

Passion Sunday
Mark 14:1-15:47
March 25th, 2018
St. George's Bolton
Fr. Chris

Emotional Roller Coaster

It's Palm Sunday...

Today we start out with a parade. That the followers of Jesus showed up in public and celebrated His entrance into Jerusalem is brave and notable. (Remember the old hymn, "Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus?") They all stood with Jesus. Their hopes were raised to a new level. Lazarus was raised from the dead. The blind see and the deaf hear. Miracles of healing abound. His reputation precedes him. To those who stood on the sidelines of the Palm Sunday parade, it looked as though God was going to win this one for the people and their hopes of getting rid of Roman rule and the rule of the corrupt local leaders of their own government and their religious establishment, was just around the corner.

And then it all changed. The parade is over and now quickly forgotten. Then we read the Passion drama and the whole mood changes. Instead of the political victory they had hoped and prayed for, it would seem in a few days like another major defeat for God and for God's people. Their hope was nailed shamefully to a tree, robbing them of their dreams of better days ahead, and stealing hope from the hearts. It was what we might call a roller coaster ride: one moment at the top of the game in apparent success, and the next, down at the bottom, as a failure by any human measure or standard. That is pretty rough on our emotions. And yet, that is also a slice of our life and human experience.

I always wondered why they call it Good Friday, when such a horrible thing happened on that day. God is shamed, abused, mocked, abandoned, beaten and killed before a seeming crowd of strangers passing by him on the road to Jerusalem, almost ignoring the spectacle of the passion drama, as they travel to Jerusalem for the religious Passover holiday festival. How can anybody call that good?

Thankfully more than a few gathered for his first and last parade into the "Holy City." At least they stood up with Him and were on his side. But how quickly we fickle humans forget the parade and the reasons for it! How quickly do we return to

life as it was and accept the unacceptable, embracing it as a norm with which we must live. This is fear taking over, and faith taking a flight. Is there no hope for us? Where is God in the midst of this? At least some of his faithful followers were there to greet him and welcome him to Jerusalem. They honored him by showering his way with their garments and palm branches, just as we marched into church this morning to the triumphant strains of "All Glory Laud and Honor."

Do we stand with Jesus when it counts in our daily lives? Do we witness to our faith in word and deed? Do we fight the good fight? Do we strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being? Do we seek to serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as ourselves? This is what standing with Jesus means and this is what we committed to do in our Baptism. [Check it out in your Prayer book on pages 304-305.] Are we willing to stand in the parade of saints with Jesus when the going gets tough and the brave are separated apart from the others who fall by the way? It is so easy to rationalize staying on the sidelines these days, and I know I do it all too often myself.

The Christian Success Story...

What makes a Christian successful? Is it perfect attendance in Church? Is it not missing one's daily prayers or perhaps reading the scriptures every day? Is it not placing our trust in God's generosity that makes me successful in the business I do? Perhaps.

Our emotions are tested both at the top of the roller coaster when things are going very well, and also at the bottom, when things come crashing down. The story of Job reminds us that no matter where we are on the coaster, it is always about our faithfulness to God. It is about our steady emotion of love for God. It is not about fear. It is not about failure. A successful Christian has nothing to do with that.

The measure of Christian success is a man of sorrows, who was born homeless and lived homeless and who had few worldly possessions. [check out Psalm 22 for a description of Him] It is a man downcast and downtrodden by beatings and bruising's. He is described as not a man others would desire or see as desirable. He is by all accounts a failure in his mission and work. He is rejected by his own people. He is mired in character assassination and disgraced. He is crucified between two criminals and labeled as a sacrilegious pretender who is nothing more than a leader of some small political rebellion. His mother is there watching all this go on. How torn her heart must have been. How broken her hopes for this special Son. Talk about an emotional roller coaster! He is suffering and dejected, yet he prays for forgiveness for those who do this to him instead of lashing out, as he says

from the instrument of his torture and death, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do."

And finally the ultimate defeat: death comes to Jesus to end his suffering and complete his earthly work. The roller coaster derails and crashes and our emotions along with it!

Indeed, how can we make or call the suffering of God "good" when we know in our heart of hearts that if he died this way pre-contemplating our sins, than we are responsible for all this! How can we make good out of this? How can we call this good, the suffering by one innocent person for all of the rest of us?

It is rather hard to get your mind around this, I must admit. This lonely figure suffering on a cross some 2,000 years ago, this Jewish man I never met before is willing to do this for me. Why?

That is for us to ponder once again this Holy Week.

There is nothing more important for us in life than to come to terms with the drama of the passion of Jesus and what it means to us. There is nothing greater than this that can change you and your life forever and for the better. There is no medicine for the sickness of the soul stronger than that of the cross and its fruit. In Latin: *Crux est mundi medicina*. In English: 'The Cross is the medicine for the world.' It is the motto of the Anglican monastic religious order known as "The Order of the Holy Cross" and it is carved over the entry door of their mother house in West Park, New York. It is a profoundly Christian observation and truth, one which we should remember. Take this medicine and the sickness of sin and despair will be vanquished.

The whole passion is paradox. You take the execution of Jesus which was unrelenting and unforgiving, and you convert it to forgiveness. You take the shameful image of the cross, a symbol of torture and death and violence and hatred, and turn it into a symbol of love, kindness, giving and forgiving. You take an apparent defeat and turn it into a victory. You take tears and sadness and convert them to tears of joy and love. You go from winter to spring-from snow showers today to temperatures of 60 degrees by Thursday, as we will by the end of this week as we walk with Jesus in this paradox and celebrate and memorialize it.

Why would God do all this for us do you think?

Yes, it is an emotional roller coaster. I am inspired to pick up my cross and follow him. That is what my God invites me to do. You are too. AMEN