

How to Sustain the Weary with a Word?

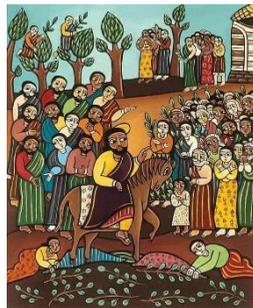
Isaiah 50.4

Rev Reg Weeks

19 April 2019

(words in red indicate a change of Pp slide)

Well I guess I don't need to tell you what day this is. It's such a familiar story, and I'm sure you are all pretty confident that you know what happened that day. The story is in each of the four Gospels, but interestingly they each seem to have a slightly different take on it, so I thought I would share with you the summary which I found in the very comprehensive Dictionary of the Bible.



Jesus's entry into Jerusalem ~ Dictionary of the Bible

The road to Jerusalem from Jericho rises 1300 feet by a long and sometimes precipitous ascent of 27 km. (about as long as from here to Upper Hutt). Following this route Jesus and his followers in due course reached the outskirts of Jerusalem. Entrance to the city was made by way of Bethphage, a suburb that appears to have been located on the southern slope of the Mount of Olives. According to **Mark** those who had travelled with Jesus hailed him on his entry as the herald who had proclaimed "the coming kingdom of our father David."

Matthew and **Luke** reinterpret the tradition as an acclamation of Jesus as Messiah, and **Matthew** emphasized the fact that the entry was in literal fulfilment of the messianic prophecy of Zechariah chapter 9. However, **Matthew** misunderstood the poetic parallelism of the old Testament text and consequently gave an absurd picture of Jesus mounted on an ass and a colt.

John represents the welcomers as pilgrims who had already been in the city for some time. He substitutes "branches of palm trees" for Mark's "leafy branches" as the carpet spread on the road. He agrees with Mark and Luke that the event was a messianic welcome, and with Matthew that it was a fulfilment of Zechariah chapter 9

Today we have heard Luke's account, and **Like** Mark and John, proclaim Jesus as the longed-for Messiah but not the all-conquering warlord riding a white charger; rather a prince of peace, in fact the Prince of Peace, his humble mount and the palm fronds historic

symbols of his mission.

And it's strange gift of bible reading that when you re-read a familiar passage, particularly out loud, something that you hadn't noticed before leaps out and grabs your attention. That's what the ancient mystics called *Lectio Divina* or 'divine reading'.

This time for me it was Jesus response to the Pharisees who wanted to shush the disciples for fear it would antagonise the Romans.

Jesus said even if the disciples stopped singing?

Yes, "even the stones would cry out"

And that made a connection for me with passages like Isaiah 55 where the joy of the returning exiles cause the tress to 'clap their hands' and Psalm 65 where the meadows and the valleys 'sing together' but of even deeper and more tragic significance is the stark reversal a few lines later when Jesus weeps for Jerusalem, because he saw that, not the stones by the roadside as I thought, but the magnificent stones of the temple itself would cry out the ancient words of greeting, only in a few short years to be left with not one standing atop another.

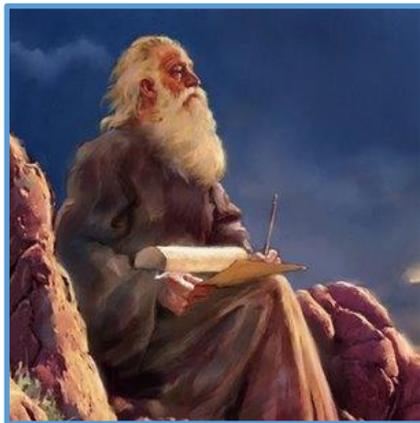
Like the rest of the city, utterly destroyed by the Romans, because Jerusalem could not recognise that Jesus himself, embodied the shalom for which they longed. Not much seems to have changed but maybe the kiwi response to March 15 is a sign of hope.

However, as I read the scriptures set down for today, I was caught by a phrase from the Isaiah reading -

" **that** I may know how to sustain the weary with a word."

A challenge for any preacher –
"how to sustain the weary with a word?"

It wasn't altogether clear to me why this passage had been chosen for today as there seemed little in it that related to Jesus' entry to Jerusalem. However, it is one of the four passages from the prophet Isaiah known as the Songs of



the Suffering Servant. Jewish readers understand these passages to refer to Israel, and particularly her time of exile in Babylon, but from the earliest of times they have been seen by Christians to be speaking of Jesus. In this sense the passage is a fitting perspective on that fateful week which begins today.

And if there was ever a group who were weary, it was those in Jerusalem so heartily sick of the long and oppressive occupation by their Roman overlords. It was as if they were still in exile, even in their own country.

But this all begs the question:

who might we regard as being “the weary” today?

What groups come to your mind?

[ask congregation]

Those long in suffering?

Those long in years?

Those long in well-doing?

Those long in the current stage of their life?

Those who are parenting?

All this raises a deeper question:

How to find the word that sustains?

[Think of a phrase or proverbial saying or passage from the bible or a verse from a hymn that you have found sustains you – share]

Then the Isaiah passage raises the question:

How to develop the “Tongue of a Teacher”?

You listen

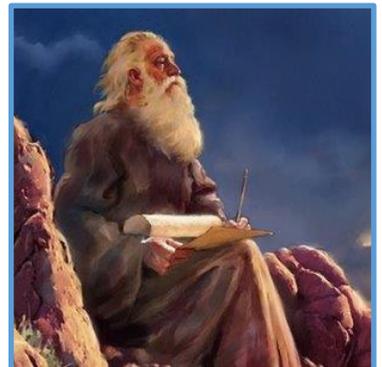
(as a learner ie to really understand)

You remain steadfast

(even when it’s difficult)

You rely on GOD.

So you will need a sustaining concept



of God. How do you picture God?

Take a moment to reflect but no need to share.

How many have heard of J.B Phillips' book

Your God is Too Small, by J. B. Phillips

He goes about the task of identifying “the inadequate conceptions of God which still linger unconsciously in many minds, and which prevent our catching a glimpse of the true God.”

He says “If it is true that there is a ‘Someone’ in charge of the whole mystery of life and death, we can hardly expect to escape a sense of futility and frustration until we begin to see what he is like and what his purposes are.”

So here are a few examples -

1) Resident Policeman. ‘To many people conscience is almost all that they have by way of knowledge of God. Conscience is by no means an infallible guide and it is extremely unlikely that we will ever be moved to love, worship, and serve a nagging inner voice,’ he says

2) Parental Hangover. In this view, the conception of God is almost invariably founded upon the child’s idea of their father. It almost always goes hand in hand with fear and/or guilt.

3) Grand Old Man. Children often view their superiors as “old,” which carries over into a person’s conception of God.

4) Meek-and-Mild. ‘Why on earth do children’s hymns call Jesus ‘mild?’ Of all the epithets that could be applied to Christ this seems one of the least appropriate.’ he says

5) Heavenly Bosom. It is true that there is refuge and shelter in God, but this is not pietistic escapism as if we can be free from life’s troubles.

Phillips also talks about other faulty views of God:

Managing Director, Projected Image, Pale Galilean, God-in-a-Box, Second-Hand God, Perennial Grievance, and a few others.

In the second half of the book he gives a constructive – biblical – explanation of the nature of God

Well the Bible has many words from God and quite a few about God.

Genesis, in a series of word-pictures and stories, begins to develop our

understanding of God as Creator – and it is science which has shown us the incredible diversity of creation, from the minute to the mind bogglingly vast. From small, beyond the reach of an electron microscope, to the farthest reaches of space.

Some may remember the **Voyager** space craft that was launched in 1977. About 3.5 years ago in Sept. 2013, after traveling for 35 years it had just got to the outer reaches of our **galaxy**.

It is travelling at such a speed that it could circle the earth at sea level, three times every two hours. Travelling at that speed it will take Voyager 40,000 years to reach a star in the next galaxy.

The only a few days ago the great delight of the astronomers to have finally photographed a **'black hole'** first predicted years ago by a Kiwi. And that little black dot is 16 billion times the size of our sun.



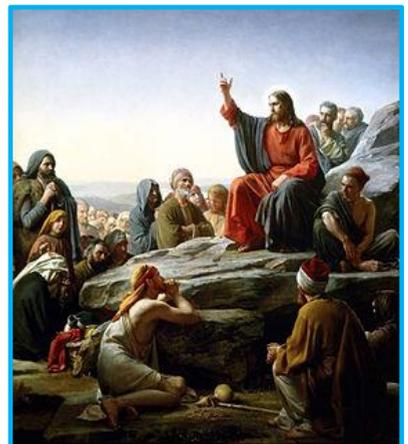
“When I look at the stars” David said, impressed by the vastness of the firmament – but he had no idea!

In the Gospels, Jesus himself asks the question “Who do you say that I am?”

And the Gospels respond that Jesus is the Redeemer – the living manifestation of God’s love in action.

In the book of Acts it is Peter on the day of Pentecost who tells the crowd that what they are witnessing is the out pouring of God’s Spirit as promised by the prophet Joel. - the indwelling empowering Spirit. So although the Bible doesn’t contain the word ‘Trinity’ Christians have found plenty to justify their understanding of God as Three in One

Long a sustaining image of the Christian understanding of God.



But if you are tempted to put all that aside as a confusing abstraction,

Jesus himself has an astounding word for us

One of the few sayings of Jesus recorded in all four Gospels is this:

“Anyone who welcomes you, welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.”

Richard Rohr, a Franciscan Brother living near Santa Fe in New Mexico, and well known speaker on spirituality, has written a book on God as Trinity called the Divine Dance. He says this:

Richard Rohr ~ The Divine Dance (p 166)

Let me share an astounding bit of 14th century poetry by Meister Eckhart:

Do you want to know

what goes on in the core of the Trinity?

I will tell you

In the core of the Trinity

the father laughs

and gives birth to the Son.

The Son laughs back at the Father

and gives birth to the Spirit.

The whole Trinity laughs and gives birth to us.

God has done only one constant thing since the beginning of time:

God has always, forever, and without hesitation loved “the Son,” understood in this sense as *creation, material Universe, you, me* - and yes, you can equally and fittingly use “the Daughter.”

Remember, the quality of the relationship is the point, not gender or anything else.

God cannot *not* love his universally-begotten child in you, and the “part” of you that already knows and enjoys this is the indwelling Spirit.

And do you know that the flow is always in both directions?

The divine child also “creates” the Father *as father* - as any parent can attest. A parent is not truly a parent until the child returns the flow. Watch the joy or tears on a mother or father’s face when their little one first says “Mama!” or “Dada!”

It’s the universe in a moment.

Anything less than this laughter, liking, delighting, and loving – the world simply doesn’t have time for! And neither do you.

The world is now repositioned on a totally positive ground and foundation. The bankrupt, sad storyline of guilt, shame, reward, and punishment never got Western civilization very far anyway. . . . But when you start with original blessing, life only grows bigger and always much better.

He takes a whole book to come to that conclusion and it's worth reading, available on Kindle.

Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me

So it seems to me that the answer to the question I started with – How to sustain the weary with a word is to trust the God in you; embodied in the earthly life and teaching of Jesus.

And to trust that relationship which binds us together as the Body of Christ every time we gather, and particularly every time we share the bread and the wine;

And to trust that you are called and empowered to be in yourself, the Word that sustains the weary whenever such a weary one knocks on your door or calls you on the phone.

Joy Cowley speaks for them in her little book
“Aotearoa Psalms” (ps 26)

What I need lord is a friend. Choose my friend carefully.

Please, no one who is going to tell me how to put my life straight, no amateur analyst or teacher, no well-meaning person who is going to "should" all over me.

I want someone to come in the door with a smile to let me know I'm valuable just as I am. There will be no advice, no expectation of change.

My friend will already know that pain is important in journey and must be travelled through.

My friend will stay beside me and hold my hand while I make my own discoveries.

And then, when this is over, Lord help me to remember two things: to say 'thank you', and to be a friend with a big smile to someone else in pain, or who is weary.

'Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.' said Jesus

So do not hesitate to **be** 'the word that sustains the weary'

