

Palm Sunday March 16, 2008 “Sharing Some Visions” Matthew 21: 1-11 Phoenix AZ, Rev. Thomas Hall, Sermon # 7

Henri Nouwen writes in his book, “Jesus, A Gospel” on this event, that Jesus seems to be focusing on something into the distance. He appears to be concentrating on something else. He doesn’t look at the excited crowd. He sees beyond the noise and movement to what is ahead of him; an agonizing journey of betrayal, torture crucifixion and death. His unfocused eyes can see what nobody around him can see; he has a knowledge of things to come far beyond anyone’s understanding.

Consider Jesus in this scene. There is melancholy, but there is also peaceful acceptance. There is insight into the fickleness of the human heart, and also immense compassion. There is a deep awareness of the unspeakable pain to be suffered, but also a strong determination to do God’s will. Above all, there is love, an endless, deep, far-reaching love born from an unbreakable intimacy with God and reaching out to all people, wherever they are, were, or will be. (There is nothing that he does not fully know.) There is no body whom he does not fully love.

Brian Gruhn, our youth minister, shared a lectio Divina process as they listened to the words and music of the Prayer of St. Francis. It was powerful. The exercise also made me reflect on the prayer and it dawned on me that this is the work, the vision for Shadow Rock. Listen to the words and work of the church in the prayer of St. Francis:

Make us an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred let us sow love
Where there is injury, pardon
Where there is doubt, faith
Where there is despair, hope
Where there is darkness, light
Where there is sadness, joy

Let us not so much seek to be consoled as to console
To be understood as to understand
To be loved as to love

When we give, we receive
When we pardon, we are pardoned

I have been with you now for a little over six weeks. The interim process began when David resigned in May two years ago. Rev. Lori assumed responsibilities as senior pastor until Rev. Gil Fauber arrived in September. He was with you for a year. Then Rev. Lori assumed responsibilities again until her resignation in January of this year. I arrive the first of February. Your search committee has not been active for two years, but for one year now, and have been doing a wonderful job. Thank you for keeping them in your prayers. In our short time we’ve met, shared, discussed, wept, laughed and planned. In many conversations people remember with fondness the history of the church, the visions that were shared and implemented. Many of them came from pastors and were accepted by you, the lay people. While pastors are to be visionaries, prophets and teachers setting a model, they are also building up the work of the laity, assisting them to see the movement of God in their lives. The model I utilize is that of Jesus, as well as the Buddha. Both always pointed beyond themselves. It was not about them, it is not about me, it is about God and God’s movement in the life of the church and most particularly in the movement of your lives. It is recognizing that there is a spiritual consciousness, an oasis that is available.

Jesus was able to touch on that when he rode into Jerusalem.

Now I'm asking you to also touch into that oasis, that well of vision, of water of refreshment, to share your visions of Shadow Rock. This is not something that you can do in one or two minutes. I'm asking you to reflect and consider. Think about the prayer of St. Francis just shared.

There is a movement already developing that is in my thinking, refreshing and stimulating. For example, last week we received five people who chose to journey with you the members of Shadow Rock during this transition time. That speaks highly of them and their willingness to covenant and commit in this journey into the unknown. It also speaks of where you are.

At our recent staff meeting, a great deal of laughter, sharing of plans, dreams were lifted up. It was a refreshing experience. They lifted up "sharing the dreams, recapturing the dream, or dreaming the impossible dream, or vision.

Next month you'll have an opportunity to volunteer, to give of your time in working on various teams such as Growth, Education, Outreach or Local Global, Finance, Youth, and more.

The local global team or outreach plans on spending some time in retreat on ways that Shadow Rock can do more on issues and concerns. Already Shadow Rock is involved in feeding the hungry and this Tuesday, we'll need volunteers to help at Chris Becker Dining Hall. You'll have an opportunity to help repair a home, with the "Paint the House" event. We support Humane Borders, where we maintain five of the water stations in Southern Arizona, Family Promises where families come to stay a week at our facilities who are working to get their lives together. Shadow Rock also will be present at the Pride Parade in April, supporting our GLBT brothers and sisters. These are just a few illustrations where you can put your faith to work, and participate in a parade of Hosannas. The team will consider ways to educate, inform, and participate in other areas like the housing issue, the environment, mental health, and people who are victims of abuse. Do you realize that the Vatican now has labeled "pollution" a sin, not just individually but a community sin? It was reported in Saturday's paper.

The youth under the direction of our Youth Team and with our Youth Director, Brian Gruhn, traveled to Los Angeles for a day of immersion into a different culture and worked there? Ask some of the youth who attended! They are planning another mission trip to Mississippi later this year.

Adult Education is another area that is planning a retreat for doing some visioning and planning. Already you've experienced several six week long programs on Wednesday evenings- Understanding the Mystery and now World Religions. Sunday mornings in between worship services are one hour topical themes with speakers. If you would like to be a part of that team, let us know, or if you have subjects, do the same.

Children's Education is important and the team is working on programs.

While the vision of Shadow Rock continues to be viable, the implementation of that vision does change, Programs, events, community activities, communication, and yes, even organization and structure may shift. We heard this morning of Forrest's retirement. He will be missed. I'll miss him personally. A "team" or "committee" will find another person who will bring gifts and skills that could change Shadow Rock. Are we open to that? Worship may change too. There may be other

worship services like the Taizé service this evening at 7 PM. Some members of the confirmation class suggested a coffee/espresso bar which really isn't a far fetched idea. We have coffee in between and after worship. Why not have an espresso bar? In the coming years, there will likely be changes in staff, because of retirements, new jobs, moving. What will the staff here at Shadow Rock be like and what will be most efficient in terms of Shadow Rock being a servant church. Your new pastor will very likely bring suggestions, ideas and opportunities for being a servant church.

I mentioned organization and structure. Perhaps a more simplified structure instead of 15 Teams might enhance the church in its ministries. I often refer to the acronym, God's MESS, where MESS represents the four main thrusts of the church: Mission or Local Global, Peace Justice Issues, outreach; Education for all ages, infant through adult, and youth ministry; Spirituality which includes worship, music, decoration of the sanctuary, sacraments, weddings, funerals, pastoral care, visitations, and programs associated with the role of healing, wholeness and health; and Stewardship which includes finance, care of the property, budgets, fund raising, endowment.

Jesus, when he rode into Jerusalem looked ahead to the possibilities. Shadow Rock is doing the same. In the children's chat this morning, Lois spoke of being a servant. A servant is one who is here to serve others, to be a presence, a light to those in different situations on their journey of life.

A key value associated with being a servant is exemplified in the Palm Sunday story. Jesus rode into Jerusalem, humbly.

Humility isn't a trait that has much appeal. We like to see ourselves as a "can-do" culture -- bursting at the seams with good ideas, good intentions and good results. Humility, on the other hand, suggests to us an aroma of helplessness. It is the quality that admits there are things we cannot do, problems we cannot solve, forces we cannot control. This "can-not" admission clashes terribly with our "can-do" arrogance.

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem he himself was not proclaiming himself to be a king. He came humbly, riding a colt. He didn't come riding a white stallion and wearing a white hat. He didn't ride in a convertible or in a bullet proof sedan, surrounded by a great entourage. Not at all.

The Jesus who rides into Jerusalem this day, who willingly endures the cross is not one who says first: you must do it this way, or do you follow the Bible? Jesus says to his disciples and to you and me in the upper room, "Love one another as I have loved you." He says also, 'listen to each other, learn from me, and from each other, nurture, and support, encourage, share the dream, and capture the vision! This Messiah is inclusive. This messiah cares less whether you have green hair or purple hair; whether you have a pierced ear or a pierced tongue; whether you are rich or poor, straight or gay, republican or democrat. He only wants you to "follow him" which means you will learn humility and become humble to one another. You will become a servant to one another. This is what Shadow Rock is journeying towards.

A story by John Aikin helps us to understand humility. One day a little puppy took a walk around his master's far. When he came to where the horse was fed, he heard the animal call to him. "You must be new here." You will soon find out that the master loves me more than all the other animals, because I carry large loads for him. I suspect that an animal of your size is of no value to him at all. The little dog hung his head and was about to walk away when he heard the cow in the next stall. "I have the most honored position on the farm because the lady makes butter and cheese from my milk. You, of course provide nothing of value to the family." Then the sheep, "Cow, your

position is no greater than mine. I lend the master wool to make his clothes and provide warmth to the entire family. You are correct, about he dog. He gives the master nothing.”

One by one the animals joined in the conversation. They spoke about their honored positions on the farm. The chickens produced eggs, and the cat, famous for her quickness got rid of mice.

The puppy, stung by the criticism of the other animals, found a secluded place away from the animals and began to cry. An old dog heard the sobs and paused to listen. The puppy sobbed: “They are right; I provide no service to any one.”

Then the old dog spoke: “It is true that you are too small to pull the wagon. You will never produce eggs, milk or woo. But it is foolish to cry about what you cannot do, or don’t have. You must use the ability the Creator gave you to bring laughter and cheer.”

That night, when the master came home exhausted from long hours in the hot sun, the little puppy ran to him, licked his feet and jumped into his arms. Falling to the ground, the master and puppy romped in the grass. Finally, holding him close to his chest, the master said, “No matter how tired I am when I get home, I feel better when you greet me. I wouldn’t trade you for all the animals on the farm.”and the greatest of these is love.

May we together welcome each other, listen to each other, learn from the past, look to the future knowing that we are in touch with the source of life and be stepping stones into the future. Amen.