

The Lectionary with Vicar

The readings for this upcoming Sunday, Palm Sunday, are taken from Exodus 34:1-8; II Corinthians 5:14-6:2; and Matthew 21:1-11. I encourage you to open your Bibles and read through these passages with me.

Exodus 34:1-8

By itself, this story is a powerful expression of God's identity and who He reveals Himself to be. We read several His attributes. He is merciful and gracious. He is patient. He is loving and faithful. And He gives forgiveness and justice in equal measure. This is who God proclaims Himself to be. If you want to know what we are supposed to think about God, verses 6 and 7 form one of the clearest statements in the Bible.

But we also want to read this story in the context of Palm Sunday and the other readings. So, note Moses response. He bows His head down and He worships God. God processes in front of Him proclaiming His name and His attributes, and the proper response to all of this is worship. Moses does not follow up this proclamation with questions or doubts or explanations. He witnesses God coming in His splendor and might. He hears who this God is. And he responds with worship and honor.

II Corinthians 5:14-6:2

There are three distinct aspects to Paul's writing here that I'm going to explore. The first is found in verses 14-17. We read about Christ doing the work of creation. By His death He killed everything that is in us so that by His resurrection, we can made into new creations. The new creation was begun with Christ's resurrection, and through Him it passes to us and then out to all of creation.

Then in verses 18-20, Paul talks about the reconciliation that this brings between God and man. Before, we were broken off from God and separated form Him. Now we can be in relationship with Him. Once we were outside of the community, but now we are brought into community. We are no longer alone or isolated. This is an aspect of Christ's work that is often left out when we consider everything in terms of guilt and forgiveness of sins. There is a broken relationship between God and man that needs to be repaired, and Christ came to repair it.

Finally, when looking at this passage in light of the Old Testament reading, I want to draw attention to verse 19, where we read, "God was reconciling the world to Himself, *not counting their trespasses against them*" [emphasis mine] Compare that to our Exodus reading verse 7 where it is written that God "will by no means clear the guilty". We then discover in verse 21 that Christ has become sin so that we might become the righteousness of God – in other words, Christ took on our identity and gave us His own. God doesn't clear the guilty, He passed judgement on Christ for our sins, and He counted us as righteous because of Christ's righteousness.

Matthew 21:1-11

Finally, in our Gospel reading, Christ passes before the crowds as His identity is revealed to all the people. He rides into Jerusalem in His moment of glory as a triumphant king. He is proclaimed to be the Son of David, heir to the throne in Jerusalem. He is named a prophet and spokesperson for God. Everyone acknowledges that He is the ruler who does His work on behalf of God. And We know even more. This is God in the flesh.

And just like when God passes before Moses, the people of Jerusalem bow down in worship. They may not have known exactly who they were dealing with – they didn't have the benefit of knowing how the story would end – but they knew Jesus was someone special.

So, looking at this weekend's readings, it is a question of identity. Who is God? Who is Jesus? And now, who are you? Are you the old you who is trapped in sin and unable to be reconciled to God? Or are you instead the new creation who has been given Christ's righteousness and taken on His identity? We have been given this new identity and our sins have been judged, and so we are now considered to be sons of God right beside the Son of God, Jesus our Lord.

A Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, who clothes me in Your righteousness after taking my sin upon Yourself, let me always be certain that my identity is found in You, that by Your work of re-creation I may be reconciled to the Father who awaits me with arms of mercy and grace. In Your name I pray.
Amen.