

GUIDE ME

Week #5 of the 6-Week Lenten/Easter Series, "Space for Grace"

April 3, 2022

With Guest Minister Rev. Dr. Michele Whittington

Get ready! [Congregation laughs] My soul ... I'm diving in! Are you ready to dive in this morning?
[Congregation whoops and applauds] Yes! Yes! To dive in; to create more "Space for Grace," which is the theme of this Lenten series that Rev. Maraj has been exploring with us these last many weeks. Get ready to be inspired today!

So let's anchor that, if you will, by saying, *"I'm ready."*

[Congregation]: *"I'm ready!"*

"My soul is ready!"

[Congregation]: *"My soul is ready!"*

"I am here to be inspired!"

[Congregation]: *"I am here to be inspired!"*

Now, turn to a neighbor and ask them, *"Are you ready?"* [Congregation has conversations with neighbors]

What did they say? [Congregation laughs] Did they say, *"Yes"*? Alright! Well, good! Because we're going to!

Today the theme is, "Inspire Me." And this is Week #5 in our Lenten "Space for Grace" series. Lent being a time of 40 days of preparation. As Jesus spent 40 days preparing for his ministry in prayer and fasting and meditation, we have been spending here with Rev. Maraj 40 days. And it will culminate next week on Easter Sunday.

I'm so honored to be here today to present today the idea of being inspired to answer the call that God has in your heart. That God has placed in your heart. To answer the call to be more than you thought you could possibly be. And the message that Jesus taught us on Palm Sunday is really beautiful and supportive of our day today.

So we're going to speak about three decisions that Jesus made that prepared him -- that created a space for grace even more in him -- and prepared him to do what he came to do. To answer his profound call. We're going to look at three decisions that he made that are metaphorical for decisions that we can make.

And one thing I love about exploring the Bible is to look at it, yes, as historical occurrences; yes, as a sacred text. Yes! And also to look at every single character in it and everything that happens as a metaphor for our relationship to God.

So today, everything that I'm going to talk about -- the three decisions that Jesus made related to Palm Sunday -- are decisions that you can make related to your life.

So please apply this all to yourself today. I'll be inviting you to do that throughout, but that's a little "heads up" to apply what we're going to talk about today to you and your life and your spiritual evolution.

So what did he do? What decisions did he make? There are three, and I want to look at the three of them today.

The first one was his decision to ride into Jerusalem, knowing full well that he was putting himself in physical danger. Knowing full well that, in fact, the greatest danger of all to our physical bodies, and that's death. He knew that and, yet, he rode in anyway. That's a pretty big decision.

Decision two was to toss out the money changers in the temple. He got kind of angry and threw them out. Why did he do that? We'll talk about it.

And the third decision was, despite his human fear and his despair, he allowed himself to be crucified so that he might fulfill his purpose.

So those are the three decisions we're going to look at today, and my hope, my prayer, my desire is that each of us will be inspired to live a higher life, a more expansive life, a life more fully in God by these examples.

So the first one: deciding to ride into Jerusalem. So here's the deal. I mean, Jesus was preaching and teaching and healing and going to weddings and changing water into wine and raising people from the dead ... I mean, he was having a ... I'd say that's probably a good time! [Congregation laughs] For three years! His ministry was flourishing; he had just a follower or two, right? [Laughs] Hordes of people, thousands of people following him and listening to him.

And yet, he decided to waltz into Jerusalem. Not just waltz, actually; ride. He decided to ride into Jerusalem, knowing that the Pharisees and the Sadducees were very unhappy with him, and that the death of his physical body awaited. And yet, he made the decision to do that.

So when we read about his story about his triumphant -- and it was a triumphant -- entry into Jerusalem, the first thing that we can take from this is that he had deep and profound conviction of purpose. He was profoundly connected to his purpose here in life. And so he did ride in triumphantly. And he rode in with great authority. And he was being hailed as a king by those who watched him. And they showed him honor and respect by putting palm fronds down in front of him, so when he rode over them that was actually a sign of honor.

So I want to digress for just one half a second and tell you a tiny little story about a little boy who woke up sick home Sunday morning. Sore throat. And so he didn't go to church with his family; stayed home with the babysitter. So when his family got home, they had palm fronds with them. And the little boy said, "*Why do you have palm fronds?*"

And they said, "*Well, because people laid them in front of Jesus as he rode by.*"

And the little boy said, "*You've got to be kidding! The one day I don't go to church, and Jesus shows up?!?*" [Congregation laughs] Thank you for clapping, you three people over there. [Congregation laughs] I do appreciate that very, very much. [Laughs]

So, yes; palm fronds in front of him were an absolute symbol of honor and triumph. Despite the fact of what was going to happen, he did that. So he did that because he had purpose. He was "on purpose." And my question for you this morning is: Are you "on purpose"? Are you "on purpose" in your life?

Now, I know -- because I can read your minds; I'm getting it right here -- that many of you are thinking, "*I have no idea what my purpose is. I don't know; I've struggled all my life to figure out my purpose. I can't figure out my purpose.*"

Yeah. It is not, my friends, rocket science. Your purpose is three-fold, and here it is. I've told you this before, by the way. I see a lot of my former congregants in the pews here ... Oh, you don't have pews; you have chairs. It's so cool that you have chairs. But you forgot, I suspect. Or maybe you've never heard this, so I'm going to tell you now.

Here is your purpose in life: to do three things. Number one: To awaken to who and what you are in God. Number two: To awaken to who and what God is in and through you. Number three: To share your gifts with the world. That's it. That is your purpose. It's been implanted, imbedded in all of us. Some of us go to sleep to it; we think we don't know it. We forget it. But that is it! To become aware and awake to who and what we are in God; become awake to who and what God is in and through us; and to share our gifts with the world. That's our purpose. So now you know. Now you know!

So say this: "*I now know my purpose!*"

[Congregation]: *"I now know my purpose!"*

Do I dare ask you to say back to me what it is? Should we try it? Okay; I'll say it first, just a reminder. So this is what you're going to do: *"My purpose is ..."* and then you're going to say, *"To awaken to who and what I am in God."*

[With congregation]: *"My purpose is to awaken to who and what I am in God."*

Alright, not bad. I wanted to see if you could do it without me. That's not bad! Let's try the second one; I'll help you out. I'll say it first.

"My purpose is to awaken to who and what God is in and through me."

[With congregation]: *"To awaken to who and what God is in and through me."*

And the last one is: *"My purpose is to share my gifts with the world."*

[With congregation]: *"My purpose is to share my gifts with the world."*

That's it! That's it! Have conviction of that, just like Jesus had conviction of his purpose to ride into Jerusalem. Have conviction that that is your purpose!

Now, do you think it was easy for Jesus to ride into Jerusalem, knowing what was going to happen? I suspect not! I suspect that took a lot of strength, a lot of courage.

And if it weren't enough what he was looking forward to, he chose to ride in, which was actually a breaking of one of the 600 Jewish laws of the time. He broke the law by riding in. The law said at that time when the Jews came into Jerusalem for Passover, they must walk. But he didn't! He said, *"Hmmm. Forget it; I'm not going to do that. I'm going to ride in."*

Maybe he did that to fulfill a prophesy in the Old Testament. That's what Matthew says in the Gospel of Matthew. The other Gospels don't mention that, but Matthew does. Or maybe he just did it to say, *"I don't believe in the old, worn-out ways."* But whatever reason he did it, it took courage.

So will it take courage, perhaps, for you to live your purpose? Yes! It might. It might be scary; yup! It might. It might mean standing up for your belief in the face of other people's beliefs that aren't the same. It might mean not getting hung up into mass consciousness and mass hysteria around things that are going on on the outside. It might take courage to share your gifts, because you think they -- or you -- aren't good enough. Which, by the way, they are, and you are. But you might think they're not.

So, yes, it takes courage to live "on purpose." But let us be inspired by Jesus' ride into Jerusalem to answer the call to live on purpose, and to have the courage to do it.

So the second thing he did -- the second decision he made -- that absolutely is an amazing metaphor for us, and that is the clearing out of the temple. Clearing the money-changers out of the temple. Tossing their tables over, kicking them out. Why did he do that? He did that ...

You know, Jesus spoke in parables all the time. I think this was a parabolic ... is that a word? I don't know ... not sure it actually means parable. But anyway ... [laughs]

I think he was giving us a parable in action. Because, for us, the meaning of that is: Let us clean out the temple -- this temple [points to herself]. What is inside that is "stealing" and "thieving" and keeping us from living our purpose? What habits of thought? What habits of action? What beliefs are we holding on to? What anger, resentment, hurt is hanging on inside of us that is thieving away our ability to live from purpose?

Jesus said to the Pharisees, and I really love this quote. It shows up in Matthew. He says, *"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup, that the outside of them may be clean, as well."*

We can spend a lot of time -- this isn't a judgement; it's just a statement. I'm as guilty of it as anyone of making sure the outside is nice and shiny and looks good and is attractive. And, you know, we've got the right job and we drive the right car. And there's nothing wrong with that; I love my hot little car. It's amazing! [Congregation laughs]

But that's not what really matters! [Laughs] But we spend a lot of time on the outside. And sometimes on the inside there are those things that I just mentioned: the beliefs that don't serve us; the ideas that stop us; the anger that keep us trapped. Jesus was saying clean those out, and then the outside will be clean, as well.

So this morning ... I love to make things very practical. I'm going to ask you: Is there something going on inside of you that does not serve you? That might keep you from living your purpose with full conviction? A belief? A habit? An anger? What might be there in you that you can identify this morning and say, *"I'm going to clean my temple out. I'm going to clean my temple; just like Jesus cleaned the temple, I am this morning going to clean out my temple."*

So I invite you to close your eyes for just a moment. And take a really deep breath. And bring that idea that you just came to in mind. Bring it in mind; bring it in heart. And I want you to say quietly, actually internally; say internally to yourself, *"Today I clean out the temple of my consciousness. Today I clean out the temple of my consciousness."*

"Today I am freer to answer the call of my soul's purpose. Today I am freer to answer the call of my soul's purpose."

Take another deep breath and, as you do one final deep breath, on that exhale really feel whatever it is that you're letting go, feel it go. Feel it go. Feel it go.

And now come back. Come back to me; open your eyes. Now that you've done this -- and I hope you all did that! -- you really have created space in your life by letting that go. Your heart has done that. But your head might not catch up right away. So the idea, the thought, the limiting belief, the anger -- whatever it is -- might want to come back in your head. Because it takes the head long ... a long time sometimes. But it takes a while, at least, for it to catch up with the heart.

So just know, if that comes back -- whatever that old thing is that you just let go of -- just say to it, *"No; no; no! I let go of you on Sunday, April 10, Palm Sunday at 11:42."* [Congregation laughs] *"I let that go!"* You tell it that a couple of times, and your brain will get it: *"Oh, that is gone. That is gone."*

So that was the second decision Jesus made that can be an amazing inspiration for us in our lives. Living into our own greatness and our own purpose and our own transformation and expansion.

The third decision he made, of course, was the hardest one of all. And that was, despite his human fear - - despite his human despair -- he allowed himself to be crucified. Now, I'm sure many of you know the Biblical story of Jesus going to the Garden of Gethsemane. Falling down and praying, *"Oh Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me."* Let this pass cup pass from me. Three times he said, *"Let this cup pass from me."*

How many of us have ever said something similar? *"Oh God, let this cup pass from me? Let this challenge, this problem, this pain go away! I don't like it; I don't want it here. Make it go away!"* I suspect we've all said that at one point or another in our lives, because this human experience is fraught with challenges. It just is! It just is.

But Jesus' example can inspire us completely to know what to do by his words and his actions. He said after, *"Let this cup pass from me,"* saying that three times, he said, *"Nevertheless, not my will, but Thy will." Not my will, but Thy will.*

Now, for some of us -- myself included -- who grew up in a more traditional Christian background, we may have a belief (or have grown up with a belief) that God's will brought on not good things sometimes. Brought on pain and suffering: *"Well, it's God's will that you've got that."* Right? No! In New

Thought -- in our beautiful metaphysical teachings -- we say that is not God's will! God's will is only and always for the highest evolution of our souls. [Congregant: "Amen!"] Thank you! And praise Jesus! [Congregation laughs]

It is always for the highest evolution of our expression. Because we are expressions of God! And so God, through us, is ever through us as is, is evolving. God does not evolve, itself, because God is whole, perfect and complete. And that cannot evolve. But as an expression in this human form, it's always evolving to a higher level. So anything and everything -- no matter what it looks like, sounds like, feels like -- it is for our highest good. That is God's will.

So when we can say, "*Not my will, God -- my will is I don't want this; go away -- but Thine,*" we are saying, "*I surrender to the higher good that is here for me if I'm willing to stick it out. If I'm willing to do what I need to do.*"

And I'm not saying it can be easy. I know every one of us have gone through challenges that were very difficult. I have! I know you have. And yet, how many of us can say -- and I'm hoping that, like, all the room holds their hands up ... That's a little warning! How many of us can say that you can think back of a really difficult time in your life -- a challenge; something that was really painful -- and now as you look back on it, you see that it helped you become the person you are today. And without it, you would not be the person you are today.

Can anybody say "Yes" to that? I see a lot of you. Good! Almost all of you! That's good. The rest of you, really listen up to this. [Congregation laughs] Because you're the ones apparently who need to hear this. [Laughs] Not my will, but Thine. Knowing that "thine" is always, always for the highest and best good.

Three decisions that Jesus made to prepare himself for his transformation, which Rev. Richard will talk about next week. The preparation is important. The preparation of choosing -- as Jesus did -- to walk into Jerusalem with conviction of purpose and courage. I invite you this morning to walk into your life -- even into your Jerusalems, which are your challenges -- with conviction of purpose. Okay, here's the test. Here it is. Which is: conviction of purpose. Your purpose is to: become awake ... Anyone want to try this with me? [Congregation laughs] Become awake to who and what I am in God. Right?

Say it with me! [With congregation]: "*Be awakened to who and what I am in God.*"

To be awakened to who and what God is in and through me. And to share my gifts with the world. That's purpose, thank you! I like hearing that! [Laughs]

The second decision he made, which is so powerful for us is to throw out -- throw out! -- what is within us that does not serve. That stands in the way of living that purpose. You did some good work today. You might need to do it on something else. Do it again! Remind your brain if it doesn't quite catch up.

And finally ... and finally ... Not my will, but Thine. Even in the face of challenge, know that God is present; God's will is for your and all's highest good for the evolution, for the transformation of our souls.

Happy Palm Sunday! Namaste! [Congregation applauds]

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