

Sermon for Palm Sunday, 2022
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- Today we reach the beginning of Holy Week – which is indeed the holiest, and also the busiest, season of the Christian year.
- We begin with Palm Sunday.
- But it's also Passion Sunday.
- There are two Gospel readings, one recounting Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, and the other his Passion and death.
- The events are days apart, and distinctly different in tone.
- And we'll return to the events of the Passion later in the week, on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday.
- So this Sunday is a bit confusing.
- I mean, what's the theme of this Sunday before Easter?
- Is it Christ being hailed as King?
- Or Christ being condemned and crucified?
- Or both at once?
- And even if you take both at once, it still doesn't seem to make for a very good story – starting in apparent triumph and ending with death and burial.
- And that's because none of it makes full sense except in the context of Easter and the Resurrection, which we mark with the Easter Vigil next Saturday evening and the first Sunday of Easter on Sunday.

- If the Palm Sunday service is a confusing juxtaposition, that's because *the events themselves were* confusing at the time as well – not least for the disciples.
- But, from the standpoint of Easter, we see today's stories as things that look one way from a human standpoint, and look totally different from God's perspective.
- We begin with what from a human standpoint seems like a triumph, yet it is not really a triumph.
- The crowd who usher Jesus into Jerusalem with palms and accolades do not understand what Jesus is really coming to do.
- They are not completely mistaken, as Jesus *is* a King.
- But Jesus is not coming to restore David's kingdom – he is already the Lord of all creation.
- On the one hand, the hopes of the crowd are mistaken and doomed to be disappointed, and, on the other hand, their hopes are far too small.
- [I am reminded of a wonderful saying I heard once: "The reason you are feeling unfulfilled is that your dreams are too small."]
- From the palms and the crowds, we proceed to what from a human standpoint seems like a defeat, Jesus' death.
- Yet it is not really a defeat – in dying, it is Jesus who destroys death, and frees those who had been in Hell.
- And in rising, He is revealed in His divine glory, and raises us to eternal life.
- The disciples and the crowds are not alone in misunderstanding Jesus.
- We, too, often still see Jesus from a human standpoint: as a great teacher, a moral exemplar, one who loved greatly, perhaps as no other has loved.

- And all that is true.
- But if the story stopped where it stops today, it would just be the tragic story of a holy man put to death by the authorities – inspiring perhaps, but not *transformative*.
- But, taken in the full context of the Easter resurrection, the events remembered in the coming week are really the crux of human history – indeed, the history of the whole universe.
- They reveal the full nature of God’s love as a sacrificial love, a love unto death – yet also as stronger than death, and carrying us to eternal life and union with Him.
- Our understanding of God, of love, and of death are transformed.
- But it is not only a change in our understanding.
- It is also a cosmic change – the powers of death and Hell really are decisively overthrown.
- It is not only our *understanding* that is transformed in accepting these holy mysteries, our very natures are transformed in accepting the One who brought them about.
- The word that we translate as “repentance” – in Greek *metanoia* – literally means something like “a renewal of the mind or understanding”.
- And I invite you to use this Holy Week to renew your mind by reading parts of today’s Gospels each day, quietly meditating upon them, and letting God speak to you through them, and reveal to you what He wishes you to understand.
- What is a long and confusing story read all at once can reveal many hidden gems when we read parts of it slowly, and ask God to show us what He wants us to see in them.

- I invite you also to come to as many of the services of Holy Week as you are able – and if you are unable to do so here, to do things like meditate on the stations of the cross in your own time, perhaps even online, and observe the hours of Jesus’ agony and betrayal in the Garden, and his crucifixion.
- On Thursday and Friday, we will have traditional services for Maundy Thursday and Good Friday at 7 and the evening.
- But we will also be doing things to act out some of the spirit of those days during the daytimes.
- On Thursday, when Jesus washed his disciples’ feet, there will be a foot care clinic on the front lawn 1 until 3.
- I hope that some will come, whether to help heat and carry water, or just to observe, or maybe even some of you will take off your own shoes and allow your feet to be washed.
- On Friday, there will be a pilgrimage on Main Street, beginning at Holy Trinity at noon, with prayers at several nearby locations.
- It won’t be a long walk; and together with other Christians, and also the Mayor and other city officials, we can give public witness to the faith within us.
- There is more information on all of these in the bulletin and on our website and Facebook pages.
- And if you grow weary of meditation on the Passion, and of your prayer and fasting, you don’t have to wait until Sunday morning to get to Easter.
- In fact, the beginning of Easter, and the highest and central service of the church year, is the Easter Vigil, which will begin at 7 on Saturday night.
- It is the first service of Easter, and many of us consider it one of the great gems of our liturgy, though many Episcopalians have never been to a Vigil.
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- Whereas the Sunday service is all about celebration, at the Vigil we mark the passage from the darkness of sin and death to the light and life of the Resurrection, moving from fire and candlelight to the sanctuary in all its Easter glory.

- If you are visually-oriented, there are stations of the cross around our sanctuary.

- And several of the artworks on display in the Victorian Room are images of Gethsemane, the Crucifixion, the Pieta, and the Empty Tomb.

- These were all things I created as part of my own Lenten devotions in years past, and hope they may prove inspiring to some of you as well.

- And better still, take some time this week to take out a pencil or pen or paintbrush or computer art program – or your musical instrument or just your voice – and let your own right brain express its worship in art or music or poetry.

- Or if that is really not your thing, let the Lord lead you on the web to images befitting the season.

- For a number of years, I looked at pictures of the Shroud of Turin, which some say is the burial shroud of Jesus.

- It's controversial, but it's a remarkable image, and no one knows how it was made.

- I liked to think that it was the closest I could get to seeing the real face of Jesus until He comes again, and seeing something the actually touched his body.

- In short, find something that connects you to Christ's Passion – at first it might just be something you find yourself drawn to, knowing why, or what is in a book of readings for the day.

- But ask God to speak to you through it – I don't mean words from heaven, but that still small voice in your heart where God speaks and dwells.
- May you have a most blessed Holy Week – no, may we have a most blessed Holy Week, both when we are apart and when we are together. Amen.
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