

Mount Hollywood United Church of Christ – Los Angeles

Fifth Sunday in Lent – March 18, 2018

Rev. Anne G. Cohen, Minister

John 12:20-33

FOR REFLECTION

**“The ego lusts for satisfaction. It has a prideful ferocious appetite for its version of “truth”.
It is the most challenging aspect to conquer; the cause for most spiritual turmoil.”**

~ T.F. Hodge, From Within I Rise: Spiritual Triumph Over Death
and Conscious Encounters with “The Divine Presence”

**“Sometimes to change a situation you are in requires you to take a giant leap.
But, you won't be able to fly unless you are willing to transform.”**

~ Suzy Kassem, Rise Up and Salute the Sun: The Writings of Suzy Kassem

Life in Turmoil

Our text this morning is out of order, thanks to the Common Lectionary. We in 2018 haven't had Palm Sunday yet – but this text from John comes to us right after Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on a donkey. The city is full of Roman soldiers, in place to keep a “Pax Romana” during the Passover season when thousands of outsiders come to Jerusalem for the holy rituals.

Some of the outsiders are Greeks – John's hint that the next part of the Jesus Movement is aimed at Gentiles. And they want to see Jesus. Jesus meets them and his disciples with a very Johannian speech – presaging his death and subsequent resurrection and ascension – promising to take everyone with him.

But there is a very human verse smack in the middle of this speech. The New Revised Standard Version of verse 27 reads like this:

27 "Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say--' Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour...

The Scholars' Version (Jesus Seminar) reads like this:

27 "Now my **life is in turmoil**. And what should I say--' Father, **rescue** me from this **moment**? No, it is for this **moment** that I have come..."

What a difference a translation makes. There is a huge difference, in my mind, between “my soul is troubled” and “my life is in turmoil.” They may occur

simultaneously – but they are two different things – one internal, one external – each with an effect on the other.

A “life in turmoil” is a very human thing. Being ambivalent about that turmoil is also a very human thing. And choosing to continue on the path of turbulence because it is more meaningful than seeking a path of calm – is also a very human thing.

Eleven years ago, John and I were pursuing adoption. We were in our late 40’s and early 50’s. We had meaningful lives and enjoyed the rhythms of work and travel and home life that we had established. We were very aware that adopting a child would change all of this – causing much turmoil and interruption of pleasant rhythms. We also knew that we had wanted to be parents all of our lives – that part of our purpose in living was to raise a child – so we continued on the path to adoption. Even now I sometimes wish G-d would rescue me from our choices. But neither of us would trade Peter for a more sedate existence. Our lives are in turmoil and we are grateful to G-d and the universe for the reason.

I’m guessing that some of our public figures and heroes have felt very similar things. The turmoil in MLK’s life and family was extreme – yet he was called to do the hard work of Civil Rights advocacy in dangerous times. Any number of politicians have been called to public service – to face death threats for their stances on public policy – but they have run for office and served anyway.

So, I’ll turn this reflection over to you:

What are some times in your life that you have chosen turmoil over peace?

What are some things you have done that you felt called to do – even though it brought some suffering into your life?

And did G-d have anything to do with your choices?

John 12:20-33

20 Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. 21 They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." 22 Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus.

23 Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 24 Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. 25 Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26 Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

27 "Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say--' Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. 28 Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again."

29 The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." 30 Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. 31 Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. 32 And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." 33 He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

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23 Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the ~~Son of Man~~ [Human One] to be glorified. 24 Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. 25 Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26 Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

27 "Now my ~~soul is troubled~~ [life is in turmoil]. And what should I say--' Father, ~~save~~ [rescue] me from this ~~hour~~ [moment]? No, it is for this ~~reason~~ [moment] that I have come to this hour. 28 Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again."

29 The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, "An ~~angel~~ [heavenly messenger] has spoken to him." 30 Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. 31 Now is ~~the judgment of~~ [sentence is passed on] this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. 32 And I, when I am ~~lifted up~~ [elevated] from the earth, ~~will draw all people to myself~~ [I'll take everyone with me]."

(33 He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.)