Holy Cross Japanese

Sunday, November 7, 2021

Today is Wednesday.

I know today in Vancouver it is Sunday, but in the gospel reading about Jesus this morning, it is Wednesday. And not just any Wednesday. This is the last Wednesday of Jesus’ life. Tomorrow will be Thursday and after instituting the Holy Communion Jesus will be arrested and on Friday he will be executed. So this is almost the end of Jesus’ life, today, Wednesday.

Why are we reading about the end of Jesus’ life now? In November? Because it’s almost the end of the church year, and the church year is based on Jesus’ life. So at the end of the church year we read about the end of Jesus’ life.

On the last Monday of his life, that was the day before yesterday, Jesus throws people out of the temple who have been making money by extorting it from poor people. People had to buy sacrifices so they could get into the temple and worship God. But they were being cheated, especially the poor, so they could get into the temple an dencounter the God of justice and fairness and love.

No wonder Jesus threw out the people who made money by cheating the poor people. No wonder the authorities hated him for doing that.

And then the next day, Tuesday, Jesus told a story about how leaders tried to kill the son of a vineyard owner so they could steal the vineyard. He meant his religious leaders were stealing. No wonder they were more angry. He had told the truth about them.

And then the leaders tried to trick Jesus into getting executed for treason by using some Roman money to get him to say he didn’t believe in the Roman emperor who claimed to be God.

Then Jesus tricked them. First, Jesus quoted the Old Testament about the priority of loving God and loving our neighbour, and then he went on to trick the leaders with a funny story about David eating consecrated bread when the Bible said you should never do that—to show how little they knew about the Bible and how little they knew about loving God and their neighbours. The ordinary people thought it was hilarious that someone told the truth that the religious leaders knew nothing about the Bible or about God. And that the religious leaders were mean when they were leading a religion about love!

So, then, Jesus told today’s story. It is the last story Jesus ever told. It is about the woman who put two tiny coins in the collection It must be a very important story for it to be the last one. It will be a story that explains everything about why Jesus is about to be killed and what comes after that.

Jesus starts the story by saying that the religious leaders love wearing expensive clothes and looking impressive as they walk around and enjoying all the attention they get and feeling more important than everyone else. That’s what they are interested in. And how do they get so rich? They steal the houses of destitute women and sell them and the women end up on the street. And then they say long prayers where everyone can hear and admire them.

There must have been dead silence. You could hear a pin drop. Everyone knew it was true, but nobody dared say so. But Jesus dared to tell the dangerous truth. And lots of people probably weren’t surprised when he got arrested the next night.

But then Jesus made it worse. He saw one of those destitute women who had had her house stolen, putting in two 25-cent coins. And he could see that was all she had. And he was astonished. She loved God that much that she gave her last two quarters. Then she was totally destitute, with no money whatever. But she’d loved God and her neighbour.

But the story isn’t really about that deeply loving poor street woman. Because Jesus points out that her fifty cents is worth more than all the huge amounts of money the religious leaders are putting into the collection. Her fifty cents is worth more than their huge donations? They are the leaders, the important people, the ones everyone is supposed to look up to. And Jesus tells them all their public generosity is worth less than fifty cents? You bet they were insulted.

When you give someone money you expect to get something back. I give money to the clothing store so I can get a sweater. I give money to Canadian Tire so I can get a microwave. We expect something in return. What were the religious leaders buying? They gave huge sums of money to buy a place in heaven, to look even more impressive, to buy reputation and importance and power over other people.

What was the destitute woman buying with her fifty cents? Nothing. She just gave it away.

Jesus says the street woman is dressed in glorious robes of love. And the rich men are wearing rags. And everyone knows it’s true! And the ordinary people are delighted.

But today, Wednesday, is the day before he’s going to be arrested. So as well as a wonderful story, it’s also a prediction about what’s about to happen. People don’t want their selfishness to be exposed. (At least there is that hope still in them. Deep down they still know the truth.) But they want their power and abuse so much that they’ll kill Jesus to keep it. That’s how Jesus shows what’s really going on. He tricks the abusers into showing what they are really doing. Because he loves the abusers.

Yes, of course he loves the abusers. He wants to love them into loving, not abusing. So he has to show them what they are doing. They are stealing destitute people’s homes so they can get richer. Sounds familiar, doesn’t it? It’s still happening today. He is inviting them to become like the poor street woman who has nothing. Because they really do have nothing. Right now they don’t have any love. That’s why they have nothing and are poor. But when they know that truth, then they have a chance to change, to love like the street lady did, and to become people of God’s love.

Some do. Zacchaeus the tax collector, who had official permission to steal from the poor did. He gave it all back. He died to his former priority to getting richer and richer for ever and ever by assaulting the poor. By dying he became really alive and began to love.

And now Jesus is going to die. That’s how God’s love comes to live in us and give us new life. He tells the truth about us and that makes all the difference.

Not many of us here this morning are very rich. But there are other parts of each of us that still need to learn how to love. And Jesus is about to die so that we can see what love is really like and invite Jesus into our lives.

We will take Jesus’ body into our bodies in communion in a few minutes. That means we take his love, even to die for us, into our selves so we become like him. When you come up to communion, imagine you are a homeless street person and Jesus is filling you with love and you go back to your seat so proud of who you are and so able to love.

If we felt we had lost our houses, or our respect, or our importance to powerful people who assaulted us and took everything away, and if we felt really poor like the lady in the story, Jesus changes all that. It turns out that because Jesus lives in us we are the ones with the power to love, we are the ones clothed with beauty, we are the ones whom God delights in. We have been enabled to love. That’s what receiving communion is all about.

Jesus has given us his resurrection. Turns out every day is Wednesday. Every day God takes our poverty, our self-concern, our fear, and our worries and transforms us with God’s relentless love. How wonderful! So our ordinary Wednesdays get transformed into resurrection Sundays! Thanks be to God!

And thanks be to that street lady, whose name we don’t even know, who showed Jesus what real love is like. May we be like her, showing the whole world what real love is like.