

Sermon for Palm/Passion Sunday – March 16, 2008

What is the 'Mind of Christ'?

Rev. John Benham

Several of the onlookers are waving palm branches—a kind of make-do ticker tape. The face of the rider is unforgettable. There is a calm certainty about Him. You feel a kind of indescribable presence. A crowd has come to watch. A sea of empty faces . . . cheering . . . for what? They don't know! Perhaps because everyone needs a hero—or perhaps simply applauding the fact that something has made this day unusual—cheering, the relief from the routine.

There are the political among the crowd who cheer this young man on because they have pinned their hopes on Him . . . They want to believe that He will deliver them from the Romans. And there are the zealots and fanatics . . . The card-carrying religious right wingers who take this moment to wear "The End is at hand!"—"turn in your keys, the kingdom has come!" But mostly they are "the crowd" —the unthinking, unfeeling, clump of bodies—the "crowd". And while they shout, He sighs. And while they cheer, He sheds his tears.

Jesus went to Jerusalem and became vulnerable for the **love of that unthinking, unfeeling crowd** who wanted successful hero. But life makes losers of us all. To lose, fundamentally, is to not be in control of what is virtually important to you. It is to run into walls that don't move. It is to fall over cliffs that you didn't build and didn't see. It is to learn that there are no guarantees. It is to experience limitations, to suffer impermanence, to become vulnerable. Jesus tells us that we find our life by losing it.

Jesus could not control the events which finally swamped Him. From the beginning, he was rejected by his home town, even thrown out of His own synagogue. His family thought He was a religious fanatic. His closest friends, even at the end, misunderstood Him, betrayed, denied and deserted Him. And at the last, He even felt forsaken by God. He knew what it was to lose everything.

We can't control all the events that happen to us, but we can choose how we will respond. Jesus chose Jerusalem. He chose to put Himself at the mercy of the crowd. He knew their fickle, cowardly way . . . but He didn't go into hiding. He didn't abdicate His mission. He chose to go along with God, though He didn't necessarily know where that would take Him. He embraced his vulnerability for the love of God, and for the love of humanity.

We too are free to choose to go to our Jerusalem's, whatever they are. We can embrace our own vulnerability. We can choose and live out of our deepest knowing and being, accepting losses and facing pain for the sake of what matters most to us.

And just as He moved vulnerably through the streets of Jerusalem years ago, he still moves vulnerably through the most captive cities . . . the streets of our hearts. To each of us Christ offers a way of experiencing life, here and now where God is all love.

Jesus could have chosen force and power or guilt trips to coerce others to trust God and follow and stand up for him, but instead He took the beating. Some days we yearn for that power as the church, and body of Christ gets pushed aside. It's close to me as I journey with a dear friend who used to worship every Sunday and the day he was married he stoppee. His family of three kids have never stepped foot in a church.

We live in a success-oriented culture. Whether it is in school, business, or sports, everyone wants to be a winner. For instance, I looked up the word "success" on one large bookseller's web site and was amazed when over 532,500 titles emerged. For example:

10 Steps to Financial Success The 100 Absolutely Unbreakable Laws of Business Success
Everything You Need to Know to Get Started on the Road to Success 101
Secrets to Negotiating Success
101 Stupid Things Business Travelers Do to Sabotage Success, Dress for Success

But, success can be dangerous. Why is it that some people, at the height of their power and careers, sometimes collapse while others simply walk away from success? In most of these cases it is a success that people won only by a long and hard labour.

The truth is that danger lurks behind success. There is a kind of disease of the successful. This disease adversely directs individuals, teams of people, and even churches. One coach put it this way: "It is relatively easy to win a championship, but much more difficult to defend it".

A danger of success is that it places us in the province of little resistance and no struggle. The Greeks had a term for this concept. Later the Romans called it *acedia*. Acedia is sometimes defined as sloth or uncaring. It comes from Latin root words that mean "absence of care" or "indifference".

Acedia strikes in the bright noonday sun of clarity rather than in the darkness of despair. Acedia does not strike struggling persons, those who strive for daily bread and survival. Rather acedia always strikes the person who sits at the top of the success stack, at the apex of achievement. It strikes those who place their trust in their ego instead of God. When Paul urges his little congregation at Philippi to "have the mind of Christ," the apostle suggested that Jesus was redefining what it meant to be successful.

Paul says real success is trusting in the mind of Christ. What motivates those with a mind of Christ is not so much what we get as what we give. To have the mind of Christ is to be willing to struggle, to feel pain, and to suffer for the sake of others.

It is this kind of mind that helped Jesus overcome all that the world threw at him during Holy Week.

For Ryan, the streets of Hamilton were his home. He grew up in a nice suburb but he was physically and emotionally abused by his parents. Ryan describes how his mother would spit on him and how life at home was like hell. Ryan in high school never did drugs, achieved good grades but his home life was like "walking on egg shells". By age 16 he didn't know where to go but he had had enough. After staying with friends for a while he stumbled along the United Church Housing Program sponsored by Wesley ministries. This program gives at-risk teens a safe place to live and a sense of community along with opportunities to learn new skills for living in this world. When people suggest that churches don't really make a difference I stand to differ. Our support of Wesley and the M & S fund supports countless programs across this country and world.

Ryan says, "When he was feeling depressed and didn't know where to go he then heard about the Wesley youth program and finally something good happened in my life and I jumped in".

Our congregation is facing one of the most important choices in our history on April 6th. If you haven't jumped in and become concerned about our future mission I strongly encourage you to leave the sidelines and experience the passion and love that God has for you, this community of faith and for this world.