

Lent VI (24 March 2024)

“WHEN the morning was come, all the chief priests and elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death: and when they had bound him, they led him away...”

+In the Name of...

Think of a time when you have been afraid. I was going to start this sermon with the question, “Have you ever been afraid?” But of course, we all have been afraid at one time or another. Or maybe there are times we should have been afraid but it kind of hit us after we could do anything about it. I remember driving one break from college in Helena, Montana, to see a friend in Chicago. There were no cell phones then, or at least they were not commonplace: none of my friends or classmates had them. I phoned my mother back in Portland before I left: “I am going to Chicago,” I stated rather matter-of-factly. There was silence on the other end of the line. “Driving?!” she asked incredulously. It was likely not in reference to my driving ability, but in recognition

of my first car's less than stellar record in the reliability department. But off I went with no cell phone, no GPS, to a state I had never visited with an atlas (What's that?) that I bought at K-Mart (Again, what's that?) on my way out of town. Now you think I am going to tell some story about feeling threatened in downtown Chicago. On my drive east, I went through miles and miles of cornfields in North Dakota. At one point the announcer on the radio delivered the news that there was a Tornado Watch. Coming from the Pacific Northwest, this was outside my realm of expertise. It was pitch black outside and the only light I had seen for miles came from my own car's headlights. I decided to take the next exit. I looked up into the sky, but of course there was nothing to see. What was I watching for? Dorothy's house to blow past? I decided it was not any safer sitting by the side of the road than it was to keep driving, so I continued my journey. Maybe it is the unknown that particularly scares us because I had white knuckles for at least a couple more hours of that trip. Should I have been

afraid? Maybe not. Not that that would matter; we cannot stop being afraid just because someone tells us that we need not be. We most frequently associate being afraid with small children: things that go bump in the night and the like, but folks of all ages can be afraid.

There are many events that will unfold this week that could make us afraid: being arrested in the dead of night, a sham trial, death by crucifixion. I would think any one of those things by itself could make one pretty apprehensive, let alone all of them strung together. We are going to hear the Passion read several times this week, so I trust that you will permit me a little latitude with this morning's Gospel: I would like to look at what occurred immediately before what we heard today, which was read as the Gospel for Mass yesterday. It is actually part of what occurs in Holy Scripture between the events read in the Gospel at the Liturgy of the Palms and the Gospel you heard read just minutes ago.

Jesus told His disciples that His soul was troubled, but asked what should or could He say? “Father, save me from this hour:” He suggests, but then as if in answer to Himself, He says, “but for this cause came I unto this hour.” God became incarnate not so Hallmark could have cutsie scenes to put on greeting cards, but to save the race of mankind. Now I realize that none of us will literally have the weight of the world on our shoulders like that, but my point is that if Jesus is allowed to be afraid, to have His “soul troubled”, as He put it, we are allowed too. Not only are we allowed, we might be *called* to do something that makes us uncomfortable! The Church has long been in the business of matching up the talents of Her parishioners with the tasks that need to be done. That is great when you have a congregation of thousands, but what happens when the task at hand exceeds the current knowledge of the membership? Sometimes God calls us to work outside our comfort zones. I do not mean recklessly: God is not going to call me to do open heart surgery without any training,

but He might call me to do something that I could do physically, but is not on *my* top ten list.

Throughout yesterday's Gospel reading, the Gospels in general, but in the coming week especially, there is a journey from darkness to light. We grew up singing "This Little Light of Mine" in Sunday school, but between the two Gospels this morning Jesus tells His disciples that the Light will only be with them a little while longer. "Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth. While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be children of the light."

The events of this week are not going to be scary to us because we know how it ends: we know that the glorious Resurrection of Easter will occur on Sunday regardless of who sues whom, who runs for office against whom, or who plays whom, or whatever transpires on the world stage. What we do not know, is who is going to take that light to the succeeding

generations. We know who should, but that is as pointless a conversation as telling people that they should not be afraid.

As troubling as the prospect of a tornado in a North Dakota cornfield might have been to a 20-year-old from the city, or whatever you find equally disconcerting, try to imagine a world, a society, or whatever political unit, that does not know about Jesus. That should be the most frightening prospect any of us can imagine, and it is our vocation, whether lay or ordained, to see that it does not happen. “Hosanna to the Son of David. Blessed is He Who comes in the Name of the Lord!”

+In the Name of...