

## **You Are the One Who comes in the Name of the Lord**

Reverend Tom Robinson

April 5, 2009

There are some words which we just do not use. They are too scary, too fraught with peril, too filled with danger. We don't use them because they come too close to the human condition; they remind us a little bit too much of our brokenness, our frailty, all of our limitations – including the limitations of years that we have.

I ran into one of those words not too long ago. It was at a meeting, and we were trying to work on a statement of purpose for this particular group. There was a phrase in it that said something about asking God to help us celebrate our vulnerability. That was just too much for one person. It's not that he was not a person filled with faith, far from it; it's just that he could not see anything positive about this word. For him – and I must say, for most of us – the word 'vulnerable' is something to avoid, to keep at a distance, a concept that is about the last thing we would want to celebrate. Rather, we want to think that we can figure our way out of any difficulty. We want to think we can work our way through any problem. That's great to a point. But sooner or later another reality becomes clear to us. And that is that vulnerability is a part of who we are, and to choose to avoid it is to avoid being human. It's a bit like adopting the life motto of Charlie Brown, who said in a Peanuts cartoon many years ago, "There is no problem, big or small, that I can't run away from."

The dictionary defines vulnerable as something or someone "that can be wounded or physically injured; open to criticism or attack." Nope, we don't want any of those. If we are realistic we may know that we cannot be invulnerable, but we certainly don't want to leave ourselves open to being wounded or hurt. We are, after all, people of our culture. And that culture is one that is geared around getting your needs met and avoiding at all costs being hurt in any way, shape or form.

So we come to this day and really enjoy the parade aspect of Palm Sunday. We enjoy seeing the kids sing and wave their palm branches, and sing with the crowds, "Hosanna! Praise be the name of the Lord! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord." We know what we're doing, and we know who we're singing about. It's about Jesus, the Messiah, the Lord of our lives. In he comes, riding in triumph as the crowds sing out praises.

Have you ever wondered what would have happened if the story ended here? If the Gospel accounts had just finished with Jesus riding into Jerusalem with the crowds cheering and waving their branches? Just another happy ending. But happy for whom? Probably not us. Because a Jesus riding in to a happy ending doesn't really solve all the problems we have.

We also know that the story doesn't end here. There is the Passover meal in the upper room on Thursday night, which then turns into the night of betrayal and denial. There is the Friday called Good, which is anything but as the One who comes in the name of the Lord is hung on a cross to die. Next week we get to celebrate all over again, but if you haven't gone through Thursday and Friday first, if you haven't eaten and drunk in remembrance while the forces of betrayal and denial are at work, if you have not heard the agony from the cross; then what happens next week may not make very much sense.

Not only that, but if you only see Jesus as a conquering king, it doesn't make sense, either. Kings come in on horses; Jesus comes on a colt, on a donkey. Kings come in with soldiers; Jesus comes in with his disciples. Kings come to conquer; Jesus comes to die. Kings come with the illusion of being

invulnerable; Jesus empties himself of everything and becomes vulnerable even to the point of death on a cross.

But we know that, don't we? These are things we say here in the church on this Sunday every year. We always talk about the fickleness of the crowd that cried out "Hosanna" one day and then "Crucify Him" just a few days later. We talk about the death on the cross. We talk about all of this. But does it ever hit us – I mean really hit us – that God took on human form and became vulnerable, just like I am vulnerable and you are vulnerable? And once we have asked that question, another one comes up: How does that affect us?

To even start to get at that we have to go deeper, back beyond the time of Jesus, back to the time of the prophet Isaiah. In that section, the prophet talks about the One sent from God, the One who is to be vulnerable. And why is this One vulnerable, why is this one fragile like us? The opening words say it all – "The Sovereign Lord has taught me what to say, so that I can strengthen the weary."

The Word of God is given so that the weary can be strengthened. The Word of God as lived in Jesus takes on the same vulnerable human state we take on in order to strengthen all of us who are weary. Jesus does this by entering into our human form and human life, and yes, our human death. Because of Jesus God knows about our pain, our suffering, our rejection. God knows this, and in that Holy Knowing, we are strengthened.

We are strengthened when we are weary because of job layoffs, when the economy goes from bad to worse, when good economic news can be just another cause for suspicion.

We are strengthened when we are weary because we have a job, and that job is to tell other people that they have lost their jobs, and we wonder if anyone knows the weariness we feel from taking away someone's hope.

We are strengthened when we are faced with an addiction, whether it be to substance abuse or porn on the internet or to power and control.

We are strengthened when we worry about our children, who face death in places like Iraq or Afghanistan, or those who face death closer to home in a myriad of ways.

We are strengthened when we look at our parents and see their health failing, their memory gone.

We are strengthened when we lose a loved one, when we feel a hole in our lives that we know no one else can fill.

We are strengthened when we are in an abusive relationship and feel that we are helpless to get out of it.

God has entered our vulnerable human condition through Jesus Christ, the One who comes riding on a donkey, the One who comes in the name of the Lord. Because God not only takes on this vulnerability but embraces it, we can too.

When we take on our vulnerable state, we come to this table and remember Christ's final meal with his disciples. We remember how he took bread and cup and gave them to those who followed him. No less than they do we receive these elements not just for physical sustenance, but for spiritual strengthening.

This is a week to remember Christ's suffering for us. But it is also a time to remember how God took on our vulnerable form and used it to connect with us so that we could be strengthened in our

weariness. As we eat, drink and remember – especially this week – may we celebrate our vulnerability in Christ, the One who comes in the name of the Lord. Amen.

Texts are Isaiah 50:4-9a; Mark 11:1-11; and Philippians 2:5-11  
©2009 ALPC