

The Rev. Dr. Hilary B. Smith

Holy Comforter

Richmond, VA

March 20, 2016; Palm Sunday, Passion Sunday

Readings: Luke 19:28-40; Isaiah 50:4-9a; Psalm 31:9-16; Philippians 2:5-11;
Luke 22:39---23:49-56.

Ready?

Palm Sunday invites us to be with Jesus...we are with Jesus as his followers, his friends; we welcome him and celebrate him...we enter the story, waving our palms and singing his praises.

This day, also known as Passion Sunday, invites us, or perhaps it might be more accurate to say forces us, to be with Jesus in his suffering, and we enter the story as those who shout "crucify."

There was a time when Palm Sunday was just Palm Sunday...just the celebration, and people came back to church on Good Friday to enter the Passion to go to the cross with Jesus.

But at a certain point, it was decided by the Church to have both in this one service because the reality of life is that it is difficult to come back on Friday.

A concession to the culture, yes, but having both today gives us a chance to take in the dramatic nature of these last days, this last week, we have a sense of how quickly the shift happened at the time...by holding the experience of joy and sorrow in tension.

By walking with Jesus today and this week, we open our hearts to God, who is preparing us to celebrate the joy of Easter.

We imagine the setting, the scenes, we have today...and we journey with Jesus who rides by, and we wave our palms and celebrate; and we journey with Jesus to the cross.

In the Ignatian way of praying, I encourage you to imagine yourself being

there...what does it look like, how does Jesus seem, does he look at you, what is he desiring to share with you, what do you desire to share with him?

Last Sunday, I asked the question, “how close do we want to be?”
 How close do we really want to be to God --- to Jesus?
 To answer that question, we need to know something about Jesus...who he is...who he is for us.
 This Sunday tells us a lot.

Consider Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem---he rides in like a King, but the way he does it changes the understanding of Kingship and power.

Jesus is humble; Jesus is with the people; Jesus’ strength does not depend on military might but on his relationship with God his Father/Mother.

Jesus is the One who shows us the way to victory, but it is different...than what we are used to...what they were used to.
 Are we ready for this Jesus?

In our world that seems to be dominated by those who claim that we need to be afraid and we need to arm ourselves for the fight, perhaps we are very ready to follow this Jesus who shows us strength in gentleness and vulnerability.

Kayla McClurg, in her reflection on the Palm Gospel reading, states that all is ready...the colt is ready...it will be there...Jesus is ready...the crowd is ready for their King... but what about us are we ready?

“Are we ready to serve him, whatever his need, ready to share his news, ready to shout his praise, [and looking beyond the celebration] ready to hide out in despair and emerge to begin again?

On the one hand, nothing depends on our readiness.

The stones along the path will cry out in our stead.”

Leaning into the Good Friday aspect of this she says, “But think what we

will miss, how the light within us will dim, how empty of joy we will be, if we do not show up fully for the journey.”¹

And so we pray today, to follow the way that leads to eternal life...this way leads us to and through the cross---the cross being darkness and death, struggle and defeat, seeming defeat...we also pray that we “may walk in the way of his suffering, and also share in his resurrection.”

Our Presiding Bishop Michael Curry speaks often of the Way of Jesus, which is the way of truth and joy but not an easy truth and not a cheap joy.

For what we find, as we consider how ready we are to follow in this Way of Jesus, to celebrate with palms, but then to be with him in his arrest, trial, suffering and death, as we consider how ready we are and how close we want to be...we find that these are the questions that we really want to ask God...or perhaps need to ask God first, before we can answer them.

Are you there for me, God?

How close are you to me, to my life, to my joy and my pain?

These are the questions that God answered through the life of Christ...in all that Jesus said and did, and especially in these great acts of love that we remember this week.

In all honesty, we are never really ready to follow Jesus everywhere; we are never the perfect disciples.

No one is; no one ever has been.

Peter shows us how human it is to deny knowing Jesus, even after being so close to him, so devoted.

Peter shows us how being human means being one who desires

¹ Kayla McClurg, *Passage By Passage, A Gospel Journey, Revised Common Lectionary Year C*. Washington D.C.: The Church of the Savior, 2015, p. 23. Published by the Church of the Savior and can be ordered at <http://inwardoutward.org/inprint/>

closeness to Jesus sometimes...but not all the time.

So perhaps this year, the question to ask on this day and throughout Holy Week is not “how ready am I, how close do I want to be to Jesus?, “ but **how ready is Jesus**...to ask God, how close do you, God, want to be to me, to us, to our world? For when we open our hearts and our minds to God in asking that question...we become more open to God’s answer...and God’s answer is known in very specific ways this week, which have both universal application and personal meaning.

And when we get to that place with Jesus...with Jesus on the cross...to know that all our pain, our fear, our failures, our searching, our doubt, our despair...that Jesus takes all that to the cross with him...it is all there...and death comes, death is known...He really dies, just as we do...He really suffers, just as we do....

When we dare to be close to the cross...when we know Jesus there...we find that He knows us and all our crosses.

On the cross, Jesus embraces us in all our brokenness and the world’s brokenness...he holds us...he holds it all.

Let us pray,

O God, thank you for inviting us to celebrate Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem, to know him as our King. Help us also to share in this way of the cross with Jesus, that we may know in a deep and personal way the power of his sacrifice. Amen.