

The Rev. Dr. Hilary B. Smith

Holy Comforter

Richmond Va

April 9, 2017; Palm/Passion Sunday

Readings: *Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29; Matthew 21:1-11; Isaiah 50:4-9a; Psalm 31:9-16; Philippians 2:5-11; Matthew 27:11-54.*

## Entering Holy Week with Cheers and Tears

We enter Holy Week being shaken by the dramatic shift of the energy around Jesus.

We call this day, Palm Sunday but also the Sunday of the Passion.

As you may know, in the past, Palm Sunday was just Palm Sunday, and you had to come to church on Good Friday to hear and remember the events of the Passion.

Some would say, and I would say from one perspective, that bringing these two events together in one service was done to make it easier for people to experience the Passion, since coming to church on Friday is not easy.

But is Holy Week supposed to be easy?

Did we sell out to the culture?

Perhaps, but there is a positive way to view what we are about today: we are getting it all; we are getting a view of all the emotion around Jesus, about him,

all of the love, all of the confusion, all of the  
hate, all of the suffering and sadness.  
Such was his life, which is intensified in this last week.  
As we open our hearts to the emotion of this service...the  
joy and the pain, perhaps we are opening to  
observing all of Holy Week...

this day makes us want to be in church all week...with  
members of our community...knowing the life of  
Christ together...knowing more about your/my  
life in Christ, and our life in Christ as a community.

For, when we walk this week together, with each other  
and Jesus, we enter deep levels of spiritual realities  
together, and that changes us, deepens our  
understanding, our experience of being a Christian  
and being a Christian community.

Holy Week gives us key moments during the last days of  
Jesus' life on this earth, in the way that he was  
known up to the day of his death.

This last week contains it all.

This last week gave it all.

This last week shapes it all...all that has happened since.

We are people who are broken open, as Jesus was; we  
follow the one who shows us the way...the difficult  
way, the hard way...starting with shouts of joy

and faith, and ending alone, fear and  
indifference in the air, and abandoned  
by most.

This is not the end of the story, of Jesus' story, or of ours,  
but it is a crucial part of the story.

God invites us to enter fully into this Holy Week...to be  
with Jesus...to come to know him better....to come to  
know ourselves as his friends at this point in our  
lives, at this point in the life of our world.

God entered our lives and the life of our world fully  
through Jesus the Christ...Holy Week helps us to  
know and experience more about such  
companionship, such love.

There are cheers and there are tears.

Even though today we have heard the Passion, the story  
of Jesus dying on the cross, hold on to some of the  
joy of the entrance into Jerusalem as you start  
this week.

On Monday and Tuesday, we will offer, what I call,  
Silent/Centering Prayer Eucharists at 7:00pm.

Gathering in the choir area, we will hear a reading or two,  
have significant times of silence, 27 minutes out of a  
40- 45 minute service, and then share

communion together.

These services are an excellent way to bring the joy of the Palms into a quiet space, still feeling the joy, but also knowing we are preparing to be with Jesus this week for all that will transpire.

On Wednesday, we will have our 12:15pm service, a Eucharist with prayers for healing.

A good opportunity during Holy Week to connect with God's healing love.

Then we begin the great three days, the Triduum, of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday, which features the Easter Vigil, the first Eucharist of Easter.

Why did people love Jesus and shout Hosanna when he entered Jerusalem for that last week?

Well, for many reasons, but certain the reasons that we remember and celebrate on Maundy Thursday -- Jesus taught, showed, and lived what it means to care for others...he washed their feet that last night together to make the point very clear.

And for the reason that through Jesus, community came to be...what would be Christian community, like ours.

On Maundy Thursday we remember how he taught us to break the bread and take the wine, and share the meal.

At the conclusion of that service, we will take the remaining sacrament to the Lady Chapel, where the altar of repose will be.

We are invited to sit vigil in the chapel through the night, as we remember Jesus in the garden, who asked his friends to stay awake and be with him.

Can you feel it how the energy of the week moves?

Then we get to Good Friday.

With the Stations of the Cross at Noon, we can enter into the scenes that history/tradition records of Jesus carrying the cross.

Our service is Ignatian in design and is intended to bring us to those scenes.

The service at 7pm will be the Liturgy for the Day, which will include the veneration of the cross, when we bring the big wooden cross into the church; we kneel, we can go it and touch it, kiss it, bow to it, sit before it.

On Saturday, there is a thin place, a time during the day between death and life.

Our 10:00am service for Holy Saturday, will invite us into that space.

Can you feel it?

We are right on the edge of glory.

Then we gather for the first Eucharist of Easter.

The Great Vigil of Easter, at 8:00pm, starts in the garden,  
we enter the dark church, we hear the great chant of  
the Exultat, and there the readings from the  
Hebrew scripture.

Bishop Shannon will be here for his visit with us.

Several adults will be confirmed and one reaffirming  
baptismal vows; we will come to support them;  
affirming the bond of our community, who we are  
for each other; and our bond with our bishop,  
our connection as members of the diocese,  
and we will renew our own  
baptismal covenant with God.

Then the lights will raise and the bells will ring.

I will stop there.

So much more I could have said.

But words are only so good.

Come and have the experience this week that this Sunday  
opens for us.

Spend time with God around these great mysteries; and  
may God bless you with new awareness of the  
wonder of God's love and care for you.

Amen.