

APRIL 7

Today's reading for Tuesday of Holy Week is from chapter 12:20-36 of John's gospel. (By the way, you can get the readings for the day by going to www.Episcopalchurch.org, clicking on the right upper side where it says "resources", then clicking on "liturgical calendar" and scrolling down to Holy Week).

John the evangelist presents a scene in which Jesus moves through several strong emotions. When he meets the people who were eager to see him, the mood of moment is surely upbeat at first, but then comes the solemn teaching. We are given the powerful image of a seed dying in order to fulfill its purpose to bring forth new life. That sounds wonderful and hopeful to us—but, as we get to observe—the seed's enthusiasm for that undertaking is under control at least for the moment. Jesus says his soul is troubled—he's struggling with what he knows and what he wants and what he fears. He is in no hurry to die, especially since he knows what horror awaits him.

We mustn't forget ever that Jesus was a healthy, normal, male of his day with the typical appreciation for life we humans have. He was in his prime, apparently hale and hearty. Becoming ever more clear that his ministry would take him to a final conflict in Jerusalem was not easy knowledge to hold.

Remember, too, people said he was a drunk and a wastrel, hanging out with the wrong people, being flippant about religious practices, and not exhibiting the proper respect for authority. What people in those 19th century costume dramas many of us love to watch on film and tv would have called a "fribble", if not worse. To go to Jerusalem with that reputation does not even provide the material for staging "a noble sacrifice" scene for a sympathetic audience.

Jesus loved his life, and was prepared to lose it in obedience to his Father, and not in a nice way with an appreciative audience. Perhaps this makes his strange and disturbing teaching, "The one who loves his life will lose it", a more poignant declaration than a simple rhetorical device to convey an abstract teaching about obedience as a virtue—it's more, it's a way of life.

Making things even more difficult is the back and forth with the audience around Jesus that closes our reading for today. They don't see or understand—or show any interest in understanding—what Jesus is talking about. Before he goes into seclusion at the end of this scene—the only time we're told Jesus actually hides!— Jesus tells the crowd to walk in the light while they may so they can become children of light. Does that sound like a word to us as well?

We know there will be dark, troubled times—we're in one right now! So, what does the teaching and example of Jesus set before us in these times? Three things come to mind for me:

1) Fear not. God is in the midst of us still and we are called by Jesus' name. We have not lost our identity

2) Now our practice of our faith is being tested, and that practice involves finding ways to love God and our neighbors that go beyond the usual

3) The future will be shaped in part by how we do the first two things. Being firm in our faith can give us the confidence to look squarely at some hard facts: "who shot John" arguments aside, our public health system is inadequate in general and disproportionately inadequate toward people of color, all people without "Cadillac" insurance coverage, and people not possessing work, resources, family to ride out this epidemic tidal wave. Public policy not guided by science and burdened with partisan positioning is just clearly bad for us.

To look ahead just a little to the day after the death of Jesus, Holy Saturday, I want to invite you to think about what happened then among the followers of Jesus. They regrouped. They came together. They were not sure exactly what was next, but they were determined to face it together. In these troubled days, we can do worse than promise ourselves and each other that we will stick together (at a distance for now) and pledge ourselves to be faithful in following the Lord.