

Palm Sunday 2022

Holy One, thank you for your unmistakable presence! With our senses and our minds, we delight in the gift of life! We honor you with attentive listening and we eagerly wait for your voice. Amen.

Jan will tell you that I often take a very circuitous route to get the sermon to where it ends up on Sunday morning. I can only hope that the Holy Spirit wins out and guides the process. This morning, we again find ourselves at Palm Sunday. I have participated in processions through neighborhoods and around church grounds waving palms and singing. Palm Sunday has been described as one of the joyous celebrations on the church calendar. To a certain extent, I get it, but it is difficult for me to feel the joy on this day. If we are supposed to be celebrating, why read the Passion account today? I always assumed, and I have told you this, that we read the Passion narrative today because very few will hear it read on Good Friday. Turns out, this is not the case.

I came across an article written by one of two official United Methodist representatives to the ecumenical Consultation on Common Texts (CCT) that created and continues to support the Revised Common Lectionary.

He explains that reading the Passion on Palm Sunday had little to do with people missing the reading on Good Friday. He said, "What was really at stake was a recovery of ancient Christian practice, not only of this Sunday, but of Lent itself, a recovery that was part and parcel of many findings of liturgical scholarship and ecumenical work beginning in the late nineteenth century.

The three-year Roman Catholic Lectionary (OLM, its abbreviation in Latin) and revised liturgical calendar that came out of the reforms of Vatican II was the first significant flowering of recovery of Lent and Holy Week.

The recovery of Lent was not simply about re-syncing our current calendars with more ancient ones. Instead, it was primarily about recovering the church's mission of discipling people in the way of Jesus and realigning our worship practices to support that mission." End quote

In the early church, people preparing to be baptized, underwent a three-year process of learning how to pray, how to listen to and learn from Scripture, how to care for the poor, the sick, and the orphans, how to care for and advocate for the needs of older people. This intense process led them to Holy Week and the path of Jesus to the cross. Over the centuries, the theme of Lent shifted from a focus of learning for the catechumenes and their congregations, to a time of personal sacrifice for our sins.

As a result of the ecumenical work begun with the Common Lectionary (1983) and the Revised Common Lectionary (1992), we have come back to a recovered Palm/Passion Sunday as the hinge between a recovered Lent and a more intense Holy Week.

So, knowing just a little, about where we have come from and where we find ourselves on Palm Sunday 2022, what does it mean for us, especially when many congregations have no one in the catechumenate process and have not seen an adult Baptism in years? How many of us had an intense learning process in the ways of Jesus, prior to our Baptism, let alone our confirmation?

In all fairness, there are many congregations in our Diocese that have an excellent adult education program in place as well as classes for the younger folks. Most of us, however, rely on the Sunday Sermon to learn about and reinforce living the way of Jesus in our lives.

I have always tried to make the sermons relevant to what is happening around us within society as they relate to our lives as followers of Jesus. Often, that type of message is hard for us to hear, let alone put into practice.

Walking in the footsteps of Jesus has never been easy.

I wanted to share part of a Palm Sunday sermon that was given in 1968 by

Lutheran Pastor Richard Dahlin. It really hit home for me this week. He preached;

“I usually approach Palm Sunday with a degree of exhilaration, with a sense of triumph.

Not like Easter to be sure, for the cross yet looms before us, Black Friday casts its shadow on this day. But yet we normally, kind of, celebrate this day in commemoration of Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

But today we are filled with a sense of apprehension. We are now questioning our own destiny. We find ourselves torn within as we are called on to make great decisions.

When I began to study the Palm Sunday text earlier this week, I had the feeling that I was reading something that was taking place right here and now. And reading the newspapers these last two days has been just like reading the Bible. Never in my life have I seen contemporary events so closely parallel a portion of Scripture. Let me show you what I mean.

Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem was a non-violent demonstration. By this time, the religious authorities were filled with hatred toward Jesus. His teaching, His revelation of God was a threat to their establishment. If He was allowed to continue, their whole religious system, their jobs, their social standing, their whole way of life was in grave danger of crumbling. They had decided that Jesus must be done away with.

This was also the time of the feast of the Passover. Thousands of pilgrims, devout Jews from all over the Mediterranean world were in Jerusalem for the celebration of this great feast. National feelings always ran high at this time of year. The Jews longed for independence from Rome and were always looking for the opportune time, and the opportune leader, to lead them in revolt.

It was into this kind of an excitable, tension-filled situation that Jesus came, when He entered Jerusalem that day. He didn't just sneak into the city. He entered like a king. He came on a mount. A crowd went before Him, and a crowd followed after Him. They spread their garments before Him and hailed Him as a King. But his mount was not a horse, the mount of war, but rather an ass, the mount of peace. He wore no sword. He called for no army. He did not call for the people to revolt against Rome. But He went to the temple and turned over the tables of the money changers and chased them out. He demonstrated against the ungodly practices that were being carried out in the name of God.

Four nights later as He was with His disciples in the Garden praying, He was arrested by men dressed in armour and carrying clubs and swords. And the next day after an unjust trial in a kangaroo court, He was killed on a cross.

Ten days ago, a man who throughout his life was dedicated to peace, love, and brotherhood, who during the past twelve years had led hundreds of non-violent demonstrations in protest of racial injustices in Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, Florida, Illinois and Washington, D.C., this man led a protest in Memphis, Tennessee.

Thursday night as he was leaving his motel room to go get a bite to eat, he was killed by an assassin's bullet. A man who preached and taught and lived nonviolence was violently killed. He now has joined that long list of those who have died violently at the

hands of white racists—Medgar Evers, James Reeb, Mrs. Louzzio and the four Sunday School pupils in that Birmingham church, plus many, many others.

The comedian Dick Gregory has said:

“It’s amazing how we come to church every Sunday and cry over the crucifixion of Christ, and we do not cry over these things that are going on around and among us. If Jesus were here now and saw these things, He would cry. And He would take those nails again, for us, for this problem. It just so happened that in His day and time, religion was the big problem. Today it is color.”

You and I helped kill Martin Luther King. We are a part of our society which breeds men like his assassin. Our society is riddled through with hatred, prejudice and violence. For the first time since Abraham Lincoln, our President has spoken publicly about divisiveness which is tearing our nation apart. We are divided and torn apart over the war in Viet Nam and over race.

One hundred years ago our forefathers fought a war to end that inhuman and un-American institution—slavery. Now we are on the brink of another Civil War to decide whether or not we are going to give the Negro the freedom we promised him a hundred years ago. They have been an exceedingly patient people. They have endured more indignities, injustices, and persecution than any other people on the face of the earth. And this in a supposedly free and Christian nation. We are now facing an hour of great peril.

Dr. Martin Luther King led non-violent protests in the face of violence from the white establishment—in Birmingham, Montgomery, Selma, Chicago, and other places. In these cases, it was the Black (Negro) community that acted like Christ. No bricks, stones,

clubs, or guns were in their hands. They were spit upon, kicked, clubbed by the police, flattened by powerful fire hoses, and locked up in cold, dirty jails. Thousands were threatened, many killed.

Now the apostle of non-violence is Dr. King and there are many in the Negro community who are advocating and striking out in violence. Now we, the white community, are being called on by God to react in a non-violent, Christian way. The question is, do we have the moral courage to take the hatred and rage of the Black community upon us, without striking back? Do we have enough Christian love to suffer-innocently at the hands of their hatred, even as they in the past took it, when we were handing it out? This time we are now facing is far more difficult for us, the white community than it was before Dr. King died. He led his people in the way of Christ. All that was asked of us was that we give them justice.

But now with the Black community beginning to erupt in violence, we are called on to be Christian, to suffer innocently, to turn the other cheek. If we will not return evil with good, then I am afraid that we shall have civil war, blood for blood, gun for gun, black against white, brother against brother.” End quote.

He goes on to advocate educating oneself about the effects of racism on society and writing to their congressman about passing the Civil Rights Act. He concludes with the following: “Let’s quit building crosses! Let’s burn all of the hatred and violence out of our nation with love. We have had enough crucifixions! Let’s not nail Christ to any more crosses. He died to free us from hatred. He died to put an end to prejudice. He died to make all men free, black and white, red and yellow, American and Vietnamese, capitalist and communist. Sing your Hosannas, your praises to this humble, non-violent,

demonstrating King, Jesus Christ. But if you do, then be ready to give up all bigotry, your prejudice, your claim to your rights. Be willing to die that men might live!!

If you are not ready to go the second mile, to give the Negro his rights, then be sure that you are a part of a new Good Friday crowd, crying out for Christ's blood. Palm Sunday celebrations are grand and glorious if you know what you are doing, if you mean what you say, and if you go with Christ all the way, even unto the Holy hill." End quote

Pastor Dahlin was not giving his sermon in Montgomery or Birmingham AL. He was not preaching in Mississippi, Tennessee, or Georgia. His church was in Milwaukee, WI. He told his granddaughter in 2016, that the congregation was dead silent as he preached and some even stood up and walked out, some never to return. But he said he was more "on" that day than ever before. He KNEW he had to preach this.

Walking the way of Jesus is not easy, and yes, it **can be**, and sometimes will be, dangerous. Jesus has called us to love those who are different than us and may hate us. It requires following Jesus all the way to the cross. Holy week should be just as intense for us as it is for those about to be baptized during the Easter Vigil. Please use this week as the Church intends as we walk the path to the cross. Amen!