

R. Grant Mansfield

March 29, 2015

Church of the Holy Comforter

In the Shadow of the Cross

May the reflections of my heart and mind be pleasing to you oh Lord
and may the hearts and minds of this community be open to hearing
them. Amen.

“Hope is being able to see that there is light, despite all of the darkness.”

–Bishop Desmond Tutu

Today, we enter into a confusing, trying, and emotional moment in the Church year. We gathered this morning feeling the light of hope in our hearts, exalting the entrance and promise of change into our world, praising and singing, dancing and filled with life, only then to see it extinguished by the darkness that surrounds and dwells within us, with arms that are stretched out on a cross. Yes, today marks the beginning of an emotional and most holy week, a week where we come face to face

with our own limitations and weaknesses, where we admit that we are finite creatures of this world and cannot live life fully on our own, but only through the infinite will, love, compassion, forgiveness, and grace we find in God.

Our journey begins this morning with the entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem, where he is honored, praised, and lifted up by the community, being called “Hosanna” and “Blessed”, seen as next in the royal lineage of King David, come to set the world to order...though he enters as a peasant, riding on the back of a donkey no less. Up to this point in the story, Jesus has been followed by thousands of people who have witnessed the great compassion, love, forgiveness, grace, and call to justice that he has modeled and taught throughout his ministry.

Through his teachings and actions, the followers believed that God was doing something great in the world through him, bringing about a new era, one where their society, government, and religion raised up the trampled, the ill, the disinherited, and the outcast, rather than throwing them aside as had been the custom. We too believe in this new era; we also have witnessed, studied, and followed Jesus just as the first

followers did centuries ago. We too seek the light of hope that emanates from his life. We too see that God is working through his ministry. We too see that he offers change for our lives, our government, our society, and our faith.

Yet, though the followers, who rejoiced in his entrance into Jerusalem, believed in this hope, in the change that would come into the world from this man's ministry, that belief could not stop the inevitable fear, pride, and jealousy that resided in their hearts, that resided in their institutions. In the end, instead of living into that new hope, they turned away from it, and embraced the darkness. This inner battle brings to mind a Lady Gaga song that was put out a few years ago, "Judas", whose lyrics paint this turmoil perfectly. In her song she sings, "I wanna love you, but something's pulling me away from you, Jesus is my virtue and Judas is the demon I cling to, I cling to." So often, we fool ourselves into thinking that we are part of the virtuous few, fool ourselves into denying the existence of our own Judas, which dwells in our own hearts, that we engrain into our society, our government, our religious institutions. No matter who or where we are, we all have a Judas in our

hearts, a Judas that we cling to, though we wish to cling to the virtue of Jesus.

We see this played out in our Gospel today. Though the crowds began by loving Jesus and exalting his entrance into their lives, the Judas in their hearts was what they ultimately ran to. For some, the fear of the unknown and the change that would come with it made them fearful enough to turn away from God and run; for others, the jealousy that they felt towards Jesus and his popularity led them to seek his destruction. Then, there were those whose pride was hurt, who had initially taken up the call to serve the less fortunate and better the world, but had fallen prey to the power, wealth, and prestige that taunts us all at many points in our lives. Instead of asking for forgiveness and returning to their calling, they clung to their Judas for the sake of their station in life. This turning away from God, from the work God performed through Jesus, affected all who were gathered, even the most loyal of Jesus's disciples. We see two of his closest followers turning away to embrace the darkness of the world, Judas through jealousy and greed, Peter through fear and denial. The sad part about all of this is that, even after turning

away from Jesus and his message, the majority of those gathered at his trial still believed in his message and that hope could enter the world through it. Yet, instead of protecting, embracing, and fanning that hope, they fell prey to the world they knew, and crucified their hope upon a cross.

This turning away from God, from Christ, did not just occur centuries ago, but has continued every single day since then, and will continue to do so, at least until we all begin to leave our own Judas behind and embrace the life God is calling us all to live. We are just as responsible for the crucifixion as those who were physically present for it. Every time we deny and turn away from God; every time we choose power and hate over love and forgiveness; every time our government works for the powerful, rather than the weak; every time our government chooses war over peace; every time our society attacks and demonizes a group of people; every time our society subtly or blatantly perpetuates racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia, anti-semitism, islamophobia, and classism; every time our faith communities refuse to speak out against these injustices in the world; every time our faith

communities perpetuate these injustices; every time our government, society, faith communities, and we as individuals stand by idly and let these atrocities occur, we crucify Christ.

Fortunately for us, hope is stronger than darkness; God is limitless, where we are limited. Though we so often abandon the gift of hope God gives us, it is always there for us, waiting patiently for our return. We may not be able to undo the crucifixion, but God can. God takes the crucifixion that we cause every day and transforms it from a symbol of darkness into a beacon of hope. The cross was raised that day and it cast a shadow upon the world, a shadow that reaches out beyond the grave and beyond time, into our hearts and minds. We are given the gift to live into that shadow, to live into the beacon of hope that the crucifixion has become. Through God, all things are possible; through God, we can find the strength to leave behind our Judas, our darkness, and begin to walk in the shadow of the cross, which lights our way forward. “Hope is being able to see that there is light, despite all of the darkness.”

In the name of our Lord, our beacon of light in the darkness. Amen