

April 10, 2022 – Palm/Passion Sunday

Palm and Passion Sunday presents the starkest of contrasts.

Hosanna! Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!

I loved Palm Sundays from the first service I ever attended, if for nothing else than being encouraged to wear an aloha shirt in church ... and not be the only one for once.

The palm leaves reminded me of Hawai'i where I was born.

The joyous shouts of praise felt good. The image of Jesus riding into town on a donkey, along a path strewn with cloaks as a poor man's red carpet, provided this sense of rooting for the ultimate underdog. And as someone who has rooted for Seattle sports teams all their life, never played on a winning team for Coupeville or South Whidbey and went to

college at Wazzu, I have a deeply ingrained need to root for underdogs.

Even in March or April in the Pacific Northwest, it almost always seemed to happen on a bright and sunny day. And Easter would be on its way in just another week.

But oh, yeah, there's something that comes in between.

Right away.

It's like whiplash to go from the triumphant, though humble entry, of Jesus into Jerusalem, to launch minutes later into the narrative at the end of the same week that leads to Jesus' death on a cross and burial in a tomb.

Shouting "Crucify him!" would feel wrong deep in the pit of my gut. The incongruency between what we would read and what we know is right would burn. I'd want to change the story. Shout something else. "Please *don't* crucify him!"

But time after time, year after year, the story doesn't change. It can't be re-written to undo the inhumanity of humanity toward one another, to include even God made a human being. It's like replaying a video of a tragic accident and desperately wishing the victim will move out of the way at the last second this time. The viewer knows it won't happen but still the heart wants to burst from the chest and scream to demand it will. Somehow, some way, this time it will. But no, it won't.

And in this case, it's no accident. Everyone, foe and maybe even worse, *friend*, fails Jesus. The religious council chooses earthly power over heavenly faith. Pilate chooses cowardice and political expediency over justice. Peter chooses self-preservation and fear over courage. The disciples choose sleep, not dutiful watch. And Judas chooses greed over love.

The people who cry “Hosanna!” choose to switch allegiances and demand “Crucify him!” A mob mentality and vengefulness over conscience and patience.

At least among the less privileged and powerful in this Gospel account, there is immediate regret, a recognition of failure and wrongdoing. But it doesn’t save Jesus’ life. It doesn’t undo anything.

For three days, nothing would be certain. We all know how the story ends, and in part because of that, we want to rush to that ending.

But for Jesus’ contemporaries, time had to have dragged on agonizingly slowly. They would ask themselves and each other, what have we done? And what will we do now? Questions that could only be pondered in the midst of fear and trembling.

We are challenged this week not to rush to Easter’s glory but to remain in the shadow of the cross. To sit with the

discomfort it brings. To ask what was and what is our role in this scapegoating of an innocent person, one who came to us as God in human form? And how do we continue to act this way today?

We will commemorate later this week Maundy Thursday and Good Friday before the celebration of the Easter vigil. But we should be mindful that our whole existence takes place on a figurative Holy Saturday. We know what is to come with the Resurrection. But it is not yet. And the wait is a struggle. But God is active in our lives in that struggle. Let God do the work of God and act upon our hearts and our spirits in the hard times, the hours and the days we don't want to face and yet we must.

Let us do this, not on our own strength, but by the strength of God perfected in the weakness we witness on the Cross.

Where God in Jesus Christ chose loving sacrifice over retribution.

Thanks be to God.