

The Sunday of the Passion: Palm Sunday

Year B

Saint Paul's Episcopal Church/La Iglesia Episcopal de la Resurrección

Mount Vernon, WA

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There are those who call this day dissonant, Father Paul in his reflection states; “The day is a bit schizophrenic.” And so it feels, bringing together, the procession into Jerusalem, originally from the Church in Jerusalem and the Passion at the end of the week from the Church in Rome. We start on a high, the procession and end in the crash of execution.

Coming up from Jericho to Jerusalem was in itself quite the journey. Jericho lies about 800 feet below sea level, the lowest city on earth, while Jerusalem is 3000 feet above sea level and only 12 miles away. The road is always going up to Jerusalem. The road is desert all the way up until the Mount of Olives when suddenly there is green and Jerusalem is laid out at ones feet. Think about being a pilgrim from Galilee, going down the east side of the Jordan and bypassing Samaria. It has been a long time since seeing any green. It is the time of great festival of the Passover, a celebration of freedom and God's freeing the ancestors from bondage in Egypt. No wonder the Romans and the authorities in Jerusalem, were going on high alert.

Jesus and his followers are among these pilgrims and they have a real sense of anticipation and anxiety. They believe that Jesus

has come to restore the throne of David and drive out the Romans. But Jesus has also told them that he will be killed. I believe that expectations took over and allowed the denial that this provocation of the powers, would end in death. Jesus will spend the week provoking those in power and becoming a perceived threat to their power, privilege, and existence. At the least he is making them angry.

Mark's procession to the gates of Jerusalem are more of a prophet's act than a the triumphal parade through the streets of Jerusalem He sets up and borrows "a colt that has never been ridden," not exactly a war horse that a conquering general or Pilate, coming from Caesarea, in front of a legion, to support the local garrison in expectation of trouble, would be riding, through a gate from the other direction,

And those who went ahead of him and those who followed spread their cloaks on the road and spread "leafy branches", cut from the fields shouted.

(Exaltation)

"Hosanna! (God, save us now)

(The crowd recognizing Jesus and raising their expectations)

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

(Then a very political threat, with increasing expectations, to the whole establishment)

Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!

Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

And in an anticlimax, "Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was

already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.” Jesus will spend the next week continuing his prophetic ways and increasingly angering the local establishment and the promise of confrontation.

People can be fickle especially when they have their long held expectations dashed and there were some very deep expectations that have been dashed, not for the first time in history, nor for the last time. But Jesus, in so many ways had looked so promising according to some of the prophets, other ways he let them down because he was not a warrior king, come to throw the oppressors down and out. He has shown a God who does not work the way people try to force into their own expectations. Jesus preaches, not human violent victory, but God’s saving grace for all creation. A God that influences with love, not violence, a God who overpowers through sacrifice. A God who wins by suffering, not humiliating — suffering and aligning God’s self with those who suffer. But as Paul puts it “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.”

So too will we spend the week moving through Jesus’s last week and on Wednesday evening we will start with Tenebrae, Darkness, the service is an extended meditation upon, and a prelude to, the events in our Lord’s life between the Last Supper and the Resurrection. As this is the beginning part of a single service leading to Easter, there is no dismissal here or at Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, or Holy Saturday with a dismissal following the Eucharist at the Vigil or Easter Sunday Service.

As the week progresses more and more people fall away from Jesus and his support disappears until even the cry of Jesus, from the cross,

asking why God had forsaken him. Except for the women, who stood vigil at a distant and witnessed to all that happened. Mark is very bleak and dismal and there is great suffering, both physical and spiritual and the part of Jesus and his followers. Remember they had been told what was to happen, but they did not have an empty tomb.

As Teresa of Ávila is quoted as saying; 'Christ has no body now on earth, but yours.'