

March 28, 2010

Scripture: Psalm 118: 1-2, 19-29

Sermon: "In the Midst of Our Darkness is the Light of God"

I struggled this past week as a person of faith. I struggled this past week to find the Light of God in the midst of the darkness that seems to be closing in and to threatening to overtake. I struggled this past week as a person of faith, confused, worried, afraid, wondering where God was in all this confusion and anger that seems to be invading our world.

As a person of faith this past week, my heart was and still is heavy. With each passing day, I felt more and more uncertain, felt more and more fearful, and felt more and more worried. because we live in a nation, in a world where tensions are rising. People are angry. People are afraid and worried. People no longer recognize each other as fellow human beings, as brothers and sisters. We only see "the Other", the "stranger", the "one that doesn't think like me, act like me, which is not like me:.. This past week, as a person of faith, I have seen the bonds of unity and community strained and sometimes even broken by hurtful words, vicious acts, and lines drawn in the sand. As a person of faith, I struggled this past week. I e struggled this week to find the Light of God in the midst of the darkness that seems to be closing in and threatening to overtake.

This tension, this confusion, this hurtful anger is all new to me. I didn't live through the sixties with its uncertain times. I didn't experience the tension, the anger that surrounded the Civil Rights movement that pitted neighbor against neighbor. I didn't live through World War II that pitted nation against nation. All I know about those times, those feelings of tension, anger, confusion and those experiences that shaped generations of believers, that molded a response from the faith communities are simply stories, memories that have been shared with me by people who lived through it, experienced it, and survived it. To be honest, I am part of a generation that has had a pretty stable existence. Sure, we've had wars during my lifetime but they haven't been as close to home. They seemed like they were worlds away, happening to other people. We've had conflict but it hasn't seemed as close to home or so strained or so broken.

But now...this past week, these feelings of confusion, of uncertainty, of broken community are all new to me. I found myself struggling, wondering Where is God in all of this? "What is the Good News in the midst of this entire community-dividing, anger-filled, neighbor against neighbor tension?" Where is the Light of God in the Midst of our Darkness?"

And the answer comes to us today through the words of Psalm 118! Hosanna! Save us! Blessed is the one that comes in the name of the Lord! A reminder that God has acted in the past, has saved us from ourselves in the past, and God will save us again! As we wave the palm branches, as we celebrate that the Kings of Kings is here, as we find hope filled with understanding that our God is an active God, and as we proclaim that our God is still working and still speaking, that our God has answered our pleas and has given us salvation, we find comfort, peace and joy! We find unity and community! We find grace!

We hear the words of Psalm 118 and they give us hope as people of faith to celebrate God's faithfulness. God was with us in the beginning. God is with us now. God will be with us always.

They remind us that God's love is steadfast and endures forever. They remind us that God gave us God's Light to shine in and through the darkness that God's light will never go away!

The very words of Psalm 118 give us hope and stir our hearts and our souls to celebrate! They unify us! They build community! They remind us that we are all God's children!

This is the very Psalm that the crowd so very long ago shouted as Jesus began his approach into Jerusalem. These are the very words that they cried out as they witnessed and experienced God at work, as they experienced the Word made flesh, as they celebrated God's saving grace once more. As they realized that God was gathering God's people in to unify them and to bring about God's Kingdom here on earth!

People began throwing their cloaks down. People began waving palm branches. People began shouting: Hosanna. Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!" In the midst of their darkness, they found the Light of God! Because God had heard God's pleas. Because God was unifying God's people once more. Because they found comfort and joy in the fact that God was saving them once more.

Amid rising tensions, they discovered that God was working in their world and in their nation. Amidst their oppression, they rejoiced because God heard their pleas once more and God would save God's people once more! Amid the tension and anger that filled their world, they found peace

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! God's love is steadfast and endures forever! God is here! God will save! God's Kingdom is here, unifying us, making us one! In the midst their darkness, the crowd sees God at work, proclaims God's faithfulness, and celebrates! The Light of God never goes away. Jesus rides into town with his followers shouting before him, "Hosanna." Jesus rides into town with his disciples bringing up the rear of the parade!" God's Kingdom is here! They began shouting, "Hosanna!" People began waving palms. People began throwing their cloaks down on the ground in front of Jesus. They knew that the Messiah has come. And they were celebrating. God was saving God's people once more! God heard their cries! God was renewing their hearts with light, with peace, with grace! They knew that God was unifying God's people once more.

And today we join in their celebration. We join in as they cry Hosanna. We join in as they shout, "Blessed be the one who comes in the name of the Lord." We join in as they proclaim Jesus, King of Kings. Amid the rising tensions of our world and our nation, we celebrate that our God is still working. We celebrate the hope, the security, the trust that we have as people of faith because we know that in the midst of our darkness, we find the Light of God. Because the Light of God never goes away.

And there can be no better reminder of this than the image that graces the front of our bulletin cover today. I have always loved "Starry, Starry Night". When I find myself needing a moment of peace, a moment of sanctuary, I simply lean back in my chair and turn my eyes to this painting which hangs upon my wall in my office. And with each passing observation of this painting, I am humbled by Van Gogh's faith and his hope in God. There in the village, all the

lights are out, and most poignantly, the lights of the church are out. Now as a preacher, I actually find a strange comfort in this thought. It helps ground me and remind me that the church is a human institution, that the homes filling that valley are human institutions. All limited. All finite. All imperfect. All will end. These human experiences, these human emotions, these human wars, these human creations, these human divisions will all pass away, will all come to an end, will all fade away.

But in the midst of the darkness, the Light of God fills the sky! Over half of the painting is Light, Swirling, moving, enfolding, gliding, actively working to illuminate the darkness, working to break through the darkness, working to overcome the darkness, working to bring peace, to bring hope, to bring grace.

The Lord is God and God has given us light and through this light, we can see clearly what unites us and that is the simple fact that we are all created in the image of God. What unites us and gives us hope and courage for the journey ahead is the fact that we are all created by, formed by, and are made in the image of God. We are all human. We are all God's children. And that is the good news! We are all connected as family, as brother and sisters, as community, unified because we are created in the image of God.

With our shouts of Hosannas, through our waving of the palm branches, through our celebration that the Kings of Kings is here, through our hope filled understanding that our God is an active God, that our God is still working and still speaking, that God has answered our pleas and has given us salvation, we find the Light of God in the midst of our darkness! We celebrate! We find peace! We find hope!

And that is our calling as people of faith: to go out into this world that is broken and hurting, that is filled with people who are hungry and dying, that is filled with People who are lost and lonely, that is filled with people who are oppressed by the power, and show them the Light of God that surrounds them, that enfolds them, that wraps them securely in the hands of God, that illuminates their paths, shows them that we are all connected, part of the one Body of Christ, filled with the same love, the same peace, the same grace of God.

We are called to live our lives as people of faith, to recognize and proclaim that Jesus Christ is our Lord and Savior, and to speak out against the powers that oppress, that divided, that separate, and that destroy. Jesus brought himself and his message to Jerusalem that day, that Palm Sunday, to be an expression of hope for God's people, to be an expression of change. He came to show the world that there is something more. That God was still working in the world, that God was still saving God's people, that God had the last word. And we are called to do the same, to follow Jesus through the gates of the city, to continue shouting and singing Hosanna, to cause a great commotion. We are called to follow Jesus through Jerusalem proclaiming that he is the Messiah, joined in the Spirit of God as the body of Christ, proclaiming that we are unified as people, created by God, connected as one body.

Our task today as we wave the palms and celebrate our king is to be agents of his reconciling love for all of God's people. Our task today as we shout Hosanna is to say that this world does not have the last word, God does. Our task today as we follow Jesus through the gates of

Jerusalem is to journey with Jesus, challenging the powers that oppress and hold sway in our world. That is our mission as followers of Christ. That is our answer as people of faith. That is our call as Christians. To be the Body of Christ in a this broken strained separated divided world.

Blessed is the King of the poor, the oppressed, the suffering. Blessed is the King of the weak, of the sinners, of the outcasts. Blessed is the King of love, of grace, of peace. Blessed is the King of mercy, of hospitality, of hope. Blessed is the King of Community. Blessed is the King of wholeness and healing. Blessed is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Because the Light of God never goes away!

And nothing will silence this joyful cry! God's love is steadfast and endures forever. No darkness will extinguish the Light of God. Nothing will dim this joyful celebration. Nothing will stop this parade. Nothing will stop the Kingdom of God from coming about! Even as tensions rise, and darkness threatens to overtake us, the Light of God is there in our midst. And we celebrate because our God has heard our pleas. We celebrate because our God is still working, still speaking. We celebrate because our God's saving grace is steadfast and endures forever. We celebrated because we are one!

The Light of God fills our lives. The Light of God shines in the darkness, giving us strength and courage for the journey ahead. The Light of God is for all of God's children, bringing peace, bringing hope, bringing grace to all of God's people. The Light of God fills us, renews us, lifts us up, and connects as one.

Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Our God has answered our pleas and has given us salvation! Amen.