

The Liturgy of the Palms

Matthew 21:1-11

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

The Liturgy of the Word

Isaiah 50:4-9a

Philippians 2:5-11

Matthew 26:14- 27:66

or Matthew 27:11-54

Psalm 31:9-16

The journey with Jesus in this the last week of his life on earth compresses the central message and mission of the gospel itself into a short timeframe. We began our service this morning in great joy.....waving palm branches and processing through the church grounds and singing praises to God. It's a triumphant beginning to the week, but before the service is over we have moved through the dramatic turn of events that ends with Jesus' death on the cross. The service begins with the highest high and ends with the most despairing low. We entered the church today singing praises and we leave the church this morning in silence. It's an emotional roller coaster.

Next Sunday we will once again be celebrating the great joy that is Jesus' gift to us.....his resurrection from the dead which is his triumph over death and the possibility of life eternal for us. In between, during this week that we call Holy Week, we remember and observe all the brutality and evil that humans are capable of and all the pain that Jesus and those who loved him endured in order to bring new life to all of us. This Holy Week experience is surreal. It's enough to give us all emotional whiplash. But isn't that what our own lives are like over timegreat emotional highs and devastating emotional lows? Our lives are a mixture of good and bad.....victory and defeat.....joy and despair.....all mixed together.....and in that complex mixture is where we find Jesus.....intimately aware of all of it.

Just like life itself, Holy Week is painful and sometimes poignant. It is full of disappointment and suffering, but it also has its tender moments. During this week we have an opportunity to walk this last week with Jesus and remind ourselves of all that he experienced on the way to providing all of us with life eternal. In your bulletin this morning you will find a card that gives you the Scriptural roadmap for walking this week with Jesus. Each day we have an opportunity

to remind ourselves through scripture and prayer of what this week was like for Jesus.....what his final walk to the cross was all about. It is in experiencing, if only briefly, the agonies and heartbreak that he faced during this week that we can fully appreciate and experience the joy that awaits us at the end of this week.....the new life he has given to all of us.

This Holy Week is full of all the worst that human beings can bring to bear on each other. Evil is on full display and seems to be out of control and all powerful and in charge. The week begins with fleeting adoration for Jesus and quickly turns to all the evil impulses that grip us as humans.....fear, betrayal, intrigue, greed, lust for power, conspiracy, injustice, a public trial that is a sham, group think that controls large numbers of people, lying, false witness, denial, abandonment, loneliness, torture, public shame, inaccurate rumors and ultimately death itself.....the worst that we humans can do is all directed at Jesus.....and he endures. He is resolute. He is obedient. He stands firm. He questions, but he does not falter. Humanity did its worst, but what humans intended for evil, God intended for good. God uses all the evil impulses evident in the multiple people in this story to effect God's own ends. It makes us wonder.....does that mean that when these people do these horrible things they are actually 'doing God's will'? Their intent is to destroy. God's intent is to give new life. God's intent is to prevail over evil.....and God does.

In our own day and time it's important to remember that God is still in charge. Whether it's something going on in our family, or at work, or at school or in our neighborhood or even in the background of our nation as a whole.....when we are feeling like what's happening around us is not what God intended, we need to remember that God uses all things to God's purposes. So even when things look dismal to us, our faith requires that we trust that God is ultimately in control. If God could allow Holy Week to happen then perhaps we need not worry about what happens in our own lives.....even if those things are difficult or painful. Surely as this Holy Week unfolded, the disciples were convinced that everything had gone terribly wrong and all was lost.

But because Jesus was willing to walk this way toward the cross, we now know the most central truth about our faith.....in both winning and losing in our own lives we know that Jesus meets us there. He owns all of it with us. Jesus identifies with every person who has ever felt God's absence at the moment of deepest need. Even Jesus whispered to God, "Why have you abandoned me?" Jesus knows the depth of our despair. He knows our fear and our loneliness. He knows when things are going really well for us and when our hearts are truly broken. He is with us through it all and he knows intimately.....and first hand.....whatever it is that tugs at our hearts or moves us to tears. And he prevails.

The failings of human beings showcase the triumphs and power of God.

Stay the course. Continue in your walk of faith no matter how it looks. Don't lose heart. Don't give up. Continue to follow Jesus' example. Love one another. Forgive one another. Build up the

body of Christ. It matters what you do even when it seems as though all is lost. Do what God is asking you to do. Be faithful to Jesus and to God.

As Holy Week reminds us.....Evil does its best.....but the Darkness does not overcome the Light.

Thanks be to God.

AMEN.