

**Sunday, April 5, 11:15 Palm Sunday Sermon, the Rev. Phillip A. Jackson**

**“From Theory to Reality”**

On this unusual Palm Sunday, the Rev. Phil Jackson asks us to consider what happens when we leave theory and experience the reality of Good Friday.

**Sermon Transcript:**

Please be seated.

I read an essay this week about phatic speech, P-H-A-T-I-C. Phatic is the Greek for speech and phatos rather, is the Greek refers speech and phatic speech according to the author, a guy named Richard Hughes Gibson, who's a professor at Wheaton College, phatic speech is the type of speech we do when we see each other day-to-day, is the speech that says, how are you doing? Doing okay? What's going on at home? How are things? It seems that that kind of speech is trivial. But in fact, he says, drawing on in older scholar, he says that type of speech actually serves a purpose, it serves a purpose of binding us together. It may seem trivial, it may seem light, but that type of speech we do when we just check in or just shoot the breeze serves the purpose, the social purpose of bringing us together, or what he calls actually communion. It was this line that hit me this week given where we have been here in New York City for these past several weeks. He said, "Phatic communion is a timeless pursuit, a bedrock aspect of human nature in society." Now, here's the line that got me, "The fundamental human desire for the mere presence of others." Let me say that again, because this is what we have been lacking here in New York City, isn't it? The fundamental human desire for the mere presence of others.

I have felt that acutely these last several weeks and however much we may Zoom, however much we may Webex, however much we may do anything online, nothing compares to the fundamental human, Philip, desire for the mere presence of others.

I miss you all, I miss you all dearly. I miss you all in ways that I didn't even know that I would. I miss you with the fundamental human desire for your mere presence and to celebrate, celebrate is not even the word, isn't? To celebrate Palm Sunday for the first time in my life with, well, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, there are five of us here, celebrate Palm Sunday with five dear people and thank you for being here all instead of throngs is a heartbreak indeed. But that's on a theoretical level, isn't it?

As if I needed a reminder that that is theory, yesterday afternoon I took a walk here in lower Manhattan. Is beautiful day, is the kind of day in early April when things being as they should be, would have been packed outside. There would have been people all up and down Broadway, all down the Seaport, there would have been people everywhere because it was a beautiful day. I went and took a little walk, and I was walking around, and theory became reality when I walked past New York-Presbyterian Hospital.

As I walked past the hospital on the side street, there was a side door. The side door was encased by tint, and the tint coming out of the side door took an L move an L bend, out into the street and the tint lead into a truck, a semi-trailer truck, no cab but it was running, it was a refrigerated truck. As I walked by, I realized what that truck was. Need I spell it out? It was the morgue truck and in that truck, were human bodies. I stopped on the side of it and I blessed it and said a prayer for all those who had died, and theory became reality at that moment. A theory of human contact being a fundamental human need, became

reality at that moment for me here in our beloved New York city at this time when people are dying and people are losing loved ones.

I once heard a preacher, I don't even know where I was or why I was there, I once heard a preacher during Holy Week preaching Easter sermon, and I recall my reaction, which was to turn up my Episcopal nose that he would preach an Easter sermon during Holy Week. I remember thinking you can't possibly get to Easter without going through Good Friday. Don't go there yet sir, you got to go through Good Friday first, and yesterday I realized that that was theory. That was theory.

If for these past years I've lived with Good Friday as theory, this year feels like reality. This year, Good Friday is something we're all going through together. This year. This Year. Good Friday feels like reality.. This year Good Friday is not theory, it's practice. I have been teaching for years that suffering and loss can lead to growth and wisdom. I've been teaching that for years to people that suffering and loss are the fertile soil in which growth and wisdom can develop.

I've been teaching for years that Good Friday leads to Easter Sunday, but that's been theory. What happens when we're really faced with it as we are now? What happens when we're faced with suffering and loss? Will we allow it to let us grow? Will we allow it to grant us wisdom? Will we allow it to be God's?