

## Palm Sunday 2021

“And being found in human form,  
he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—  
even death on a cross.”

My friends, there is so very much we could talk about this morning. My temptation on Palm Sunday, is usually, to keep the message short due to the length of the Passion story. I remember the days when I used to dread going to church on Palm Sunday with the Blessing of the Palms, the procession, the Passion reading, the sermon And the Eucharist. I knew we were looking at a 90-minute service for sure. I would try to just stay home, but Jan made me come since I was the priest. I am Just kidding.

Seriously though, every single reading this morning has something to contribute today.

I know it is a long service, and that may keep people away, but as I have said before, most will only hear the Passion Gospel read today. Sadly, there are too many that rarely hear it because they avoid Palm Sunday and Holy Week, instead skipping right to the Bells, incense, joyful singing, hot cross buns, and children scurrying about hunting eggs filled with candy. Or at least, that was what used to happen on Easter Sunday.

I get it. As we prepare our menus for Easter dinner and our last-minute shopping for Easter baskets, Holy week can certainly feel depressing. For most Episcopalians, this will be the second year of live-streamed Holy Week services, possibly involving palms; but no washing of the feet due to COVID restrictions. No doubt that this year will again be different from what we are used to. The good news, strangely enough, is that due to the pandemic, and live streaming, more folks may tune in to watch services, at times that are more convenient for them.

As we remember Jesus' entry into Jerusalem and the week that follows, we find ourselves at the precipice of our walk with Jesus to the Mount of Olives, the upper room, his betrayal, his arrest, his trial, and his death. In the words of Phillip Brooks, author and Episcopal clergymen, Christianity allows us to "face the music even when we don't like the tune."

We don't ponder the question, "why". Why did Jesus ride into Jerusalem the way that he did? Why did he go to Jerusalem at all, because he knew what awaited him? Through his deity, Jesus knew what had to happen. He had to suffer, die, and be raised from the dead, for salvation to occur for us. But there was part of him who wished it could all just go away. "He said, 'Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want.'

Jesus had to face the music, even if he didn't like the tune. We can relate to that because we are human.

Paul talks about how although Jesus was God, he did not exploit his divinity but instead, 'emptied himself' to become one of us. Even more than that, 'he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross'. So rather than bypassing his fate, Jesus did what he had to do.

Holy Week is a very emotional journey which is why so many have a difficult time traveling it. This is true anytime but the last year has brought a new meaning to walking with Jesus. The portion of Psalm 31 that we have this morning is especially relevant.

'Have mercy on me, O LORD, for I am in trouble; \*

my eye is consumed with sorrow,

and also, my throat and my belly.

10 For my life is wasted with grief,  
and my years with sighing; \*  
my strength fails me because of affliction,  
and my bones are consumed'.

This tells the story of someone who is in **deep pain**. Could Jesus have said similar words to God in the garden? We know he was extremely distressed and agitated with grief. I can only imagine his pain. There are so many who have suffered the loss of loved ones to COVID without being able to hold them or kiss them good-bye. Imagining their pain brings tears to my eyes. People who lost their jobs and businesses. Those who have been treated with the utmost of disrespect and indignities, for no other reason than their race or gender. Those who seem to have gone deeper into poverty with no way to find their way out. There is a gentleman who is in a Red Cross Shelter in Kalamazoo, that I have been talking to for spiritual care. I am not sure of the exact sequence of events, but his apartment complex had a fire just over a week ago. All the residents had to leave. He attempted suicide and was hospitalized. The hospital could not keep him with a mental health diagnosis. He was placed in a cab and arrived at the shelter around 3:00 am on Friday, confused, and without his meds. It will take time and a lot of support for his recovery. There are those who have isolated from friends and family in order to stay safe and to keep their loved ones safe. So many stories like this in 2020 and 2021. In no way would I imply that any of our human sufferings are on par with what Jesus went through, but there is no doubt that Jesus understands our pain. Despite the difficulties and trials that we endure, how do we respond to others in their pain? How do **we** face the music when **we do not like** the tune? According to Phillip Brookes, his mother had a rendition of this adage which went like this: “

"... just bloom where you are planted." However ugly or screeching or demeaning the sound - however awful the conditions, total the rejection, mean the boss, etc. - the Christian doesn't protest the weather, or wait for better weather before working. The Christian who follows Jesus in walking alongside, rather than standing against, looks for ways to serve God even in the most difficult of places. Christians are people who live fully in the thick of things, who live wholly in the thickness of time". End quote

Jesus entered the thickness of time when he entered Jerusalem. He did not do it for himself. He did it first and foremost because it was part of God's plan. He also did it out of an intense **love for us**. Isaiah uses the phrase: "I have set my face like flint", to describe the Messiah's unwavering determination to persevere in the excruciating task set before Him.

There is much that can be said about what our response will be to the passion story that we hear today and then John's version on Good Friday. Like it or not, pleasant, or not, we cannot get to the Resurrection without first traveling through Holy Week. It is simply not possible no matter how much we may wish it to be so. We must walk with Jesus this week so that we will then be able to show others the way through their trials.

We may not like the tune, but we still have to face the music. Jesus makes that a whole lot easier.

Amen