

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
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Jesus the Painter

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Holy Tuesday

Those who paint with oil colours know that the key to painting a canvas, with acrylics as well as oils is the layers that go on the canvas or paper. In landscapes, it is the layering of the sky or sea, the land, the mountains, the trees and then all the other details.

Jesus painted with his words. Each of the gospel writers also painted to show faithfully and accurately what Jesus wanted them to say. Perhaps John used the boldest colours. In the last week of Jesus' life, to which all the gospel writers devoted an inordinate amount of space in their accounts, we see Jesus entering Jerusalem as King and Messiah, then spending time with his disciples and followers, particularly in the Upper Room.

Here in John chapter 12, we find Jesus once again trying to get through to those who desired to give their whole lives to him, the significance of this last week in his life. It is a holy week simply because in it we see the major mysteries of God's reaching to us revealed. But most still hadn't understood that Jesus was about to die in three days time.

So he painted again. He painted for those who wanted to see him, whether Greek or Jew or any other persuasion.

He painted a farm scene, with a large garden. There were sowers who had large bags of seed, sowing wheat into the ground. There was one sower, examining one kernel of wheat, one seed. He was looking at it with wondering eyes. Jesus was that one seed and the story he painted, noted that unless you give up that one seed to death, you cannot have the whole head of thirty, sixty or more seeds which is produced as a direct result of that one seed going into the ground. You cannot enjoy the bread or the other flour products, unless that one seed goes into the ground. It was a way of talking about his death, his sacrifice, and the huge yield that would come as a result of him going into the ground.

He then painted a scene with many people in it. Some had the look of victory on their faces, others had defeat painted on their faces. Some had looks of compassion and love, others' faces were marred with hatred and

lined with discouragement. Then in the middle, you could see Jesus with his arms around two followers, possibly a man and a woman. They are walking away from the foreground so you cannot see their faces. But the story Jesus painted was a surprising one. It was the losers that Jesus met. It was the ones who knew they needed a Savior, a doctor; these were the ones he had his arms around. The happy winners apparently were walking away from Jesus, since they didn't need him. Others seemed preoccupied with so many parts of their lives that they didn't have time for Jesus. They too were headed away. Jesus the King who sacrificed himself for us, calls us to sacrificially follow him. This week we are all called again to this high calling. Choose today if this is still in your heart, or whether you find yourself wandering away. Choose to follow.

The next painting has a group of people in the midst of a plantation. They are not well dressed, they have clearly been working hard. They have been in the fields in the heat of the day, and have come through much. Over by the large home, is another group of workers who have been cleaning the house, preparing the meals, doing the laundry, cleaning the toilets, making sure the banquet is prepared in every way. They too look tired and worn, not in exactly the same way the crew from the fields looks, but with similar looks in their eyes. They look at each other and wonder together at how much work they have done and how much work remains. Jesus is among them. He says, "Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me."

And in that moment, he stares off into space. He wonders at his own death. Which one of us can honestly say we have not thought about our own mortality, our own coming funerals, even as we attend others' funerals, those we love, those we miss, those we wonder how we will ever do without them. Jesus wonders at his own death.

He is troubled. Now for you and I, we could say honestly that there are times where we are scared to death of our own deaths, hugely anxious, maybe not about the fact of it, but how we get there, everyone wanting a peaceful death in our own beds. But Jesus doesn't seem as anxious as you and I. He doesn't live in that worried place you and I live. Yet he has the full range of emotions that you and I have.

He is troubled, shaken by his coming death. The last time John uses this word (*tarasso*) is when he is outside Lazarus' tomb in John, chapter 11:38.

He was deeply moved at his friend's death. He cried. He felt the loss. He knew something was wrong with this life, that death should rob us the way it does. Death is the result of the rebellious path Adam and Eve took, and our own. But instead of simply giving into that troubled, shaken feeling, Jesus seems to get a second wind and begins to pray in the midst of his trouble.

Are you troubled? Follow our Lord's example and pray. Call out to your Dad. Call out to a fellow believer. Tell him/her what's going on. Tell him you don't want to give up. That's what Jesus says to his Father. I don't want to be tortured to death. He doesn't say this, although later in the Garden, he will intimate at that thought, yet continually yielding to God, saying, "Glorify your name."

The final series of paintings in this passage is John's painting of Jesus considering his own death. There is a troubled look on Jesus' face. That's one painting. Then the next one has a triumphant, even confident look where his face looks up to heaven and it is clear that he is praying with open hands and a heart full of love. The next painting has a broad landscape with clouds and sunlight peaking through the clouds, a small crowd dwarfed by the huge weather system overhead. If you could paint thunder, it looked like that in the picture.

John says some people interpreted what they experienced as a thunder clap, others believe Jesus heard an angel. But John knows and others there knew that God himself had spoken and had said that he would glorify, that is, bring glory and honor to God's name, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He explains that Jesus was about to draw a great parade to life, to heaven, and that the devil's plan of rebellion was being crushed.

Yet many who saw these works of art still didn't understand. The Messiah's path to life and freedom isn't like Moses' exodus. There was even a greater cost. So the final painting is one of a light. There is a crowd in a dark place, drawn to that light. The one flame burns brightly in one man's hand, but will not last in that place. It looks as if it is windy, people's hair show this. Jesus said, "Enjoy the light while you have it." Many dark events will overtake the people in the next few days. Many thought God's plans would not end in such a way.

None of us know how our lives will play out. We are not in control of those details. Nevertheless, we can entrust our lives to the Lord, even as Jesus

entrusted his life to God. He knew the power of resurrection in raising Lazarus from the dead. He knew the power of life, as we know Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. This is something Jesus will tell his disciples in that Upper Room coming, chapter 14. So we too can come tonight and bring every troubling detail to the Lord.

Lacking hope? Bring this to the Lord. Lacking wisdom or direction? Call out to the One who says, "If any of you lack wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you." (James 1:5) Lacking peace? "...Present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4: 6-7) Needing healing? Confess your sins to one another and ask the elders to anoint you with oil for the healing you need.

Jesus this week reassures us in the midst of his own coming suffering that he understands us and walks with us through whatever we are going through. Tonight is the time to give ourselves back to him.

Let us pray.