

## Sermon ☩ March 28, 2021

Frank Maxwell

It's Palm Sunday and we usually do two things within the context of worship. One is to read the entire Passion of Our Lord . . . which we just did. The other is to re-enact the Palm Sunday parade . . . which we always kind of do.

The movies love this scene . . . this Palm Sunday ride into Jerusalem. They just love it. They like to make a big deal of Palm Sunday, the movies do. Compared to other stories in the Bible, the life of Jesus is not all that flashy. He spends most of his time talking with dull, ordinary people. He wasn't addicted to cocaine, the story is not filled with illicit love affairs, there is not any foreign spy intrigue and suspense, there aren't any creatures from outer space threatening to destroy civilization. There is a lot of dialogue and not much action.

Basically, it's the story of a nice guy. Oh, there is the occasional miracle or healing, but those are visually difficult for Hollywood to duplicate because everyone seems to interpret those in different ways. But Hollywood does like Palm Sunday! It is a chance for a wide-angle shot of the large crowd; there is a lot of shouting and noise; and perhaps some good processional music that could even put the theme song to "Rocky" to shame. All in all it is a scene that can become the stuff that movies are made of. It can be a scene that is bigger than life itself.

How do you view the events of Palm Sunday? Is it simply a big parade out of place with the rest of Jesus' life? Is a naive Jesus riding right into the hands of his would-be killers? Or is there perhaps something deeper taking place?

It is interesting to note that through out the Gospel narratives, Jesus doesn't want to be treated like a king, yet on this day he rides into town in a most splendid manner.

Did he suddenly change his mind and figure that he might as well get at least some of the glory that was coming to him? I don't think so. In the face of his impending death, Jesus was affirming life.

When we think of Jesus going into Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday, it might be helpful to ponder these words of Thomas Merton:

*"There is no wilderness so terrible, so beautiful, so arid and so fruitful as the wilderness of compassion. It is the only desert that shall truly flourish like the lily."*

It was because of his compassion for the people of the world that Jesus entered into Jerusalem. He faced the people who were his enemies and who wanted him dead, and he also faced those who thought they knew and loved him but did not understand who he was or the purpose of his mission. His compassion was a wilderness that was terrible, beautiful, arid, and fruitful. It was out of this compassion, this desert, that the lily of hope flourished. He came to affirm life . . . even in the face of his own death . . . he affirmed life.

When the liturgical calendar was changed a number of years ago designating the Sunday before Easter as Passion Sunday instead of Palm Sunday, a number of people were annoyed. However, when you reflect upon it, it makes perfect sense. It puts the exhilaration of the Triumphal Entry into a truer perspective.

- † It reminds us that God is in our failures as well as our victories.
- † It reminds us that God is in our rejections as well as our acceptances.
- † It reminds us that God is in our suffering as well as in our health.
- † It reminds us that pleasure and pain, winning and losing, love and hate, praise and condemnation, good and evil, faith and doubt are all a part of God's redemptive, reconciling purpose.

That God does all that for us . . . what are we willing to do for God? We have been given the gift of life. How do we return thanks? God's love goes so deep that it doesn't demand thanks. But once we have realized the marvelous possibilities of life . . . once we have tasted life . . . how can we not give thanks. And that thanks can be in the form of a life lived in service to others.

And so that ride into Jerusalem wasn't just for show or fun. It had a meaning and purpose as essential as life itself. Rev. Dr. Norman Habel summarized Palm Sunday in this prayer/poem:

*We feel for you today, Lord,  
as you ride your drowsy donkey  
through the crowded streets  
of gaudy old Jerusalem, alive with palms.*

*You had your ticker-tape parade  
and rode forth in majesty  
to receive the keys of the city,  
the keys of death.*

*You suffered a hero's welcome  
and learned the pain of a hero's heart  
torn by the thought of tomorrow,  
when the shouting would be over.*

*In the face of this, Lord,  
can you explain  
why we keep striving  
to be heroes?*

*You heard the dreams of the crowd,  
a sacrifice for the crowd,  
a sop to the fools, a king for a day.*

*Let us join you  
under the palms,  
tonight.*



St. Paul's Episcopal Church  
Key West, Florida