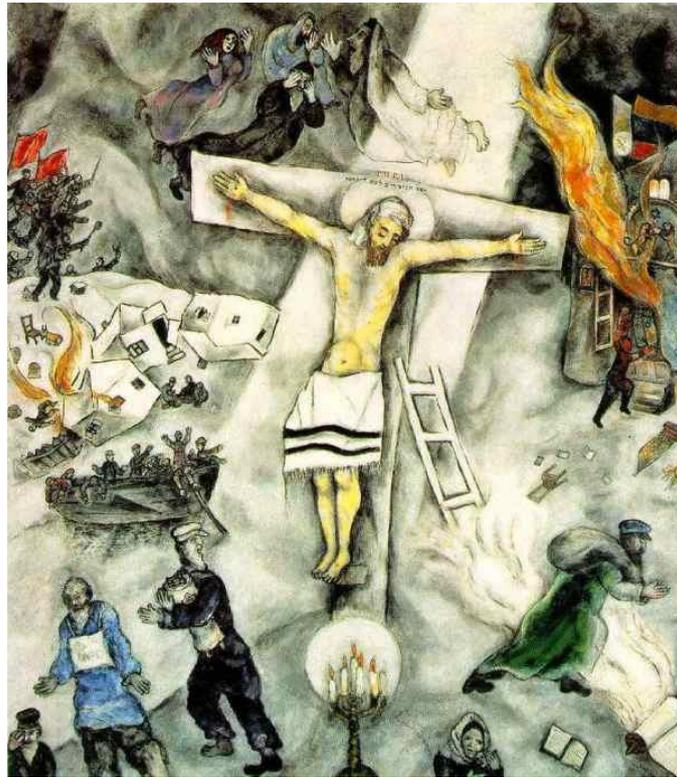




Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost Sunday, September 23rd, 2018

O Saving Victim! Bringing People down from their Crosses



We continue with the rhythm of readings centred in the Gospel of Mark which focus upon the cross: what we call the “*theology of the cross*”. What we need to keep in mind in the Gospel tradition is that the cross, is not a noun, but is in Christian thought, a verb, something that happens: the act of crucifixion. In short then, for Mark, God is *not* the one who we habitually think he is: the victor, the powerful one – but rather is in fact the victim. Connected to this really uncomfortable reading of God, is the equally uncomfortable view of reality: namely that the “Victim Messiah” through his crucifixion, unmasks, reveals to us, that the world is characterized by powers that victimize. God’s own crucifixion demonstrates this beyond the shadow of a doubt: a crucifixion that continues in the bodies of many millions of people, today. This is the point of Marc Chagall’s “White Crucifixion” – that we saw last Sunday as well. The crucifixion of Jesus continues in the ongoing crucifixion of human beings: in Chagall’s case the holocaust or Shoah.

GATHERING

Announcements

Welcome

In the name of God,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit

The Lord be with you

And with you

Hymn: Immortal, Invisible, (TiS 143, St Denio, WC Smith)

Introduction to the Theme

The theme this week follows on from that of last Sunday. Last week, we heard of Jesus challenging Peter's horror at what lay ahead: likely crucifixion, resulting from Jesus' challenging of the powers: those religious and those political. Today, we continue with this theme of the cross, where Mark presents the story of Jesus embracing the children, the vulnerable, the excluded. This is not about sentimentality, although that is how we tend to read it. It is to the contrary, about Jesus' very muscular requirement that his followers embrace the *little* victims that societies produce. It is about, seeing things differently, thinking about things differently and ultimately, living differently – bringing people down from their crosses.

Community Prayers

Today we hear ideas from Jesus that run absolutely contrary to our habitual and established way of seeing, thinking and living. Jesus proposition is this: that power exists in order to give life, power exists to genuinely serve others, especially the vulnerable. This proposal lies at the heart of Jesus' thought and action: without it, Christianity is just sheer pretence. What is required to actually absorb this new ethos, is the faith and courage to risk seeing God and reality differently, to ultimately think differently to the norm: to be a dissident. To register the point this morning, I use a story 'The Black Book of Colours', that is written for children and adults who are blind, but who experience differently...through sensation. There are different ways of seeing which lead to deep understanding, deeper than usual. This prayer is about alternative seeing, thinking and living.

Thomas says that yellow tastes like mustard,
but is as soft as a baby chick's feathers.

Red is sour like unripe strawberries and as sweet as watermelon.
It hurts when he finds it on his scraped knee.

Brown crunches under his feet, like autumn leaves.
 Sometimes it smells like chocolate, and other times it stinks.
 Thomas says that blue is the colour of the sky
 when kites are flying and the sun is beating on his head.
 But when clouds decide to gather up and the rain pours down, then
 the sky is white.

And when the sun peeks through the falling water,
 all the colours come out, and that's a rainbow.

Thomas thinks that without the sun, water doesn't amount to much.
 It has no colour, no taste, no smell.

He says that green tastes like lemon ice cream
 and smells like grass that's just been cut.

But black is the king of all the colours.
 It is as soft as silk,
 when his mother hugs him and her hair falls in his face.

***Thomas likes all the colours,
 because he can hear them, smell them, touch them, and taste
 them.***

Our Confession and Reconciliation

Let us be still and listen to the voice of God

Silence

O God,
 enable us to see that there are alternative ways of seeing.

***O God,
 enable us to think that there are alternative ways of thinking.***

O God,
 enable us to live alternatively – to internalize the cross,
 so that we may help bring others down from their crosses.

O God, forgive us!

***Help us to see be moved by your self-giving, your self-yielding
 Amen***

The Peace

Peace be with you;
and also with you

The young people leave for SMG

LET'S HEAR THE WORD

Some Anecdotal Thoughts about the Cross and Crucifixion: God's and Ours

The cross is not a noun. The cross is about crucifixion. The cross is about what people do to each other. It is about death actively or passively imposed. It means that there are victims and there are hangmen. It means that there exists today, as much as yesterday, a grave sin committed by individuals and of society.

Jon Sobrino, "The Crucified People – Suffering Servant of God"

In Christianity, neither morality nor religion come into contact with reality at any point.

Friedrich Nietzsche

The principle of compassion for Christians, involves bringing whole peoples in our world, down from the cross.

Ignacio Ellacuría

The test of morality of a society is what it does for its children

Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906-1945

Readings

James 3:13-4:2a, 6, (Good News Translation) Heather Lakiss

The wisdom of James challenges hearers not to embrace a polarising and fractious stance towards people. Many people who most want to be known as wise are anything but peaceable. History abounds with people who think they are right and are prepared to die or kill for their truth. Notice that the author is not just giving a moral lesson about fractiousness and division, but addressing it at its roots. The image of fruit, used already in 3:12, reappears in 3:17 and in the image of sowing in 3:18. Wisdom comes from above (3:17). It is an echo of that Jewish tradition, first attested in Proverbs 8,

that wisdom is like God's companion and makes visits to earth seeking people in whom to dwell. As such this wisdom is sometimes identified also as God's word and as God's Spirit.

¹³ Are there any of you who are wise and understanding? You are to prove it by your good life, by your good deeds performed with humility and wisdom. ¹⁴ But if in your heart you are jealous, bitter, and selfish, don't sin against the truth by boasting of your wisdom. ¹⁵ Such wisdom does not come down from heaven; it belongs to the world, it is unspiritual and demonic. ¹⁶ Where there is jealousy and selfishness, there is also disorder and every kind of evil. ¹⁷ But the wisdom from above is pure first of all; it is also peaceful, gentle, and friendly; it is full of compassion and produces a harvest of good deeds; it is free from prejudice and hypocrisy. ¹⁸ And goodness is the harvest that is produced from the seeds the peace-makers plant in peace.

4 Where do all the fights and quarrels among you come from? They come from your desires for pleasure, which are constantly fighting within you. ² You want things, but you cannot have them, so you are ready to kill; you strongly desire things, but you cannot get them, so you quarrel and fight. ⁵ Don't think that there is no truth in the scripture that says, "The spirit that God placed in us is filled with fierce desires."^[a] ⁶ But the grace that God gives is even stronger. As the scripture says, "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

Mark 9:30-37 (Good News Translation)

George Katsoolis

Jesus is on the way. Last week we met him at Caesarea Philippi, far to the north. Now he is passing through Galilee – on the way to Jerusalem. The secrecy is probably about not wanting to be waylaid. In 9:31 Mark has Jesus repeat the prediction of what would await him there: a path to suffering and death and then to resurrection. When 9:32 mentions the disciples' lack of understanding, we are reminded of Peter's confrontation with Jesus from last week (8:31-33). This passage is about leadership: 'If anyone wants to be first, let them be last of all and servant/slave of all.' The message will be repeated in 10:41-45, where Jesus contrasts this with leadership styles of the day where people love to flaunt their power and authority. The message is directly subversive of the norms of his day and the norms of ours. When Jesus says the greatest is to be the slave (9:35; 10:43,44), that is a shocking contrast. The use of the Greek word '*diakonos*' as well as '*doulos*', both words for slaves, helps us to see that the focus is not only the status, 'slave', but also the function, 'serving'. Greatness is being a loving and serving person: something we nod yes to but seldom actually do.

³⁰ Jesus and his disciples left that place and went on through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where he was, ³¹ because he was teaching his disciples: “The Son of Man will be handed over to those who will kill him. Three days later, however, he will rise to life.”

³² But they did not understand what this teaching meant, and they were afraid to ask him.

³³ They came to Capernaum, and after going indoors Jesus asked his disciples, “What were you arguing about on the road?”

³⁴ But they would not answer him, because on the road they had been arguing among themselves about who was the greatest. ³⁵ Jesus sat down, called the twelve disciples, and said to them, “Whoever wants to be first must place himself last of all and be the servant of all.” ³⁶ Then he took a child and had him stand in front of them. He put his arms around him and said to them, ³⁷ “Whoever welcomes in my name one of these children, welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me, welcomes not only me but also the one who sent me.”

The Gospel of the Lord

Praise to you Lord Christ

Hymn: Brother, sister, let me serve you (TiS 650, Servant Song, Richard Gillard)

Some Thoughts

Let's Give

Doxology

***Praise God, from whom all blessings flow,
praise him, all creatures here below,
praise him above, ye heavenly host,
praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.***

Prayer of Dedication

Prayers of the People

Lawrence Peak

The one who prays ends each petition with the words, “***help us to live the kingdom,*** and the congregational response, “***to bring people down from their crosses***”.

Lord's Prayer

Let us say the Lord's Prayer

***Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.***

***Forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.***

***For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen.***

하늘에 계신 우리 아버지여
이름이 거룩히 여김을 받으시오며
나라이 임하옵시며
뜻이 하늘에서 이룬 것 같이
땅에서도 이루어지이다.
오늘날 우리에게 일용할 양식을 주옵시고
우리가 우리에게
죄 지은 자를 사하여 준 것 같이
우리 죄를 사하여 주옵시고
우리를 시험에 들게 하지 마옵시고
다만 악에서 구하옵소서
대개 나라와 권세와 영광이
아버지께 영원히 있사옵나이다. 아멘

Closing Hymn: Fairest Lord Jesus (TiS 203, St Elizabeth, Anon)

Blessing and Sending Out

Christ is life!

Let us live
Walking with the Christ
Bringing people down from their crosses.

Our service has ended

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord

In the name of Christ

Going Out: Shalom to you now (TiS 778, Somos del Señor, Elise Shoemaker Eslinger)

Musical Postlude

Organist:

Tony Ireland