

SERMON - Words and a Wisdom Luke 21:5-19

I have many fond memories of the past. I remember at sacred family dinners when we would prepare for dinner My job would be to set the table.

I remember how my mother taught me on which side the silverware goes and how the place settings gets properly laid out. I'm thinking about how getting a table ready can even be a sacred heart-setting, preparing our lives for the Christ to enter and be our welcomed guest.

(PAUSE)In Lee Daniels' *The Butler*, the story is told about a White House butler who served eight American presidents over three decades, and there is a very different table-setting scene. The scene shows the differences two different tables being set in the 1960's. The first is a dignified state dinner at the White House with African-American butlers serving the white DC elite and world leaders. The other table, a soda fountain counter like those all around the nation, where black college students endure the horror of being spit upon, bullied, physical abuse and unimaginable taunting.

There's a compelling connection between these two tables-- one of privilege and one of pain. There's a convicting cry that emanates from both spaces of presumptuous civility and civil rights. At both tables, there's a need for Christ to enter and be a welcomed guest.

In the Gospel reading for today, Jesus is in Jerusalem in the looming days before his crucifixion. The Palm Sunday parade has already happened, and already the shouts of Hosanna have curdled to questions and threats and challenges to his authority. The banquet table has yet to be set for the Passover feast. It is clear in the temple that Jesus is not a welcomed guest.

After calling attention to another unlikely guest of the temple, a poor widow who gives all she has out of her poverty, Jesus starts to speak about the end of the age and the challenges to faithfulness and discipleship.

Now I have to admit, I always struggle with these words, and the end-times images of the Gospels. And yet, Jesus' words today sound as though he has been reading the same newspapers and hearing the same news that we are these days: civil wars, nation rising against nation, kingdoms against kingdoms, famines and plagues as a result of the earth's changes, power and poverty, privilege and pain, even persecution for the faithful.

But then a curious thing happens. Rather than Jesus telling us to dwell on these realities or to cower in fear and run from these realities, and certainly as he dismisses our attempts at predicting these realities, he assures his listeners and disciples this way, "For I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict. You will be hated by all because of my name. But not a hair on your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your souls" (Luke 21:15-19).

It's like he's assuring us and strengthening us by saying, "I've set my table right in the midst of all of this. It's in these places of fear and loss and confusion and pain that I set my table and am a guest among you."

In power and poverty and privilege and in pain, even as we endure persecution and the pain and complexity of our modern world, these are the places where Jesus sets his table, where he grants us the words and wisdom of a Kingdom vision, that welcomes our neighbors and even our enemies--where Jesus comes to be our welcomed guest.

I could never really imagine the confusion of those days of Jesus in Jerusalem, on his way to the cross nor the thickness of the images of the end times that he's teaching.

And yet, as I observed the broken body of Christ shared at each of those oblong tables, I remembered that Jesus has set his table here as well. He promises the words and wisdom he has given us of a day of healing and restoration that rises us out of all brokenness and pain we can ever imagine.

May he indeed be our welcomed guest. Amen.