

Palm Sunday, April 14, 2019
St. John's Episcopal Church
Luke 19:29-48; 21:37-38
The Rev. Kara Wagner Sherer

Maybe you don't pay attention to the more grisly parts of the news, but I've been noticing how many cold cases have been solved in the last few years because of DNA tests that weren't available when the crimes were committed years ago. It reminds me of my belief that the truth can never be buried forever; the truth comes out. It makes me think about this morning's gospel, when the Pharisees tell Jesus to be quiet. They aren't being mean you know; they want to protect Jesus, and the Jewish people too. You see Jesus came riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, the symbol of a Jewish king who comes in peace. The Romans come in on horses, ready for war. The people are shouting hosanna and waving palm branches and the Pharisees are afraid; they know the Romans don't stop to ask questions or determine guilt; they just quell loud uprisings with violence. "Please," beg the Pharisees, "tell your people to be quiet." Jesus replied, "If these were silent, even the stones would cry out." The truth comes out.

Most Episcopal churches have two services on Palm Sunday, first the parade with palms, and shouts of hosanna, and then the mood changes suddenly and the story of Jesus' arrest, trial and crucifixion. But I've been thinking the last couple of years that the story of the crucifixion has become so familiar we have forgotten what it really means. And we've forgotten that unlike most of the stories in the gospel, Jesus' crucifixion is not just a story, it's historical fact. And maybe we've forgotten how we got from "Hosanna" to "Crucify him!" It's not in a moment, but in a week. So, today we also read the next part of the gospel, how Jesus went to the temple and turned over the tables and accused the religious authorities of extortion. And how Jesus taught in the temple every day, and at night went to the Mount of Olives, a grove of ancient olive trees where he could rest and think and pray. It is a wonderful example to us; of how we need to work and serve others, and also how we must also be responsible for taking care of ourselves, resting, spending time alone with God.

During Lent my practice has been to read a poem every day. I've realized how much poets are like prophets, seeing and saying things that the rest of us can't or won't see. I've been reading two other books, a book of theology called "The Cross and the Lynching Tree" and a book of reflections on the spirituals entitled "Were you there?" I've been thinking about the history of lynching in this country, and about innocence and guilt, about official and unofficial authority.

There are 4,743 recorded cases of lynching in the United States between 1882 and 1968. 73% of those lynched were African-American people, the other 27% were Native Americans, Mexican-Americans, and white people. The majority of lynchings happened in the south but there were lynchings in Illinois and other northern states, and in the west. Most people who were lynched were accused of murder, rape, or other serious crimes. Accused, but not arrested, tried or

sentenced. But over 1000 black people were lynched for other reasons including being too loud, demanding respect, insulting a white person, marrying a white person, voting, or throwing stones.

“As he came near and saw the city, Jesus wept over it, saying, ‘If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. Indeed, the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you, and hem you in on every side. They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another; because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God.’”

What was Jesus guilty of? He was guilty of healing people, feeding people, restoring people to community, teaching. We hear today that Jesus was also guilty of being popular. Jesus was guilty of questioning political and religious authority. Jesus was guilty of breaking rules that put laws before the lives and needs of people.

We were there shouting hosannas. And we were there shouting “Crucify him!” We will take pictures and sell postcards to prove we were there.

It turns out that, just like our own sin, the truth comes out. Our nation will not heal until we face the truth of our past and present. For if we do not cry out, even the stones will not be silent.