

April 4, 2004/Palm Sunday
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The Mind of Christ

Isaiah 50:4-9a *The Lord God has given me the tongue of those who are taught.*

Philippians 2:1-11 *Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus....*

The passages from Isaiah 50 and Philippians 2 are heard regularly throughout the Christian community on Palm Sunday. Holy Week and Easter give us a concentrated view of who Jesus is and what he is about. As we see deeply into the nature, meaning, and direction of Jesus' life, we also see who he is calling and empowering us to be and what kind of community he has made us. Jesus fully expressed God and God's will for our lives in his teachings, his life, his death, and his resurrection, the whole of his life.

There is always the tendency to reduce the fullness of who Jesus was and is, making on part the whole. This is good to keep in mind as we enter Holy Week. Jesus' suffering at the hands of the religious and political powers of his day, and his suffering and death on the cross, cannot be disconnected from his life and teachings. For this reason I don't plan to see the movie "The Passion of the Christ." Every film about Jesus' life is a misrepresentation, and to present the last hours of Jesus' life as the whole meaning of his life is as wrong as focusing only on Jesus' teachings, leaving out the crucifixion and resurrection. Films are about the manipulation of emotions, and Christian faith is not about emotion but a life of total commitment to following Christ, the life of discipleship. Christ is encountered not in a movie screen but in the life of prayer, in the community he calls together to live under his command to love one another, and in the missions to which he calls us for the healing of the world. Prayer. Community. Mission. These are the things I want to touch on this morning from our readings from Isaiah and Philippians.

"The Lord God has given me the tongue of those who are taught." This is a better translation than the NRSV, which has it: "The tongue of a teacher." All the difference in the world! We Christians over the centuries have too much taken ourselves to be teachers. The Japanese theologian Kosuke Koyama says that Christianity suffers from a "teacher complex." [Three Mile an Hour God, p. 51] We have

the truth and others do not. Therefore we have devastated peoples and cultures, yoking Christian religion to military and economic power. This is not the truth about Jesus.

Three years ago I attended a conference on inter-religious dialogue in Columbus, Indiana. I sat at a table with Presbyterians, Unitarians, Quakers, two Tibetan Buddhist monks from a nearby monastery, and a young woman recently converted to a fundamentalist form of Christian faith. When time came for us to share with one another, the zealous young woman didn't hesitate. She told of being recently "saved," and immediately informed us all that she was sorry but all those who do not, as she put it, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ are going to hell. I looked at the Tibetan monk sitting beside me. His head rested on the palm of his hand as he patiently, yet sadly, listened to the young woman. I felt more spiritual connection with him than with the one who was supposed to be my sister in faith. She spoke without listening and knew without understanding. She did not have the tongue of one who is taught. In Isaiah's words, the true servant of God speaks only from listening to God, as one who is teachable and not trapped in her or his own thoughts and ideas.

"Morning by morning God wakens me to listen" the servant continues. We each do our inward journey work at the time of day that works best for us. But there is something significant about beginning our day with silence and the listening that is prayer. Before we go out to our work, before we encounter other people, before we meet what life will present us, it is important to be still, quiet, and listening. Being still and empty makes us ready to live the day as those who are taught by God, by Christ, as disciples. Time spent each morning in silence and inner listening enables us to let go of all the stuff we tend to carry over from one day into another, all the feelings and preoccupations of mind and heart that keep us from living our lives as servants of God. If I wake up and rush out the door with animosity in my heart because of something that happened with someone yesterday, then I am going to carry it over into my relationships today. I have not listened to God. I have not listened to my own heart and am controlled by unresolved tensions and inner conflicts. I am too full of old stuff to be present to anyone, including God. If I meet each day with an arsenal of ideas and ideology, religious or political, going forth to right all wrongs and set everyone straight, then I am not listening to the living God, the living Christ, and will do violence to everyone and everything I touch. My ideas may be wonderful and good; but I have rolled up my sleeves to use force. I have abandoned the non-violent love of God and Jesus' call to treat no one as an enemy.

So, first of all, we meet the living Christ in prayer. I don't know any better definition of prayer, of the inward journey, than listening to God, to Christ, teaching our hearts and minds and spirits. When we are listening, then our speech and our lives will be more full of God, full of Christ.

The living Christ is known in community. "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus," Paul wrote to the Christians at Philippi. Paul asked the community to "make his joy complete by being of one mind." If they have any bit of encouragement, love, Spirit, compassion, sympathy, they are on their way to being a true community of Christ. Paul didn't mean having the same opinions on everything. He meant something like having the same "mentality" or fundamental view of life. Or having the same consciousness or awareness. But also sharing the same will and desire to be a true community of Christ. That desire must shape everything we do and undertake, and the ways we treat one another and those who come into the community.

The church is the community shaped only by the mind of Christ and nothing else. We are called to be those who daily give ourselves and our life together to the transforming power of the Christ who was crucified, who poured out his life for the world. What does the mind of Christ look like? Paul quotes what scholars believe to be a hymn or confession used in the early Christian communities. It speaks of the self-emptying of Christ, who refused to use his intimacy and status with God to his own benefit, but gave that up for the sake of others. There is this downward movement of his life, away from privilege and status, away from self-securing, and toward the world. And this downward movement was so that others might have life, true and real life, might be awakened to their relationship with God and the living of their lives in the same manner.

The community of Christ has, in Koyama's words, a "crucified mind." He writes that "the crucified mind is not...a wisdom mind, a philosophical mind or a religious mind. It is a shaken mind that feels the power of God coming from the crucified Lord." [No Handle on the Cross, p. 9] It is the power of God that shows itself in servanthood and love that seeks the well-being of others first of all. It is the power of God that does not roll up its sleeves to use force but to reach out, lift up, and receive what others have to offer. Having this mind is our own salvation and liberation, as well. We are freed from the perpetual disappointment found in preoccupation with ourselves.

If we bring to our community of faith expectations and demands that the community be as we think it should be, then we will not know the living Christ. If we are non-accepting of those who bring different callings, temperaments, ways of understanding, and experiences, then we do not know the living Christ. If, however, we enter this community with commitment, with a humility that accepts reality and opens up to learning and growing, then we will know Christ and the mind of Christ. If we give up our fruitless search for a perfect community and commit ourselves to being in community with whomever Christ calls to himself, then we begin to know the living Christ.

All of this leads naturally to finding Christ in mission. The same downward movement that we are to have with one another—looking not to our own interests but the interests of others—is to be the way we live in the world and toward the world. This means discerning in ourselves and then letting go of the ways we have bought into the domination, violence, and self-seeking that surround us. It means giving up status and privilege, especially today as white, affluent Americans. It means seeing honestly and deeply the ways we use Christian faith to bolster our own sense of righteousness instead of creating in us a servant spirit. Finding Christ in mission means seeing that our inward journey, our personal transformation, and our life together as a faith community are all for the sake of the world and not ends in themselves.

The outward journey of mission can be for the nourishing of the community of faith itself or for the world that we are called to serve. The one who makes the sanctuary a beautiful place for worship is as important as the one who is called to confront the injustices of society. Each with his or her particular gift is part of the one servant community. The inward and outward dimensions of our lives and our life together are inseparable. We can't have one without the other. To be all outward is to risk becoming domination-minded, leaving behind the mind, the spirit, the power of the servant Christ. To be all inward is to reveal that our inner life has not yet encountered the servant spirit of Christ.

Where do we meet the living Christ? In prayer as we daily listen to God and to Christ teaching our hearts and minds. In community where we live together with the mind of Christ. And in mission as we give ourselves to others and the world with the gifts God gives us, following the callings God sounds in our hearts.