trustworthy, I can ride into glory.

Those who have the mind of Christ have developed the talents and grace with which they can get whatever they want out of life without being selfish. Fundamentally, they know that they can ride into glory, not on a horse, but on a colt.

Last Wednesday at the Lenten Supper, I said that being a Christian is like riding a bicycle. The day you stop moving forward is the day you fall. Much as the Lord needed the colt, so does the Lord need you because the Lord wants to use you for the Lord's ride into glory. But you would need a humble mind and spirit to ride into glory with Christ.

Amen.