

PALM SUNDAY SERMON 10TH APRIL 2022, ST. ANDREW'S ON THE TERRACE

“ARE WE LIVING IN CONTRADICTION, FROM HOSANNA TO CRUCIFY HIM”

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It's sometimes so easy to switch allegiances when we are swept up by the emotions of the crowds and protestors around us. Our prime minister was the golden girl at the start of the pandemic two years ago, and now she is the scapegoat that tries to find a way of addressing the grievances of the protestors that held parliament grounds to ransom last month. Two years ago the people shouted she is the world's best prime minister and now some are literally trying to dethrone her.

Sounds familiar to what happened 2,000 years ago as Jesus rode on a donkey into Jerusalem, an animal with its own dignity and honour into the crowd who called him the Son of David. They worshipped him.

I remember being asked which side I was cheering for when I went to the rugby game where the All blacks played the Manu Samoa, my response was “whichever side is winning”. It was so easy to switch allegiances when you love both teams equally, or when you're not really committed to either side.

Palm Sunday was significant for the Jewish people because the palms symbolised victory and triumph at the time.

Within the Roman empire Anthony and Cleopatra were defeated by Octavian and with that victory he changed his name to Augustus and the Roman empire

took things to an even higher level than ever before. The Romans had just gone through 20 years of civil war and Augustus ended it. He brought peace – 40 years of peace. The people responded, “Thank God, praise Augustus, he must be divine”. And then the Roman emperor cult was born which was the heart and soul of the Roman Empire. It created a unifying ideology which asserted that Caesar was God, that he was the Son of God and that he was the Saviour, Redeemer and Lord and Rome expected all of its subject nations to call him those things too.

So when the next Caesar came to power a certain Yeshua of Nazareth arrived on the scene, and this Yeshua this Jesus from a small town in a backwater province on the eastern fringe of the Roman empire had the gall to take on and defy that arrogant Roman ideology.

Jesus came to bring a new world view, he came to dismantle the status quo and reverse the order of inclusiveness, who’s in and who’s out. That the poor will be blessed, the weeping with laugh, the outcast will be welcomed and included. Those are good contradictions

Do you still live with your own contradictions from time to time? I love him but I also hate him, we have a love/hate relationship. I wish he’d go but I’d miss him. She drives me insane but I can’t live without her. This crowd worshipping Jesus is passive/aggressive, gentle and humble caught up in the sweetness of the moment. Nekminnit pulled along by the majority and very soon shouting to have this same man killed. From Hosanna to the son of David to Crucify him.

That's the world we live in a world where we are influenced by the crowds. Today we call it social media, tik tok, Facebook, television, newspapers, media and the internet.

Over the next few days we will be walking with Jesus to the garden of Gethsemane and he will be praying "take this cup of suffering away from me, not thy will but yours be done". How many of us have prayed this same prayer? Take this cup of suffering away from me and then we add, not my will but thine be done!

We need to be realistic with our Christian walk with Christ, we can't stay up in the clouds all the time, we have to come down into the valley where shadows lie and where we sometimes reach the depths of despair. We can't run away from conflict all the time, most of the time it jumps right out in front of us and we have nowhere to run but to choose to fight or flight. Even in our families or should I say especially in our families as much as we love them, we can also be pushed to the depths of despair.

I remember talking with a colleague recently and we were talking about the high suicide rate particularly among young Pacific Island youth. A colleague in ministry's daughter attempted suicide a couple of years ago and she posted it all over Facebook and her brother commented, "I would much rather you talk to me than attend your funeral". It's really sad and unfortunate, but we must all know someone who has committed suicide. I have a guitar that I play with all the time, this belonged to a young girl and dear friend of mine named Katie, she committed suicide on the 26th April 2002, 20 years ago, she was 20 years old. I attended her funeral in Whakatane and did a eulogy for her. Before I left to come home her parents gifted me her guitar, because I taught her how to

sing and laugh and play in public. So this guitar is very, very precious to me. The sad thing is her father never got over her suicide and two years later he did the very same thing leaving behind a family who were still trying to come to grips with Katie's death and then they had to deal with his suicide on top of it all. All they were left feeling was anger at his selfishness knowing the struggle they were going through and then he went and did the very same thing. Like the brother said to his sister, I would rather you talk to me than me attend your funeral.

Most of you here are parents, how much time do you take to talk to your children and listen to their stories? Are we open enough to allow them to share in depth with us, or do we just touch the surface and say I'm too busy and then never get around to returning to that conversation? Suicide and thoughts of suicide is like the passion of Christ, crying out to God to let this cup of suffering be taken away from me.

The Passion of Christ is all around us in our communities and even in our families even though we may not like to admit it and sadly even though we fail to recognise it.

This passion week is not just a time to remember Jesus walk on the road to Golgotha, it is our time to stop and remember our own walk to Golgotha, past, present and future. Even me as a minister of the word and sacrament, I have had my own gethsemane's and even my own Golgotha's, don't be ashamed of it it's part of this reality that we call "life". At my 60th birthday celebrations last year I pointed to my "soul" table, around that table sat the people that pray with me, carry me when I'm no longer able to walk by myself, people who embrace me and cradle me when I'm struggling. We all need a soul table in

our lives. This church should be our soul table, this church should be the place that we come to when we are experiencing our Gethsemane's and Golgotha's, don't be afraid to share, come to me, come to someone here that you can trust, that is what our Christian walk and faith is all about. Being the presence of Christ, being his hands, feet, mouth, ears and eyes. We are to be the Christ that people can see and touch.

This Maundy Thursday we would normally be gathering together to share the Passover the Last Supper that Christ shared with his disciples before he was crucified, but due to Covid we will have to defer this to next year.

At this supper we would each to bring some roast lamb, unleaven bread, green salad, grape juice and even some grapes. We remember that night that Jesus was betrayed and we will also remember the night that the angel of death passed over the homes of the Israelites who's door posts were painted with the blood of the lamb and their children were saved. Those whose homes that were not painted with the blood of the lamb their children were slain by the angel of death.

In this day and age we often hear these stories and regard them as something that happened way back then to the Egyptian children and the Israelite families. Today, when people enter your homes do they feel that this is a place of peace, of solace a place where love, peace and hope dwell between the door posts?

Go home this week and over this passion week, remove all those obstacles that get in the way of making your home a place where you feel the peace of Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Your home is your castle and it should be a place where your children can't wait to come home to, where your

husband or your wife your partner or your spouse, can't wait to come home to.

Lent is a time of emptying that emptying is called kenosis, getting rid of all the rubbish inside of us and laying it all at the foot of the cross. What rubbish are we carrying around with us that we need to surrender and place at the foot of the cross this Friday? Bring it with you on Friday to church and together we will have an opportunity to write it down and quietly and confidentially place it at the foot of Cross. That will be our emptying time, no one needs to know what you write down it is between you and God. So come, come and let us stand in solidarity with one another helping to carry one another's burdens.

May God bless you all this passion week as you walk with Christ to the garden of gethsemane and then to Golgotha. We will gather on Good Friday and then again on Resurrection Sunday now go in the peace of Christ. Amen.