

## **What a Difference a Year Makes**

**March 28, 2010**

**John 19:28 – 40**

**Our scripture reading today comes from the 19<sup>th</sup> Chapter of John verses 28 – 40. Listen now for the reading of God's Word for the people of God.**

<sup>28</sup>After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. <sup>29</sup>As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, <sup>30</sup>"Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. <sup>31</sup>If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' tell him, 'The Lord needs it.' "

<sup>32</sup>Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them. <sup>33</sup>As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?"

<sup>34</sup>They replied, "The Lord needs it."

<sup>35</sup>They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. <sup>36</sup>As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road.

<sup>37</sup>When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen:

<sup>38</sup>"Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!"

"Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"

<sup>39</sup>Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!"

<sup>40</sup>"I tell you," he replied, "if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out."

**This is the Word of God and It can be trusted. Thanks be to God.**

*Let us pray:*

*It is right to praise you, Almighty God, for the acts of love by which you have redeemed us through your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. On this day Jesus entered the holy city of Jerusalem in triumph, and was proclaimed as King of kings by those who spread their garments and branches of palm along his way. Help us remember the palm branches as signs of his victory, to hail him as our king, and to follow him in the way that leads to eternal life. Amen!*

What a difference a year makes. Fifty-two weeks ago today, on Palm Sunday of last year, we met together for the first time as a community of faith. Some of us were finding ourselves at the end of a long healing process, having found ourselves set aside – once again – by those we had trusted the most, while others of us were just beginning the journey to healing and awareness. How fitting that today we find ourselves at the end of the Lenten journey, where we have taken the time to self reflect on our lives, our callings and most importantly our relationships, not only with those who have remained close to us, but also our relationship with our God.

We met together in the main portion of this house, seating enough for about twenty and there were fifteen present at that first service. Our music was played on a CD player, communion was served from the lectern and I'm not sure that any of us were really aware of what God had called us to and the extent of growth that lay out before us. Of the fifteen attending that first service, only about half of those were in attendance were to remain a permanent part of our community of faith and the other half was made up of visitors from our sister church in Greer, SC. While we were desperately seeking to be a part of the International Christian Community Churches, our sister church was desperately seeking to find a way out of the denomination. We were eventually accepted . . . they eventually withdrew. And so, again we found ourselves in a time of well needed healing, but unlike before, the process was much more amicable and God has blessed us in our journey.

So our journey has unfolded with its ups and downs, literally. We have torn down walls of this church house, torn down walls that have kept us from fully carrying out God's Will and Way for our lives and we have build up new relationships with a hope of a new day with new beginnings, the most recent of which you are each sitting in today. A lot of hard work

accompanied by hours of prayer, a little bit of money and the faith to move mountains we have turned a community of faith of four members into a place of exile and acceptance for those who have been marginalized and disenfranchised by main stream society. Today we will accept our 24<sup>th</sup> member into this community of faith and in about three weeks we will elect two new members to our board of directors.

I remember sharing my vision for this community of faith with a Pastor friend of mine about six months before God made that vision a reality for us. In speaking with her, I shared that I felt God was calling us to plant a church in Toccoa, Georgia but that I was a little unsure what that would mean for me being that I taught school in this county. She told me it would not be easy, that it would certainly put me out there and cautioned me about my decision. Isn't wonderful to look back today and know that God's plan is not always our plan and that God's plan is without failure. And so I want to take this opportunity today to remind each of you that if you put your trust continue to place your trust in God, follow the path that is laid out before you and seek God in all that you do – making God's desires for your life your own – you cannot fail. It may not be what you wanted out of life, it may not be where you thought you would be or you may not have with you the people you thought would always be there, but again I tell you that in keeping with God's plan; you cannot fail.

And so that brings us to our lectionary reading today. We have walked along side Jesus during his three year ministry abbreviated into seven Sunday services. We began with the affirmation of Christ ministry at the River Jordan as God announced with pleasure and pride, "This is my son, in whom I am well pleased." Almost simultaneously we see the Holy Spirit descending on Jesus like a dove and immediately he is lead into the desert for forty days of fasting and prayer – a time of preparation, if you will, for the ministry on which Jesus was about

to embark. We know that during this time, as we also encounter in our daily lives, that Satan came to Jesus, just as the evil one comes to us and tempted Christ with fame, glory and material possession. This lesson taught us that the Holy Spirit and the Word of God are two very powerful tools that we are afforded in battling against the temptations in our own lives. Satan left Christ, but not without us becoming aware that the absence of the evil one would be only temporary, as Satan would await a more opportune time to return. The same is so true for each of our lives – Satan isn't always present, but we are to remember that the evil one is forever awaiting a more opportune time to deliver temptation and so we must be ready when Satan decides to return.

As mentioned previously, the remainder of our Lenten journey has awarded us an opportunity to walk along Christ as he makes his way to the Holy City of Jerusalem. As Christ journey's toward the place of his eventual death, we journey alongside him and reflect inwardly on our own mortal lives; our own ministries, relationships and call. We have learned along the journey that the religious leaders of Jesus day, as well as Herod the king, are not happy with the radically inclusive message of love that Jesus is offering God's people and so they are constantly looking to discredit him and eventually even begin to plot to kill him. Despite their efforts, their plans and their scheming, again we see that God's plan is without failure. Jesus has been sent to carry out a mission for God and that mission will be carried out; all the way to the cross of Calvary. It may not be the plan that Jesus had for himself, it may not unfold exactly as he had perceived it or desired it to be and he certainly will find himself rejected by some of his closest friends – Judas will sell him out for thirty pieces of silver and Peter will deny his very relationship with him. But, alas, God's plan will be carried out – God's plan will not fail.

<sup>29</sup>As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, <sup>30</sup>"Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. <sup>31</sup>If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' tell him, 'The Lord needs it.'" [And so] <sup>32</sup>Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them. (John 19:29 – 32) The lesson for us here today is so simple and so applicable for each of our lives today; when God speaks to us, through whatever means or medium that God chooses to use, we are to respond faithfully. The disciples had spent so much of the past three years with Christ questioning his teachings and arguing about who is the greatest amongst them, but that day as they approached Bethphage and Bethany, there were no questions, no discussion and from what we read there was no hesitation; just a faithfulness to go forth believing that what had been spoken to them was truth. Could it be that their time with Christ had finally begun to pay off? Could it be that his teachings were finally beginning to sink in? Who's to say? It doesn't seem to be an integral part of the author's intent in including this story in his writings but I challenge each of you today to find comfort in their response. <sup>32</sup>"Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them."

The four of us who were discerning God's call to bring New Day to Toccoa, Georgia spoke with Pastor Cindy Shepherd during Convocation in November of 2009. Bud, David and Chris were so gung-ho about beginning the church, but I was not without my hesitation. God spoke to me that evening through Pastor Cindy. The Word that was given to us, in particular me, was simply this, "You can have your plans but get ready; when God decides that it's time then you must go." And so, our disciples, those who were sent in our lectionary reading today have found themselves prayed up and prepared to carry out the will of God relayed to them through their teacher, God's only Son, Jesus Christ.

Are you listening today for what God is saying to you? Are you prayed up? What has this Lenten Season taught you about God's Will and Way for each of your lives? New Day will be formally celebrating our one year anniversary next Sunday. There is still plenty to do. A fundraising event and show to script, Saturday activities to plan and prepare and our Anniversary Sunday service to finalize. Food will need to be prepared, final invitations need to be delivered and an ever increasing list of details to attend to. But it's time to set all of that aside this morning and to look to the deep within ourselves and to seek to acknowledge and accept the call of reconciliation, awareness and relationship given to each of us by God our Creator, Jesus Christ our Redeemer and the Holy Spirit our sustainer. During our sermon hymn today, set aside the responsibilities of this world and look to the one who is the creator and master of all. What is God speaking to you today? What have learned during this Lenten journey? You are welcome to come to this altar this morning for a time of prayer or you my communion with God where you are today. God wants so much to be in relationship with each of you today. If you have not accepted this relationship for your life, then please do not leave today without doing so. If you have found reconciliation and relationship with God, then seek the plan he has for you today. God *will* meet you where you are.

May God continue to bless us in the hearing and the living out of his Will and Way for our lives. In Jesus' name. Amen.