

Daily Meditation 3-30-26

Palm Sunday: Another March Mocking Emperors as Prophets Urge

Good morning. A blessed Holy Week to you all.

In today's meditation, we focused on the stories around Jesus driving money lenders from the Temple, how he invoked the prophet Jeremiah — but how so many other prophets chimed-in on the very same theme: that what God wants is justice. And worship is subject to justice and compassion. That worship can be full of hypocrisy and words and noise, if the heart is not put first. Thus Jeremiah's phrase about "my temple has become a den of thieves and robbers" is invoked by Jesus, when he turns over the moneylenders' tables in the Temple. And Bruce Chilton, a New Testament scholar, says that Jesus didn't do this alone. He organized a team of people to do it. It would have taken that many people, to have done it with kind of impact that it had.

Of course, we also talked about the role of Palm Sunday and procession: Jesus riding in on a donkey as an affront to the emperors of the world, who ride in on horses and chariots. And this too is a prophetic statement on Jesus's part.

But what I like to share this morning is what I call the flood of archetypes, the flood of archetypes that appear in these stories of Holy Week. It really is a flood, and obviously the writers of the Gospels are bringing together a lot of the stories that culminate in the death of Jesus on Friday and the Resurrection on Easter.

Of course, integral to these stories is the Feast of Passover, which, of course, is an archetype of Exodus, of leaving oppression behind, an archetype of liberation. And of course, it is also a great holiday, a day of remembrance in Judaism, to teach future generations, to teach the young this important story of Exodus, of how their people were liberated from slavery under the pharaohs, the Pharaohs of Egypt. So this is part of the story of Holy Week.

Thursday, sometimes called Holy Thursday, or Maundy Thursday is the day that celebrates the Last Supper, which has also come to be known as the Eucharist, worship for Christians or Mass. But it too is a memory feast, as Jesus said at the Last Supper, "do this in memory of me." So there too we have an immense archetype being developed, and brought to life again in the story of Jesus, who, of course, being Jewish, knew very well the Passover story, as did his followers, all of them being Jewish, that first generation. So

just as at Passover, people take bread and wine, give thanks for it and bless it, so Jesus did the same — and provided a new dimension to it, saying, “this bread is my body, and this cup is my life force or my blood, given for many.”

So there too, we have an archetype of eating and drinking together, the archetype of dining, which is absolutely universal. Of course, all peoples celebrate meal time together. (Or at least we did before television!) And it is a coming together. It is a communion. And Jesus kind of ups the ante on communion, saying that this is a special encounter with the Cosmic Christ — if you will, the Buddha nature, or the Salaam, the image of God — that we eat and drink together. And he said to “do this in memory of me.” And that's what an archetype is. It's a collective memory. It's a universal memory that triggers experiences, stories, deep feelings, deep connections that all of us share.

And preceding the actual meal was another practice, and that was the washing of feet. And when you get down on your knees to wash another's feet, you are obviously committing humility, if you will: humility, simply because of the word for homeless, which means earth in Latin. So it's an earthy operation to wash someone's feet. Feet, after all, walk on the earth. And it's also humility in the best sense of the word. Not in the negative sense, beating yourself up, but in rendering yourself humble. When you're on your knees washing someone's feet, you are eye to eye, and in a humble way. You are recognizing, you are honoring, you are respecting their specialness by washing the feet, and by being on your knees. So that too is part of the archetypal flood that is bestowed on us this week.

Now the Cosmic Christ, or the Buddha nature, or the image of God that we eat and drink together, is obviously a very robust and nurturing food to carry on our work together. That is one reason we eat, and eat together: it is to carry on our energy for the next day, for the gifts we will be giving to the world, to our family, to our community, in whatever form, for the next day, if we remain healthy and well. Washing others' feet is a reminder that we are capable of humility and of respecting one another. And that this should really precede our dining together.

What is more intimate and more memorable, and therefore intense and more immense than eating and drinking the Cosmic Christ, or the cosmic Buddha, or the cosmic image of God: this marriage of psyche and cosmos, of self (the small s) with the big Self (the big S). To be able to practice that, in a context of eating and dining, is simply amazing.

Now in John's gospel, there are several chapters that pretend to teach the teachings of Jesus at the Last Supper. I say pretend because John's gospel is late, written about 60 years after Jesus died. But nevertheless is mature in that sense, that the authors of that

gospel were picking up the deeper meanings of Jesus's goodbye meal, and develop them in very poetic and very powerful ways. "The father and I are one," and that "you too are branches of the same tree" and so forth. Powerful, and again archetypal imagery to connect us to the source, who was also Jesus's source.

Following the meal, Jesus goes to Gethsemane, a park or garden where he and his disciples frequently went to pray. But this time, his disciples have eaten heartily, and they've had wine, and they're sleepy, and they fall asleep. But he is alert and awake, and he's praying because he knows something eventful is about to happen, that one of his followers is going to betray him with a kiss. So Judas arrives with soldiers from the Imperial Army and they arrest him. Judas kisses him to signify who it is that they are to arrest.

And what follows is, of course, great degradation and suffering, a cruel and sadistic punishment that the Romans made for all those who would threaten the Empire, so that others would take the lesson, as these people died naked on a cross and with nails in their feet and hands. People would take the lesson that obedience comes first.

So that archetype of suffering is, of course, what the cross is about, and it speaks to everybody. It's universal, because all of us experience betrayals, and all of us experience a suffering in life of a profound kind. And Jesus represents it archetypally in this profound experience of crucifixion.

But again, death does not have the last word. And so Sunday, the Resurrection is another archetype of overcoming death: of how all of us are invited to go beyond this life. And there is a hope here, a question: is there something after this life? And Jesus, in the tradition of his people, many of whom, not all, believed in resurrection, he becomes quite explicit about it. And we're told, 500 of his followers were testified to their unique experience of the risen Christ, and each was unique. Paul fell off a horse and heard a voice, and went blind for a few days. And then took months to process the whole thing. And it moved him from being a zealot killing Christians, to announcing the good news that he underwent.

And we have many stories of the people who ate with Jesus afterwards, and Mary Magdalene was told, "Don't touch me." So she experienced him, but in a less physical way, and so forth. Many, many versions of a risen Christ.

And I experience, I talk to people a lot about whether they've experienced people who have died, loved ones who have appeared to them afterwards. And this really happens, in today's world too. So the resurrection is not just a hope or a dream, but it addresses what

Otto Rank, a great Jewish psychologist said, is the “number one question for human beings, and that is the question of immortality: Is there something after this life?”

So this is just a sampling of the rush, the flood of archetypes that we celebrate this week. Thank you. We'll see you next week. Have a wonderful Easter and Holy Week, whatever tradition you draw from.