

The Liturgy of the Palms

Luke 19:28-40

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

The Liturgy of the Word

Isaiah 50:4-9a

Psalm 31:9-16

Philippians 2:5-11

Luke 22:14-23:56

From time to time, life doesn't turn out the way we planned or the way we thought it would. Something unexpected happens that throws everything off track and changes our lives forever. We spend lots of time fretting over the fact that 'this is not the way things are supposed to be!' We can see our expected future on the horizon and it has been snatched away from us. Or we are required to go through enormous emotional pain for what seems to us to be no good reason. It's hard to recover from such unexpected twists and turns. It can take a long time. Our lives seems to be in shambles...an absolute wreck...and we feel like we're suffering from emotional whiplash.

Today is Palm Sunday. It's the most emotionally volatile Sunday in the Christian calendar. We begin the service in great joy! The king has arrived! Fresh from his spectacular raising of Lazarus from the dead, Jesus enters Jerusalem triumphantly amid much festivity and fanfare! During the service, the tables turn completely. By the end of the service, we see Jesus hanging on a cross. Crucified between two thieves. The service ends leaving us somber and still and silent as we try to comprehend what just happened to Jesus. And how did it happen so fast? Emotional whiplash.

We entered the church this morning waving palm branches and singing "All glory and honor to thee, Redeemer King!" Just as the people did for Jesus entering Jerusalem. Can't you just imagine what that sight was like? During the past week, Jesus has showed up at the home of his friends, Lazarus, Martha and Mary. Like thousands of other Jews, he has made his way to Jerusalem for the Passover that is coming up. But he knows. He knows this isn't going to be just another Passover celebration. He knows how the week is going to end. Can't you just imagine what it must have been like for him for Mary to anoint his feet with perfume and wipe them with her hair? What a beautiful and sensuous experience; but he knows what's coming. He must have savored this precious moment with Mary and her family because he knows how this will end. He even says that she has anointed him as if for burial. He knows. And perhaps she does, too.

When the Sabbath is over, throngs of people who know that Jesus, their 'rock star,' is headed for Jerusalem line the streets, literally. There are throngs of people everywhere.....so excited to see Jesus. So excited to know that he is going to be entering Jerusalem. And they *know* he is the Messiah. They just know it! They've met people that he has healed. They have talked to the lepers and they've met the blind men. They've seen the little boy possessed with demons who is now whole and healthy. They've heard about the little girl he brought back to life. And now, they are about to see the man he raised from the dead after four days. Lazarus is going to come with Jesus into Jerusalem. They will be able to see for themselves. And they will get to meet the disciples.....those men and women who have been traveling with Jesus for the past three years. The excitement is at a fever pitch. You can feel it in the air. You can see the expectation on people's faces. This is it. They know this is it. Their king is about to arrive victorious into Jerusalem. The Romans are about to be history. Jesus will see to that. Jesus is going to ascend to the throne of David and kick the Romans out of Israel. It's all over. And it's going to happen right before their eyes.

When Jesus sends two of his disciples into the city to get a colt the people know the time has come. They scan the horizon to get a glimpse of him. People begin to throw their cloaks and robes down on the ground in front of him. They are waving their palms frantically with the greatest joy they have known in years. The people line the pathway. The cloaks cover the ground so that the colt's foot never touches any dirt. The scene is reminiscent of the parting of the Red Sea...a wall of people on either side and Jesus leading his followers to Jerusalem..... just like Moses leading the people of Israel to the Promised Land.....a wall of water on either side of them as the people crossed on dry land. When the Israelites walked through the Red Sea on dry land headed for the Promised Land, they didn't know that they were going to have to spend 40 years in the wilderness.....enough time to lose faith in God; enough time to make idols; enough time to be disobedient. Jesus is walking through his own Red Sea on the carpet of cloaks, but he knows that he is headed for a wilderness.....a wilderness of unspeakable physical, emotional and spiritual pain.....but he will not lose faith; he will not make idols; he will not be disobedient. He trusts in God to the very end. The significance of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem to celebrate the liberation of the Jews from Pharoah's oppression in Egypt by celebrating the Passover is not lost on the people longing for liberation from the Romans in Israel. The backdrop is perfect.

But the throngs of people don't know what Jesus knows. The throngs of people are jubilant and joyful and full of expectation. They just **KNOW** that this is their moment. The time has come. The King is here. They are saved! They will be liberated. They will, in fact, be liberated. We will *all* be liberated, but not in the way they imagined.

The story of the week that unfolds is all too familiar to us. When Jesus enters Jerusalem he has a choice. He can turn right and walk into the housing for the Roman garrison and take care of business or he can turn left and go into the Temple and take care of a different kind of business. He turns left and goes into the Temple and in the only recorded show of temper by Jesus, he overthrows all the tables of the moneychangers and drives them out of the Temple Courtyard with a whip. This is it, people think. This is the beginning of the revolution. Jesus is going to straighten out all the people in power who need to be straightened out...confronted...rebuffed...rebuked...put in their place.

But then.....nothing else happens. The enthusiasm of the crowd dies down over the next few days when Jesus doesn't take on the Roman garrisons. He doesn't assume the throne of David. He doesn't liberate the people. What was just a few days ago uncontrollable enthusiasm now gives way to wonder and doubt. This is not turning out the way they had expected. As each day passes, the hope of the people begins to fade. They lose faith. They begin to feel a sense of disappointment....a sense of betrayal. They begin to feel they have been let down. They start to think that perhaps they have been duped into believing that this Jesus was going to be their Savior. Disappointment is a hard emotion to manage. It's full of hurt and anger and disillusionment and cries of the unfairness of it all as well as that pervasive sense of betrayal. On the lips of many of us when we are disappointed is, "How could you? How could you have let me down like that? I was counting on you and you didn't come through for me?"

Jesus goes to the cross not with the loving support and accolades of those he loves the most...those who have been the closest to him in this life, but with the looks of pain and anguish on their faces as they try to figure out what has happened. They know their whole future has been taken from them and their lives will never be the same. They are stunned. They are shocked. They are disappointed and they are completely bewildered. To believe their eyes is to give up what they are believing in their hearts. Something has gone terrible wrong. Their lives have been changed forever. But not the way they think. And they are suffering from emotional whiplash. Little do they know what lies ahead for them. They didn't see this devastation coming, but they're in for even more emotional whiplash in just three short days.

Their lives...and our lives...will never be the same.

Thanks be to God.

AMEN.