

## The Gifts of Lent: Insight Palm-less Before God

Isaiah 50:4-9

The 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Civil War occurred this week and Americans are still not sure what caused that bloody conflict. According to CNN, only 52% of Americans think slavery was the main issue. 42% believe something other than slavery was the cause of the war. One would think that with the passing of a century and a half that we would have enough distance from the event and enough information published about it to have a clearer perspective on something none of us participated in. Historians have filled libraries with documented evidence of the period. But this is clear: information and insight are not the same things.

Information: Taxes are due every year at this time.

Insight: If you haven't filed your taxes yet, **you're toast.**

Information: Religious fervor is one of the leading causes of bloodshed in history.

Insight: Faith teaches us how to appreciate the differences of others.

Information: There was a parade on that first Palm Sunday.

Insight: They had no idea what their celebration marked.

Insight and information are important in all of our lives. Over the last three years All God's Children has received hundreds of letters from people in prison. A big chunk of these are from our work with the facility in Moose Lake but there are dozens of other facilities across the state and in other states where gay men hear about MCC and they contact us. Often the questions I receive from them are information questions. I have found that what they really want to receive is insight. "Does God really love unconditionally – even someone like me, someone who has done the things I have done, been the person I have been?" Do you hear that there is more to that question than information? There is really no data that I can show them. I can simply share my experience of the presence of God.

We go to school to learn information. We come to church to gain insight. Now, true, you will often obtain one with the other, but we shouldn't confuse them. Insight gives us clues as to what to do with the information we have learned.

Insight happens in lots of unexpected places. He's one example. You may have heard about Louis Marinelli, the man who organized The National Organization for Marriage's (NOM) strategy for opposing marriage equality for GLBTQ couples. He has now become a supporter of marriage equality. This is remarkable because he was someone who worked against marriage equality for years, producing Youtube videos that were vitriolic and full of misinformation, publishing blogs and web-posts for NOM propaganda and even setting up NOM's Facebook page for them. He helped organize the bus tour that NOM brought to Minnesota along with several other states this past summer. His experience on that tour gave him insight into the lives of real gay people. He met some of the people whose relationships he was challenging. The result was a change that mere information previously had not been able to accomplish. Insight changes us. Sometimes we don't like change. **Correct that, we never like change** but with insight we come to see how change is beneficial.

In our reading from Isaiah, the Suffering Servant comes offering the word that sustains the weary. Insight happens in unexpected places. And insight often comes with a cost.

What is the cost for Isaiah's Suffering Servant to offer this sustaining word? His back is beaten, beard is pulled out by the roots while mocking and spitting are unleashed. Sounds pretty disgraceful yet the suffering servant refuses the label of "disgraced." **Do you hear how that is more than information?** To take those cruel and painful experiences inflicted willfully on one's person as information would bring a conclusion of helplessness, fear, anger and disgrace. Insight allowed those experiences to be transformed into grace. What was the insight he discovered? The actions of others don't define us. We get to choose the meaning of our experience. Letting others determine that meaning means we have given our power away. Insight changes us.

Sometimes we call that insight inspiration, the work of Holy Spirit, the presence of God or just a flash in our brain. **I don't care what label you put on it, I just want you to know that you can have it. And I want you to know that there are people in your life who need to know they can have it. You** might be the source of insight that happens for someone else.

All of us have probably had the experience of becoming so mired in our own issues or problems or difficulties that it seems to overwhelm our ability to find a way out. Have you been there? Or maybe you've found yourself caught up in a big parade where everybody seems to be cheering for the same thing. These kinds of parades happen when there is an assumption that everybody thinks alike. I'm paying too much in taxes. That's a parade we like to join. **I mean, who isn't for keeping a little more of your paycheck?** Then we see what lives will suffer if that social contract to help the most vulnerable goes away and some of us wonder, is this the right parade for me? Insight changes us.

Or maybe you've found yourself caught up in a parade of discontent. There's the saying that "misery loves company" **and enough company makes a parade.** I don't like this or I don't think that is being done right. But before you paint your sign and create your chant, maybe there is a way for you to be part of the solution that could make the parade unnecessary. Insight changes us.

Just know this. Insight will cost you. It will encourage you to resist the tide of assumption. It will mean that you not go along mindlessly with the flow. It will bring anger and resentment and resistance.

When everyone was waving their palms that day entering Jerusalem, Jesus came into the city palm-less. The gospel story tells us he went into the temple and turned over the money changers table because he recognized how out of whack the mindless parade had become.

Is it any surprise that most of us go through our day mindless? Do you realize how much information your brain is processing all the time? Millions of bits of data come into your brain every second of the day. Most of it is unconscious. That's why we get feelings sometimes but

we're not sure why we're feeling something. Have you had that happen? Something feels strange or off or good or exciting and we're not sure why. The information is missing or hasn't been processed. When the moment of insight happens, the information comes together in a way that makes sense or inspires or gives us an "ah ha!" and suddenly there is a congruence of feeling and information.

Over the next week we travel through the most poignant part of the story of Jesus. Some of us have been in this parade before. We know the story. We know what happens. We don't have to even think about it. If that is you, then I want to ask you to do something this time around. **Pay attention.** What is the story saying to your life? How do the things that happened to Jesus impact who you are? What can we learn about how we are called to challenge unjust and exploitive systems and situations? What are the costs of insight that we are willing to bear to make this world a better place for all of us?

If you are someone who is new to this story – who doesn't know what happens or you're seeing it with new eyes – I want to ask you to share your sense of wonder with others. What is the story saying to your life? How do the things that happened to Jesus impact who you are? What can we learn about how we are called to challenge unjust and exploitive systems and situations? What are the costs of insight that we are willing to bear to make this world a better place for all of us?

Our world loves chasing parades. What would it mean for you to come before God palm-less?

Sources:

[www.homileticonline.com](http://www.homileticonline.com) The Greatest Teacher, April 2011.

<http://politicalticker.blogs.cnn.com/2011/04/12/civil-war-still-divides-americans/?hpt=C1>