

Trinity 10 (HC) (2018)

Does Jesus care?

Does He care, for example, about the victims in the Cardinal Theodore McCarrick sex abuse scandal? A story that has been very much in the news this past week.

Or, for that matter, does He care about McCarrick himself – a sinner of the first order to be sure – yet a man of great talent and potential?

Or, what about the young man who came by the church this week seeking food. Does Jesus care that he has only one can of refried beans in the cupboard to feed his family of four?

Or, what about people struggling with all sorts of life-threatening illnesses . . . or those who muddle along day by day with a host of aches and pains? Does Jesus care?

Or, what about those whose lives are wrecked by addiction? Does Jesus care?

If we know our Bibles, we would have to say YES to all of the above. Jesus cares for the good and the bad, and everyone in between, and there is no situation beyond his concern.

More than that, Jesus gives us a window into the very heart of God.

What does He tell His disciples in one place? **“He that hath seen me hath seen the Father”** (John 14:9).

And what do we find Jesus doing in today’s Gospel? Weeping over the very city whose citizens will soon cry out: **“Crucify him, crucify him”** (Luke 23:21). **“His blood be on us on and on our children”** (Matthew 27:25).

Weeping for the very ones who sent Him to the cross – yes -- but also for those who themselves, within a generation or so, would face judgment because of their unbelief and rejection of their Messiah. Remarkable isn’t?

One commentator writes:

“Jesus shows us the heart of God, how even when judgment must be pronounced, it is never done with glee. There is weeping in the heart of God even when His judgment is perfectly just and righteous.”

No doubt this is still true today . . . let’s say even with that Roman Catholic Cardinal of whom I have just spoken. God weeps.

Judgment – both temporal and divine – is coming, but the God we meet in Jesus does not gloat over it.

‘Hell’, either literal or metaphorical, they will get, but that is not His desire.

Today’s Gospel tells us as much. Here we find Jesus entering the Holy City for what will be His last Passover.

Chronologically speaking, it’s Palm Sunday.

Apparently, as you make your way from Jericho to Jerusalem you arrive at point where you get a panoramic view of the city.

There is a place like that as you head into Atlanta from the west on Interstate 20. You crest a hill, and all of a sudden there she is in all her splendour.

Well, Jesus and the disciples had arrived at just such a spot, and Jesus broke down and began to weep.

Why do you suppose He did anything so extraordinary? Well, the passage does not leave us in any doubt.

Here was the city whose very name meant “peace.” Yet, there was no peace within her walls or in her future.

The Prince of Peace was coming to make one final appeal. But the majority – as Jesus seemed to know in advance -- would follow their leaders in rejecting that appeal.

Instead, they were bent on following a different path: the path of insurrection and revolution.

Jesus knew only too well where that path would lead: death and destruction.

And, it all came true in A.D. 70. First, came the Roman army, then a siege around the city and finally the levelling of the city . . . wall, Temple and all.

The great Jewish historian Josephus gives us a graphic account:

"All hope of escaping was now cut off from the Jews, together with their liberty of going out of the city.

"Then did the famine widen its progress, and devour the people by whole houses and families; the upper rooms of women and infants that were dying by famine, and the lanes of the city were full of the dead bodies of the aged; the children also, and the young men wandered about the market places like shadows, all swelled with the famine, and fell down dead wheresoever their misery seized them.

"For a time the dead were buried; but afterwards, when they could not do that, they had them cast down from the wall into the valleys beneath.

"When Titus [the Roman general in charge] saw these valleys full of dead bodies . . . he gave a groan, and spreading out his hands to heaven, called God to witness this was not his doing." ///

Even this pagan general seems to have sensed that what he saw was a visitation from above . . . a visitation of judgment.

This is the fate Jesus saw coming upon the Holy City. This is why he wept.

Does Jesus care? Yes, he cares.

He weeps because they did not know the time of their visitation. Peace, salvation, was in their grasp, but they would not take it.

By the way, "visitation" is used in two ways in the Bible. At times, it is used in connection with **God coming with blessings**. At others, with **God coming in judgment**.

The latter – God coming in judgment -- seems to work is like this:

First, people close their eyes to the light God gives them, and, then, if they persist, God closes them. In other words, God confirms their decision.

A case in point is what happened with Pharaoh in the Old Testament. After being presented with signs from on high at the hand of Moses, first we are told *he* hardened his heart. But, as the narrative moves along, we are told, *God* hardened his heart.

Which was it? Both. Human rejection leads to divine confirmation.

The same principle is found in Romans 1. Here, Paul writes:

“And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient.”

They closed their eyes, and God closed them.

This was what happened with Jerusalem First, God visited with blessing. The Prince of Peace entered, but the people of that city would not follow His way. They rejected the light that was given them.

Hence, God visited them a second time: this time in judgment in A.D. 70.

So, in today’s Gospel, we find words of great comfort and encouragement as well as a solemn and fearful warning.

The tears of Jesus are real. He cares. But so is the judgment that awaits those who refused to follow His way of peace. But allow me to end on a positive note:

No matter where you find yourself in life, no matter how dark the night . . .
no matter how fierce the storm . . . no matter how far you have strayed . . .
Somebody loves you . . . Somebody stand ready to welcome and encourage . . .
Somebody cares. That Somebody is Jesus.

Perhaps Frank E. Graeff, a Methodist minister and hymnwriter said it best, and with these words I close:

**Does Jesus care when my heart is pained
Too deeply for mirth or song,
As the burdens press, and the cares distress,
And the way grows weary and long?**

**Oh, yes, He cares, I know He cares,
His heart is touched with my grief;
When the days are weary, the long nights dreary,
I know my Saviour cares.**

Take this thought with you. Think about it. Claim the peace that comes from the Prince of Peace.