

MESSAGE: “*Watch the Lamb*”

Text: Luke 23:26-47

Purpose: the purpose of this message is to invite the congregation to embrace Jesus as Lamb of God, wounded healer, who loves, forgives, heals and restores by gifting of his life.

When I was a boy, I often accompanied my mother when she would visit the village cemetery to plant flowers on the graves of loved ones. The traffic flow required us to circle the cemetery before exiting. One small gravestone stood out from the others, for it had a lamb chiseled into the top. Each visit prompted a retelling of the story behind it. A five-year-old boy chased a frog into an uncapped well and lost his life in the fall. In my mind, the lamb became a symbol for all who are vulnerable to the unforgiving realities of this world.

I thought of that lamb this week as I looked at my ‘not-so-smart’ phone viewing the heartbreaking photo of Abdul-Hamid Alyousef, a 29-year-old Syrian Dad, holding the bodies of his 9-month-old twins, Aya and Ahmed, who were killed with his wife and family by an unsanctioned chemical weapon. Choking back tears, he speaks words that translate, “Say goodbye, baby, say goodbye.” Lambs of life, gone too soon.

We cannot help but wonder where God is when such things happen. In our minds, we know that it is a result of criminal human intent, but our hearts cannot help but wonder why God didn’t step in to protect. “Why, God, why?” we ask.

There are those—we know some of them—we may be some of them—who throw up their hands and say, “I cannot follow a god who allows such things,” or who go even further and conclude, “Maybe there is no god after all.”

The crisis of faith is not exactly new. Many have faced it before. In a 2008 television play, “God on Trial,” Jewish prisoners in Auschwitz during World War II put God on trial for breaking covenant with them. During the proceedings, the defense speaks of the ways in which God suffers too, but the argument falls on deaf ears as the question is asked, ‘Who follows a weak, suffering god?’ The verdict rendered is ‘guilty.’

But I have a different response to that question. Who follows a suffering god? Well, I certainly do. In fact, I cannot imagine following a God who does not suffer. Isaiah phrased it this way, “But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

In Jesus, God enters the broken human heart and begins to heal it from the inside out. The gospels record two instances when Jesus weeps; both take place during the final week of his ministry. In the first, he gathers with grieving friends outside the tomb of his dear friend Lazarus who has died. He knows that he will raise Lazarus from the dead, but he feels what they feel and weeps with Mary, Martha and the rest.

The second happens on the parade route of what we call Jesus' 'triumphal entry into Jerusalem' on Palm Sunday. This, however, is not a 'weeping with;' it is a 'weeping for.' He understands all too well what the parade is about: the palms which symbolize Jewish resistance and independence derived from the Maccabean revolt, the anticipation of Passover celebration which rekindles a desire to overthrow the Romans, the Hosannas which are more a battle cry for deliverance than a celebration of joy. He knows they seek a political or military deliverance which can never truly heal.

In Luke's account of this day, as Jesus approaches the city, he weeps loudly for those who do not recognize what is really happening in front of them. He laments, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you." Jesus saw the devastation on the horizon of Jerusalem's fall in 70 AD.

In Jewish tradition, the day we celebrate as Palm Sunday is Lamb Selection day, the day that lambs without blemish are chosen for Passover sacrifice the following Friday before sunset when Passover begins. Jesus does not enter the city mounted on a stallion ready to conquer the Roman garrison; he enters on the colt of a donkey, God's chosen Lamb, ready to offer his life for the redemption of all. After this Passover, lambs will never again need to be sacrificed. After this Passover, death will release its vice-grip on human soul and destiny. After this Passover, the Spirit of God will move from the temple mount to the human heart.

The God we worship walks the Via Dolorosa with us. God is in every concentration camp, every hospital room, every accident scene, every human cry. God holds us when we are scared, carries us when we are tired, and embraces us when we die. The question is not, "Does God walk with me?" The question is, "Will I walk with God?"

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I close with words from the fifth chapter of Revelation: “Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed!” Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne of God...and they sang a new song...