

Sermon, April 5, 2020, Palm Sunday A - Matt Steinhauer

A few days ago I was thinking about writing my Congregational newsletter article for the month of April. I always start the process by looking back at what I wrote the previous month, which took me back to what was going on the last week of February (*when I would have been writing my March edition*).

I just shook my head in disbelief when I realized the week of writing my last newsletter was the week before the Tennessee tornadoes that destroyed homes and lives.

It was a week in which talk of Covid-19 and Coronavirus was still just an update in the news cycle and had not yet begun to affect our lives in the dramatic way we find it affecting our lives now.

Everything was so different. Our life and circumstances can turn so fast.

Thinking about the way life can change thinking about the way things turn so fast is certainly in line with Palm Sunday. This is the day we observe the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem and, on the same day within the same hour of a worship service observe the humility of Jesus on the Cross.

I worship in a small but vibrant community of faith where, on this day we normally gather in the parking lot of the church to hear the story of Jesus riding a donkey into the city, with shouts of "Hosanna!" and branches from trees or palm trees, or cloaks being spread on the road for the HOPED FOR Son of David to claim his rightful throne.

We process into the building to the strains of "All Glory Laud and Honor," and I lead the children of all ages in a parade up and down the aisles of the sanctuary. There are always giggles as the children try to keep up *walking and waving their palm fronds* with smiles on the faces of parents, *as well as the pastor*, at the joy and celebration.

But when the hymn has ended as the children find their way back to their parents, and the lively parade disperses and settles back in the rows of seats, I introduce the Prayer of the Day:

*"As we now enter into the contemplation of the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ and meditate on the salvation of the world through his sufferings, death, burial, and resurrection. Let us pray."*

And THAT QUICKLY, the mood changes, *the world turns* from laughter and hopeful celebration, to hearing that powerful and solemn story of the last days of Jesus' life.

We gather in the upper room with the disciples and witness the Last Supper. We walk together to the Mount of Olives and overhear the conversation between Peter and Jesus: *"I will never desert you."*

*“Oh. Yes. You. Will Peter! Not once, not twice, but THREE times!”*

We are there when Jesus goes to the garden to pray, and we are there when the Judas leads the crowd to the garden to arrest Jesus and take him away.

We witness the shame of Peter’s denial, the mock trial conducted by Pilate, and the stripping and striking of the innocent Jesus.

And finally, we are witnesses to his cross-burdened walk to Calvary and his crucifixion.

When the worship service is over we find our exuberance and joy of the beginning, has turned to quiet introspection. There are mumbled “good byes” in the parking lot, where, an hour ago there was hugging and handshakes and celebration.

Everything is so different. Life and circumstances can turn so fast.

I wonder how the people felt who had cheered on the One they had hoped would be their Messiah, as they returned home on that Day of the Cross?

I wonder, when they saw the now dried out and trampled branches, and the unclaimed ruined cloaks, wadded up and left on the roadside, if they wondered too: *“Everything is so different. How life and circumstances can turn so fast!”*

Palm Sunday is a day when we hold the joy of a parade and the horror of an execution in tension with one another.

But we are Easter people.

Unlike the witnesses of the first Palm parade, who returned from witnessing Jesus’ death a few days later, we already know the REST OF THE STORY!

We know this story doesn’t end with Jesus death.

Although we will wade even more deeply into this story in the coming week--Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, And the Vigil of Easter--we hear the story knowing of our Hope in the Resurrection.

Jesus was crucified, dead and was buried.

But on that third day, on that day of gladness, that we will celebrate one week from today, he arose.

And with the resurrection of Christ everything has become so different. All things have become new again. All the sorrow and hardship, and even death, that may seem to surround us, does not have the final word.

We can enter into the pain of the story, we can enter into the very pain of our lives, because we know the ending.

And the end is being reconciled with Christ through the blood of his cross.

We are made whole, and healed, and new again, by the action of God through Jesus Christ, for the sake of the world God made and loves.

Thanks be to God!