

Palisades Presbyterian Church
Easter Sunday
April 16, 2006

Reflection: "The palaeoclimte record shouts out to us that, far from being self-stabilizing, the Earth's climatic system is an ornery beast which overreacts even to small nudges."
- Wallace Broecker, Cooling the Tropics.

Readings: Isaiah 50: 4 – 9a
 Mark 11: 1 - 11

Hymns: #589 Hosanna, Lord Hosanna
 #306 Fairest Lord Jesus
 # 88 Al Glory, Laud and Honor

Beyond the Dust
© 2006 Ray Bagnuolo

This is not an easy time of the year for me.
Don't get me wrong. Spring is beautiful. The warming weather, lengthening days, vacation from school – all those things and more and great. And memories, well lots of good ones for this time of calendar: the anticipation of big Easter dinners, family gatherings, Easter egg hunts, chocolate bunnies, chocolate bunnies, and did I mention chocolate bunnies?

However, this Holy Week, standing here remembering the waving of palms – well, you can't fool me – this is the week that Jesus sets his face on Jerusalem and walks right into town, probably with a fairly good idea that he is about to become a casualty of the interaction with the Romans and his own community.

I still wonder what that must have been like. Can you imagine?

I don't believe that Jesus knew he was going to be tortured, crucified, die, and be resurrected as is described by some of the gospel writers. I think Jesus had a fairly good idea that he was heading straight into the jaws of a potential violence that just might take his life. He knew the Romans and their ways. Jesus was a very smart man.

And, I don't believe he wanted to die any more than you or I want to die for our faith. I have never seen him as a zealot.

But he did die; for who he was and for what he believed in. And it wasn't easy. The Garden of Gethsemane; the calling out to God while on the cross, "Why have you forsaken me?"

These are very human things to feel and say in the moments of extreme duress, doubt, and pain. Yet, it is Jesus' willingness to remain steadfast, to stand clearly in defiance of the "easier softer way" of submission, recantation, and retreat – not as someone who knew how it would all end – but as someone who just knew what he had to do and did it – it is this very extraordinary courage of that gives me great hope. It establishes the connection between him and me in a way that could never be established were he simply divine, protected from doubt, pain, fear – yet motivated forward by love, hope, faith.

You many have noticed the reflection in this morning's bulletin. It's by Wallace Broecker from his book, called *Cooling the Tropics*. I haven't read the book, rather it is referred to in another book I've just begun called *The Weather Makers* by Tim Flannery. It reads like this:

"The palaeoclimte record shouts out to us that, far from being self-stabilizing, the Earth's climatic system is an ornery beast which overreacts even to small nudges."

I had to look this up, but in case you are wondering – plaeolithic is the earliest of the three periods of time referring to the Stone Age, the other two being the Mesolithic and Neolithic, it was a time based on discoveries that must have been very unsettling in the geological regurgitation of the planet as it sifted and sorted itself to how we know it today, continuing to sift and sort on its way to what it will be tomorrow.

Like the ornery beast of that period, the Romans responded no better to the small nudges of Jesus and the Jews. To the earth a shift in the landscape. To humans the tragedy of an earthquake. To the Romans an execution of a felon, to us the beginning of 2000 years of an emerging faith and all of history, in one way or another.

Did Jesus know that's what he was doing as the acclaim of the crowds laid down palms before him, "Hosanna! Hosanna! Hosanna!"

Did Jesus know in his head or his heart that in a few short days, the chants would change to "Crucify him! Crucify him! Crucify him!"

Another reason I don't like this time of the year is that I am forced to stop and think about how well I am doing in moving toward the end of my own human

journey in any number of ways. How willing am I to “march into hell, for a heavenly cause,” to quote a line from *The Man of LaMancha*. Do you remember the rest of the words?

And the world, will be better for this
That one man, scorned and covered with scars
Still strove with his last ounce of courage
To reach the unreachable star...

I wanted to be Don Quixote in high school...

And, I really don't like this time for another reason. I am forced to ask myself what it is that is holding me back, sometimes. What is it that can still make pain and death something I wish to avoid at an instinctive level? If I believe, and I do, that there is more beyond the dust, something wonderful and shining, filled with life as we have never known it in our conscious minds, then what's the big deal. Bring it on!

And then comes the cognitive dissonance... yeah, fine, but to get there...! What kind of a God puts us through all this to bring us back home, so to speak. I mean, C'mon, God – crucifying Jesus? Atonement through such a violent and vile act upon your Son.

Too many ornery beasts, if you ask me - beasts that stirred up things in the Stone Age, the Old Testament, Jesus' death, the Crusades, wars past and present, crushing and falling towers, collapse of mosques and their domes, more, more, more.... The dust never seems to settle, the beast of illness, violence, some call evil – seems never fed.

And yet the teachings we follow tell us that you rise above it all, Jesus – “resurrected.”

Resurrected? I was not there that Palm Sunday, last supper, or Calvary. I don't know how the stone was rolled aside, whether you were resurrected in body, as well as spirit, or whether other events were afoot.

I do know though. I know is that I have walked with you on the road to Emmaus in a different time, this time, not knowing it was you until you had moved on. It has happened on subways, on Midnight Runs, in the quiet of a hospital room, the stillness of this sanctuary. It has happened enough, assuring me that you are risen indeed. Resuscito!

My questions or the terrible angst I feel for what we remember in the days ahead, recall through history, or know in our own lifetime remain heavy, gravitas – as it should be. And, I still don't understand the beast or the dust, but also in another inexplicable way I am calmed and strengthened by your presence that I do know.

A resurrection and incarnation manifested in others, such as those gathered here today or the earth breathing a determined spring.

I know you and know that you know me, Jesus, Spirit, God -- and that seems to be enough (although I have a feeling you have a little better handle on me than I have on you!).

More than that, I love you for the others you put in my life, all of the others – sisters and brothers all. And I love you for the life you put in me and presence of Jesus in it all. Risen from the dust of a Palestine long ago.

I guess it's really not about answers, just love and courage. Just!

It's also probably not even so much about where we are going – just staying the course, once we find it – or once we let you find us and do the new thing you have in mind.

And maybe it's not so much about objections with this world and its ways, but about finding you in it and letting you use us as the agents of your love – no matter what the conditions.

And, maybe too much of my time has been spent in seeking answers and not enough in just being present, sitting with those gathered here and others, breathing the spring, the warming weather, lengthening days, and the resurrected Jesus in it all.

Maybe it's just about remembering the important stuff – like being her with you.

I really don't like this time of the year, but, come to think of it, maybe I really do need it – dust and all.