

SPIRITUALITY AND VOCATION: STRENGTH FOR THE ROAD

Sermon Preached in The Mackey Worship Center

The Rev. Dr. Carroll C. Meyer, Preaching

Westminster Presbyterian Church

353 East Pine Street, Wooster, Ohio, 44691

Palm Sunday

April 1, 2007

Luke 22: 39 – 46

Luke 19: 28 – 40

The Hymn of Praise: 89 Hosanna, Loud Hosanna

The common Hymn

The Hymn of Commitment: 92 Beneath the Cross of Jesus

This is Palm Sunday, the Sunday we commemorate the day Jesus was met by the crowd as he made his royal entry into Jerusalem. The crowd spread their cloaks and palm branches to pave the way for his journey. This Palm Sunday narrative is one of the three critical, meaning defining religious motifs of our Western culture. Palm Sunday is the liturgical day and this is an event of the day. This morning's sermon is most appropriate to this liturgical Sunday and to the events of this secular day.

We are in the very highest of holy days that determines the script for our religious life. Palm Sunday is the heart of the story. And it is occurring in the heat of our own day.

Last Monday morning, March 26, 2007, the news began at 5:00 a.m. on NPR with a warning to the listener. "The news you are about to hear is an eye witness account by our journalist in Iraq. It is a gory description of the mass killing of children. You may not want to listen to this broadcast for a few minutes."

There is not a single person here who does not know the savagery our

humanity is capable of delivering against our enemies. What I want to present is what happens to normally decent people's behavior who are not prepared for a test of their faith.

The boys were playing soccer in a field. There were about 14 boys, Sunni and Shia together. This was an old community where civil relationships had reigned within the mixed community for centuries. This was a community of peace and neighborliness. Within minutes of the news of the killing of the children, the different sects went for their guns and neighbors who had been friendly for centuries lost their senses and began killing each other in mass hysteria. There is not a single person here who does not know of this kind of possibility. Of course, we live in our community under a veneer of civility. But we know that beneath that veneer is this great capacity of horrendous evil. These were not evil people. These were normally good people who happened to be in an evil moment and got lost in its control.

Make no mistake. Jesus knew the situation he was riding into as he approached Jerusalem. Betrayal and death were waiting there sure as the sun rises and the sun sets. He knew his fate and he accepted that fate. The question you and I have to answer is this: "Are we prepared for ours?" We know where Jesus got the spiritual power to live his life because it is made so blatantly obvious in his biographies. He went to the synagogue to worship as was his custom. He went to the garden to pray as was his custom. We have so many stories of Jesus being presented as constantly moving throughout the entire territory of Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, immediately healing and actively teaching and preaching, that we forget that a significant part of his life was taken up in reflective, sacred ritual both communally and privately. We find it so very easy in our secular culture to remove Jesus' religious life from his ethical vocation just as we are now removing any hint of The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s religious life from his prophetic vocation. Nor do I want to overlook the hours and days and months Mahatma Gandhi sat meditating at his spinning wheel in India as meditative preparation for his next extraordinary act of Herculean bravery.

What are the values you hold most dear and to which you are absolutely

committed? What are the levels of affirming energy or sacrifice you are willing to exert to uphold those values? And what are the practices, sacred or secular, you have in place that will allow you to keep those commitments?