

The Rev. Dennis J. Reid
 A Homily for Palm Sunday | Year C | The Passion according to St. Luke
 St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Sinking Spring, PA
 April 14th 2019

In the Name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Every year we do this, first celebrate with Palms and then very, very quickly jump into the Passion, I am surprised by how jarring and strange the two parts of this service feel.

We start in such a serene place:

Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven

- parallels the angels in the beginning of Luke -- though then it was "peace on earth". The Son of God will find no peace this day.
- it wasn't that long ago we heard something very similar out of the mouths of angels proclaiming the glory of God made manifest in the tiny baby Jesus. What a long way we've come.
- In a way though, the Passion shouldn't ever surprise us. Even the pattern of Jesus' entry into this world by a miraculous birth foreshadows his leaving it in agony:
 - wrapped him in cloth strips, placed him in a manger, because there was no place at the in
 - wrapped him in a linen cloth, placed him in a rock-hewn tomb, in a place where no one had been laid

We also can't be too surprised with the Passion because it is all too familiar -- not because of how often we read it, but because it tells the story of who we are -- deep down it touches something within us that makes us realize yes, I too, have a little bit of Peter in me, and I wonder if Jesus has ever turned to look at me with gut-wrenching disappointment. I too have moments of great faithfulness, when everything I do proclaims "blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" that are followed five minutes later with "crucify him!". I too have been both thieves, asking for forgiveness, for Jesus to remember him in his kingdom and equally telling him what to do because I said so.

And yet, even when the loudest and harshest voices prevailed to kill the Son of God, even then he remained steadfast in his obedience to his Father, ever the tragic hero sent innocently to death. The crucified One, holy in his suffering, forever changing your life and mine by the power of his death even when we didn't deserve it.

So yes, when we want to know who we are as a people, we read the Passion.

- as people who are complicit both in the praise of the palms and the injustice of the innocent Christ being betrayed
- as people whose loud voices prevail when we look for an act of vengeance that we think might placate an unseen and unfulfillable need for violence
- as people who Christ Jesus still prayed for even in his suffering and agony
- as people redeemed by a crucified Lord, who went to the cross and to his death that he might destroy death

And perhaps more than anything, as a people confounded by all of it. The Passion doesn't necessarily require much more comment -- not because we are short on time or because there isn't more to say, but because I believe it touches us each in a way that goes well beyond words trying to make sense of it and goes straight into our souls, into our very being, and that as we hear it, as we sit with it, as we are disgusted and entranced by it, we know there to be more truth in it than just about anything else we can think of or have heard.

Such is the enigma of the cross. Such is the oddness of the Passion. That in our worst moments, we see the most truth. In Christ's ultimate defeat, we have known also his greatest victory.

But this too should be no surprise, not for we who believe in the Christ whose blessed mother taught him about the God who lifts up the lowly. For there is no more lowly place than the cross, than the grip of death. But for Jesus, he who took on our lowliness that we might share in his glory, the way of the cross is his way, and he made it for us to be the very way of life.

We have now entered into our most Holy Week, sacred time to tell again this sacred story. May we who cry both hosanna and crucify follow Jesus even to the cross that we might find there the truth of God, the love of God, and the redemption of God.