

PALM SUNDAY, MARCH 29, 2015 (Year B)

INTRO

Good morning, everyone. Today is a day of not one, but TWO Gospel readings. We began with Mark's account of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. And we have just finished our dramatic reading of the Passion (Suffering) of Christ, one of the most memorable times in our yearly round of worship.

When I saw the sermon title – *Reflections On The Day* – in the first draft of today's bulletin – I immediately liked it. For it reminds me ...if a sermon is what teaches us, then ultimately **the Gospel is the sermon**. Words of Scripture speak for themselves far better than we can speak for them. So I'll offer some thoughts on our recent journey and on the Word that we have heard and read together today. But remember – it's the Gospel that is the "real thing" from which to learn and grow! We can only help each other out by our studying and discussion.

We have been on an inner journey during these snowy weeks of Lent: a time of prayer, fasting and penitence. A time to ask God for forgiveness. But now Lent runs out, and our focus changes. **This particular day** is Palm Sunday. Holy Week is really here.

I will present some thoughts in three very short "chapters": FIRST, **Jesus'** journey to the Cross, as heard in our Gospels today. SECOND, a few thoughts on Jesus' life – God's life *as a human* among us – which we call his **incarnation**. And THIRD, a look at **the week to come** and an invitation for us all, here and at home, to enter into the mystery together.

CHAPTER I: JC'S JOURNEY TO THE CROSS IN OUR 2 GOSPEL STORIES

In the approximately 3 years of Jesus' ministry, which began with his 40 days in the wilderness, our Lord taught about love, humility, and the need to turn to Him in all things . Through much of this time, you might remember, he often asked his followers to keep his miracles and teachings to themselves. Probably He just didn't want things to get out of hand too early in his ministry. Word did get out, of course, and crowds followed him, and he never begrudged anyone who came to him in faith.

But then in Jerusalem, on Palm Sunday, Jesus finally allowed them to recognize him. It was time, and he knew it. The Jewish people, longing for their Messiah, longing for their own King, as our Gospel says,

“brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, “Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

As one writer has said, *This was the celebration in the Bible that could have had a brass band!*

Of course, we recognize in this the poignancy of what we know to be right around the corner. **We** know that between this day of celebration and the great events of Easter and Pentecost, there will be the Cross. And that's what our second Gospel has just taken us through, together.

CHAPTER II: HOW CAN GOD DIE? THE INCARNATION, THE HUMAN NATURE OF THE ETERNAL SON OF GOD

This past Wednesday was the Church's remembrance of the Annunciation, the visit of the angel to Mary, nine months before the birth of her son Jesus. It was then that God first took on human form – became *incarnate*. God chose to come and *be like us*, in all ways, except that he was without sin. Now, as we recall his painful death, the story of his conception reminds us that Jesus is also fully God. Divine. God came out of love for us – to bring us back to him, back to lives lived in his love. One person has said¹,

When parents play with their children, they become like their children ... to meet them where they are. When Jesus rode on the donkey and allowed the shouts and the leafy branches and the cloaks on the road, that was God meeting the people where they were. He met them where they were, but *then* he would lead them to where he was.

As today's reading from Philippians says, *he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death on a cross*. Fr Jim reminded us last week that in dying Jesus *was glorified, and made the full, perfect & sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the world*. yet we know that he also rose again and went to his father in heaven. Jesus offers salvation if we will follow him. And he offers comfort here and now, too. Life will still be hard, but knowing the events of Jesus' last week, then when we suffer, when we are alone or in pain or even despair, we know God understands and cares for us. And when we die, we know God understands our fear of death and reminds us that death does not have the last word.

God becomes like us in Jesus so that we may become like God. What an incredible gift.

CHAPTER III: NOW IS THE TIME TO FOCUS: THE WEEK AHEAD

The Priest's Handbook of the Episcopal (Anglican) Church in the US says this:

The rites of Holy Week are ancient and by nature different from the liturgical celebrations of the rest of the Church Year ... If the time between Palm Sunday and Easter seems endless, it is meant to. Time is suspended as we ponder and celebrate the great mysteries of our redemption. A slow pace, reverence and continuity among the services are to assist in this contemplation.

This week we will enter into the mystery of Jesus' life, love, death and resurrection. We have examined ourselves. We have heard the story of Jesus' journey to the cross, the Palm Sunday and Passion Gospels. And now, day by day, we will remember, and there will be many times for worship together. On Wednesday, Jesus' ministry of healing; on Thursday, Jesus' lesson of humility in washing his disciples' feet; his institution of the Eucharist, the first Communion service; his prayer of anguish and obedience in the Garden; and his stark betrayal and capture. We will go through the heaviest time of Good Friday as we together walk and remember the Stations of the Cross, the stages of Jesus' suffering. And there will be the strange limbo of Holy Saturday, when He lay in the grave. We need to remember all these things. Because joyous Easter **will** come – but as the saying goes, to know what that means, you have to go through Good Friday first.

WRAP-UP: AND FINALLY,

It's God's own story, told in the Bible for us, that, as one writer has saidⁱⁱ, *tells us again and again that we are loved, that we are precious, that we have infinite value and worth in God's eyes*. That is the reason for God's sacrifice for us. I encourage you to read and re-read the Gospels for all of this week and pray in adoration and in thanks for God's astounding gift to us.

Thanks be to God.

ⁱ David Smith

ⁱⁱ David Lose