

**Bible Study**  
**Palm Sunday, Year A**  
**April 9, 2017**

**[RCL] Isaiah 50:4-9a; Psalm 31:9-16; Philippians 2:5-11; Matthew 26:14-27:66**

**Isaiah 50:4-9a**

This part of Isaiah is interesting. If we look closely, it has a careful balance of human responses to God and each other. First, we find the value of listening and speaking. As God gives the prophet the gift of words, it is to use them to sustain the weary. And as God gives the prophet the power to listen, it is so that the prophet hears, and more importantly, understands God. This understanding is a pivotal part of the prophet's obedience to God.

Then the passage shifts to a more physical sense of response to God and each other. Mentions of being struck, pulling out a beard, and spitting give a very negative sense of responding to God and each other through physical means. This is particularly interesting because the passage closes with a question of declaring guilt, which is the standard our communities still use in determining who is a free citizen and who is not. But those declarations are only words.

- How do we use our bodies (in all senses, by speaking, by listening, by acting) as centers of spiritual renewal and connection to God and each other?
- If this passage is telling us anything, it is that words and how we hear them are significant. How do you use your own words? How do you listen? Would that change based on today's scripture?

**Psalm 31:9-16**

When all feels lost, when we find ourselves at the bottom of the well of life, when everything seems to be working against us, it can be easy to just give up. It can be easy to throw in the towel, stop trying to climb out, and just exist in a state of perpetual sadness and fear. But the psalmist today gives us another alternative. When we feel as though we have nothing left, no one to turn to and nothing we can do to change that, God is still present. We can still cry out to God for mercy and love.

- What is your standard mode of operation when things are tough? Do you lash out? Hide away? How can you bring God into those moments with you?

**Philippians 2:5-11**

This passage is an incredible and wild statement for its time. Particularly in a time of Roman rule, the typical leader came to conquer by strength and might. When Jesus arrives on the scene, that is largely the expectation of the people. He is supposed to overthrow the Roman empire and lead the people of God into a new and peaceful kingdom. But that is not what Christ does. Instead, Christ models the life of a servant, emptying himself even to the point of death. This was a radical notion at the time.

- How do we respond to radical ideas?
- Think of those things which have never been done, things that go against our cultural expectations of how things should be done, and imagine how you might embrace or push back against that sort of thing which goes against it all.

## **Matthew 26:14-27:66**

The reading from Matthew for Palm Sunday is full of the images we associate with the Passion: the betrayal by Judas, the agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, the three denials of Peter, and the angry mom of a crowd crying out for the crucifixion of Jesus. What we focus on today is the constant tension we find between humanity and divinity. It is highlighted again and again.

Christ knows who will betray and deny him. Christ can stay awake and alert in the garden. Christ can look his betrayer in the eyes and call him ‘friend.’ The humanity in the narrative comes in the form of Judas falling prey to monetary bribes, the disciples constantly falling asleep, Peter being so filled with fear that he denies knowing Christ, and the crowds being so worked up that they allow the chief priests and scribes to convince them that Barabas is the one they should pardon.

But the tension is also housed within Christ, himself. Although he knows his path, he pleads for release. And although he knows the consequence of his betrayal, he still calls Judas friend. And even though Peter falls victim to fear and shame, he is still the one chosen to build the church on. These are all ways that humanity and divinity are playing tug-o-war with each other throughout this passage.

- In what ways do our own wills match or mismatch with God’s will for us?
- How do we respond when we are in opposition? Do we repent like Judas? Do we get angry like the crowd? Do we weep like Peter?
- What can we learn from these responses?

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