

Good Friday 2011
United Church of Santa Fe
Larry Rasmussen Sermon

Were You There When.....

Were you there when...they crucified my Lord? *The Jerusalem Times* had posted only the police notes. Four rebels were executed on Weds. and three on Friday. Three more were scheduled for the next Friday. That was it, nothing more. Friday was the end of the week, so most people did Friday things—lay a last course of stone, clear the table at work, do the wash, collect the children, and, at sundown, light the candles, pray the prayers, and enjoy the meal. It would be much better if Herod and the Romans left, of course, but life was good. In any case, life must go on. So the dying up there on Golgatha were left to the grieving. The women would know what to do with the bodies.

Most things happen this way. Life goes on, Bad Friday ends another week, and if there is anything momentous in yet another death of yet another good Jew, few notice. Besides, if something really important happens, *The Jerusalem Times* will have it in the morning.

A few, looking back from their deeply changed lives, testified that something momentous *did* happen. Even Earth knew, they said. Did not the sun's light fail at noon and darkness cover the land as others ate, then napped? Did not the curtain of the temple rip from top to bottom, unaided? Did not God cry out when Rabbi Jesus breathed his last? And did not our Jesus say even the stones would cry out if we did not tell this story to the ends of the Earth?

But except for those few, none did hear the cries or notice the weather or listen to the stones. It was a Friday like any other.

Were you there when...the planet changed? Harsh change, geo-physical change, a tough, new place. 2000-2010 was the hottest decade ever. 2010 was the wettest year ever and it tied 2005 for the hottest. In the summer of 2010, Russia had its highest temperatures and worst drought, with hundreds of wildfires and the failure of the wheat crop. One-fifth of the entire nation of Pakistan was under water at one point. Australia first suffered unprecedented drought, then unprecedented flooding, both followed with a monster cyclone that even brought flooding to the "outback," hundreds of miles from the coastline.

Oceans are now more acidic than anytime in the last 800,000 years. If present rates continue, the acid will be more corrosive than anytime in the past 20 million years. Oyster larvae mortality has increased 80 percent, many shellfish can't make thick enough shells and coral reefs, those ocean nurseries, may be gone by the end of the century.

Every major life system, on land or in the water, is in decline.

Yet on this Friday few notice. Life goes on and few notice that Earth can no longer be counted on in the ways to which we've grown accustomed: not for glacial waters feeding the great rivers and civilizations of Asia; not for sea levels trustworthy enough to host most of the great cities and much of the human

population; not for adaptation time sufficient to let flora and fauna adjust to new insect predators and diseases, or drought and deluge; not for governments capable of marshaling sufficient resources to handle disasters of greater number and intensity; not for rainfall and snowpack and enough resources to assure that future generations will survive and thrive, rather than thirst, on their diminished planet. Climate change is the biggest thing to happen to our home in thousands of years.

Were you there when that happened? You were. You are.

Still, no marches on Washington, the president's not on TV explaining the national and international emergency, students aren't in the streets and Exxon and BP are not shaking in their boots. It is as if Jesus were saying again, but to us this time, "If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But they are hidden from your eyes." *This* time the stones *are* crying out because no one's telling this story to the ends of the Earth. It's Bad Friday all over again.

Were you there when...Bad Friday became Good Friday? No one expected *that*, not in Jerusalem, not on the planet. No one expected God to go *that* incarnate, to go to the darkest corners of existence and be wholly present on the home turf of death, yea, even death on a cross. No one expected God, amidst those ruins, to shout out an unqualified "yes" to the creation with a love so wild it became a force just at the point where human hopes had come to an end because of too many bad Fridays. But God did, even as they took the bodies down.

True, only a few noticed even then. But the stones did. Maybe they sensed on that Friday that there was the surprise in store.

As you leave this service you are invited to dip your hand in the bowl of water and take a stone along. The water is a way to remember one of the last words of Jesus, "I thirst" and to call to mind and heart the thirty Southwest and the thirsty around the world. The stones, from which we have soil, from which we come and to which we return, call to mind and heart the story of Jesus' passion.

But before that, we sing.

On the tough, new planet we will need to learn to sing some new songs. "Even the Stones Will Cry Out" is one such. Jacquie will play it through once and we will sing stanzas 1, 3, and 4. Please notice that the refrain after stanza 4 begins differently. That makes all the difference, because it has us singing *with* the trees and stones crying out.