

**Palm Sunday
April 14, 2019**

**In the name of God, who in Jesus,
taught us the meaning of unconditional Love.
AMEN**

After such a very long Gospel reading, it is a formidable challenge to offer any more words. Still, I would like to share with you some thoughts about this day. For me, today's liturgy is THE most challenging of any we have all year long. Think about it. // Actually the reason for what I am saying is very clear just from the name of this Sunday... PALM SUNDAY ... THE SUNDAY OF THE PASSION .

Most of my life I was spared the challenge of today's liturgy because... just as for any of you who are old time Episcopalians, for most of your life it used to be that Palm Sunday was just that...a Hosanna day. And the Sunday BEFORE PALM SUNDAY was Passion Sunday... the two were separated. In a way, I guess, I am honoring those who are old enough to know how it used to be. But, I also am wanting ALL of us to be together in experiencing the POWER of this day for anyone who claims to be a Christian or maybe even more, for anyone who is searching. Pay attention. Today is an amazing opera.

Having Passion Sunday and Palm Sunday all in one, is a big challenge to me personally. It disturbs me.... and challenges me ...theologically, emotionally and spiritually...precisely because it so graphically SHOUTS that in the midst of life there is death...while we are living, we are dying,...while we are growing up, we are growing old. In the midst of joy, there is so often ...sadness. As the old Judi Collins song said ..." Something's gained, but something's lost in living every day."

Here today in our worship service, we move from the triumphal procession and shouts of HOSANNAH and waving palms... to words of betrayal and crucifixion. We move from the triumphal entrance into Jerusalem to the agony and suffering of Jesus. From the palms to the passion.

This is all pretty powerful stuff. And, I wonder, where are WE in all of this? Where do you find yourself? Do we find that we love the traditional "All Glory Laud And Honor" and feel pretty good ...but then, become resistant when things turn somber and we hear the Good Friday story?

What we experience here this morning in one hour is extended and lived out more fully as we proceed through Holy Week. Just think of all that is in between today and Easter. We have Maundy Thursday which celebrates the essence of what God had in mind when Jesus came to dwell among us. LOVE. The mandate/or Maundy of Maundy Thursday is the new commandment: Love one another as I have loved you. // And there's Good Friday/ God's Friday with the stark reality of the cross saying..."What more can I do?" It is precisely the depth of sacrifice that leads to the height of glory our Lord attained. The name that is above every name...every knee should bow, every tongue confess. /////////////// What is important to see here is that, in the domain of God, power emerges from humility, ultimate authority can come without a compromise to what God expects of us; that service to others and sacrifice for the good of others can be perfect freedom. What is important is to see that the suffering of Christ is present in people throughout the world....in some who are close to us.

We may leave here today in a somber tone...to then go through Holy Week. But, we know the end of the story. We know that Easter follows Good Friday; that evil and injustice are overcome by Love, by God's love, and God's truth. And we are set free from all that would diminish us or hold us in bondage. Free to experience the Easter triumph with the joy of light and flowers and the return of alleluias!

It is a brilliant manifestation of our faith that out of the agony and sorrow comes the joy. This IS the way of the cross. This is the way of Christianity. If we invite Christ into our own agony/our own temptations/our darkness...our yearning for some sign that God is listening and caring....IF we invite Christ in...into our lives...into our journey...

THEN we will begin to know for ourselves how it is that this Sunday is so well named; how it is that WITHIN Passion Sunday is the story of the crowd waving their palms, and how it is that within Palm Sunday is the story of Christ's agony. And how it is that we may find ourselves happy with the celebration of the one part and disturbed by the shift to the Way of the Cross.

The GREAT NEWS is that EVEN THAT is taken into account by Christ...and Easter comes once more. And the glory of God's love is there for us and offered to us new every morning, no matter what...Whether we are part of the crowd who shouts Hosannas ...and then shouts...crucify him...Whether we are part of a silent crowd who doesn't get involved one way or the other... Whether we are pretty certain we KNOW about all this so there is nothing new or disturbing. OR, as I pray may be true for some of us, that we hear the same OLD story as if for the first time and it is strangely new for us and very compelling.

Some years ago a book was written by a noted American historian entitled "When the Cheering Stopped." It was the story of President Woodrow Wilson and the events leading up to and following World War 1. When that war was over President Wilson was an international hero. There was a great spirit of optimism at home and abroad. And people actually believed that the last war had been fought and the world had been made safe for democracy. On his first visit to Paris after the war, President Wilson was greeted by cheering crowds. He was actually more popular than their own heroes. The same thing was true in England... and in Italy.

The cheering lasted about a year. Then it gradually began to stop. It turned out that the political leaders in Europe were more concerned with their own plans and agendas than with a lasting peace. At home, President Wilson ran into opposition in the United States Senate and his League of Nations was not ratified. Under the strain of it all, the president's health began to fail. In the next election his party was defeated. So it was that Woodrow Wilson, a man who barely a year or two earlier had been heralded as the new world hero, came to the end of his days a broken and defeated man.

Think of how it was for Jesus. When he emerged on the public scene, he was quite a sensation, so to speak. He would try to go off to be alone and the people would still follow him. Crowds came to hear what he had to say. The masses lined the streets as he came into town. On Palm Sunday leafy palm branches were spread before him and there were shouts of Hosanna.

But, ... the cheering did not last for long. There came a point where the tide began to turn against him. His critics now began to attack him publicly. That was something new. Before, they had been

afraid to speak out for fear of the masses. Soon the opposition began to snowball. When they discovered that they could not discredit his moral character, they began to take more desperate measures and that is part of today's long Gospel message. Before it was over, Jesus was brought to his knees under the weight of a cross.

Whenever I read the account of Palm Sunday, I remember how the event was depicted in "Jesus Christ, Superstar." The Palm Sunday crowd sings, "Christ, you know I love you. Did you see, I waved?" ///// That's pretty haunting.

THIS SPECIAL DAY calls us to make a choice to receive God's Christ, to allow the living Christ to confront us in our daily lives, in our sin and brokenness and to let our lives be made whole by the power of God's Love. In the words of the theme from The Man of LaMancha, this special day entreats us "To dream the impossible dream; To fight the unbeatable foe; To right the unrightable wrong". It confronts us to speak up when we witness injustice, to risk our own acceptance, or our own comfort by challenging misuse of power. It challenges us to be the voice of those who cannot be heard. //// As we begin this most HOLY WEEK, may we truly say in our hearts, "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!"

In the classic novel, The Robe, there is a character named Marcellus, who had become quite enamored of Jesus. He wrote letters to his fiancée, Diana, in Rome. He told her about Jesus' teachings, about his miracles, then about his crucifixion, and THEN about his resurrection. Finally he informed her that he had decided to become a disciple of Jesus. Well, in her letter of response, Diana said, "What I feared was that all this might affect you. It is a beautiful story. Let it remain so. We don't have to do anything about it, do we?"/////

Oh yes, we do, Diana. As we begin this most HOLY WEEK, may we truly say in our hearts, "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!" //// Hopefully WE will hear the OLD story as if for the first time and that it will be strangely compelling for us...as if we have come HOME, home to where peace passes all understanding. HOME where we are heard and Loved and accepted and treasured. HOME within God's Love...The Body of Christ given for us.

Ride on. Ride on in majesty. Ride on. Ride on, this Love of God until we too manifest that Love to all of your created beings.

AMEN