

CRIBB<S>NOTE – March 16, 2008

We can only imagine the scene on the streets of Jerusalem the last time Jesus rode a donkey into town. What was going through his mind when people shouted, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven?”

No doubt Jesus experienced the disturbing mixture of exuberance and depression. Two opposite emotions rushed through his soul as he witnessed a public display of exhilaration among people awaiting his arrival. While they lay down their coats on the ground as he rode along, Jesus also observed a city in turmoil. Injustice, greed, and violence filled nearly every corner. He came into town as the famous prophet from Galilee, but his popularity waned in near short order because he was undeterred in his commitment to exercise the preferential option for the poor.

The words of that old Negro Spiritual, “Ride On, King Jesus,” are very appropriate as we enter this Holy Week. “Ride on King Jesus, no (man) can a hinder me... In that great getting’ up morning, fare ye well, fare ye well.”

There is a promise of a better time despite the conditions of cruelty that cover almost every episode of life. The pains of suffering from an insensitive and evil system will not delay the rush of God’s goodness and mercy. There is a peace beyond our understanding that sustains those whose cries have been heard and felt by God.

So, Jesus took that ride into town a week before his life ended by being lynched from a tree.

Holy Week reminds us of the wrongs taking place in the world. Wars, crime, domestic violence, greed, broken promises, false prophecies, disobedience, and mean acts against humanity. Jesus entered the world with a purpose to address the living realities of those who were burdened under the oppression of empire. He came to call us back into Covenant with God and right relationship with other people. He was not hindered. He did not give up. It cost him his life.

Yet, there was that ‘great getting’ up morning’ on which Jesus rose from the dead and possessed all power. Holy Week transformed the world and re-wrote history. Time became defined through the delineation of ‘before Christ’ (BC) and ‘anno Domini’ (AD), the Year of our Lord (Jesus Christ).

If Holy Week is to have any meaning beyond the commercialization of Easter, then it is imperative for us as people of faith to proclaim the Gospel and advance a discipline of correct living that is inclusive of all God’s children. Our voices must be raised in defense of those in need: the homeless, hungry, war-weary, and suffering masses.

One who understands the power of God’s grace and the expanse of God’s love is our guest preacher today. The Reverend Geoffrey Black, Conference Minister of the New York Conference of the United Church of Christ, brings an extensive background in ministry from serving as a chaplain at Brown University in Rhode Island to being a local church pastor in South Hempstead, New York. He worked on the staff of the former Council for Church Life and Leadership of the UCC in Cleveland, Ohio, before he, his wife, Patricia, and their daughter, Makeda, moved to Syracuse, New York. A jazz buff, Geoffrey hosts a weekly jazz show on Public Radio station WAER-FM 88.3 in Syracuse every Monday night. We welcome him to the pulpit and pray God’s Holy Spirit will be upon him as he brings today’s message.