

Palm Sunday 2017

Some things can be told; others must be shown.

We receive some knowledge by word, read or heard; other knowledge comes by seeing. And seeing of particular sort, not the seeing of our world, in which images on screens are always around us.

But seeing with intention, as a witness, as one who paid enough attention later to offer testimony.

As one who became a participant in the thing, by being shown.

Things that we teach children come to mind.

Tell them how to tie their shoes and you will be disappointed.

Shooting a lay-up cannot be told.

Not prayer, nor fidelity to promises, nor kindness to others, in the end.

All of these can be told but become real, truly effective when shown.

Little children, John says, let us love not just in word and speech, but in truth and action.

Today we remember that God tried a lot of telling with us.

God's word came and came to us, time and again.

Moses the lawgiver; the long list of prophets; through them God told.

Told us we were loved; told us we were called to love, to the love of God and one another.

We were told so many times that a heart of love beat at the center of the universe, a love that created and that calls all things to flourish in their ultimate purposes.

But the telling was never enough.

The law could be broken; the prophets ignored or beaten or killed.

Tellers of truth often found humanity with its fingers stuck in its ears; humming, saying "I can't hear you!"

And before someone like that, only a showing can take place.

Some of us heard remember Flannery O'Connor's explanation of why her characters were so bizarre:

"When you can assume that your audience holds the same beliefs you do, you can relax and use more normal means of talking to it; when you have to assume that it does not, then you have to make your vision apparent by shock -- to the hard of hearing you shout, and for the almost-blind you draw large and startling figures."

Through all the telling, we the audience, were not won to the beliefs of the Holy One who spoke to us.

And so the shouts of the cross came to us, hard of hearing, and the large and startling figure of the Lord upon it was drawn for us, the almost blind.

Jesus' cross is ever before us as the eternal sign of the depth and breadth of the love of God, who has never accepted our sin, our distancing behavior, who has overcome them in the life and death of Jesus, who invites us to repent and believe, to see and be changed forever.