

Matthew 21 Palm Sunday 2020

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Darkness, pain, depths of despair that Jesus the man suffered.
Much worse, but apt for the feelings of Lent,
and ours in this time of isolation and fear.

Will the end of this pandemic ever get here?
It's not time yet to shout 'hosanna.'
We're there with that cross, that loss of hope.

Palm Sunday begins with the hosannas, Jesus entering Jerusalem.
The people may not have been sure exactly what they were celebrating,
but there was no mistaking the sense of hope and joy.
It was palpable, physical, probably overpowering.

But what must Jesus have been thinking? He knew what was coming.
That donkey, a symbol of peace, an anti-military statement – not triumphant at all, really.
Perhaps Jesus was wistful, he probably was wish-filled.
And conscious of what was ahead. Faith-filled and dread-filled.

Our epistle today gets this so right. Philippians is a beautiful epistle.
Paul, who was obviously capable of magnificent writing,
instead here quoted what is thought to be an early hymn.
It contains the entire Christ event and its meaning for our life together.
It sings of Christ; its extremes go from humility to exultation.
Yet, its purpose is neither; rather, it's about the Christ mind.

'Highly exalted....the name above every name....every knee should bend
and every tongue confess' -- it's a very small step from there
to our 'hosannas' of Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem of today.

Yet, those hosannas are empty. They must have rung false in Jesus' ears;
they were from people who were following Jesus yet not following him at all.

They make music that is empty of anguish, courage, and sacrifice.
Praise such as this is premature.

Just as our long gospel reading for today ends at Golgotha,
the descent of Jesus from God to the darkness of human likeness
comes from glory to the slavehood of his whole life.
Jesus was self-giving servant to all; in healing, teaching, reaching out to the excluded,
and in the final obedience to his true self. His dying is the continuance of his living.

Fully God and fully human – this part is so human.
Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams says it this way, quoting the denials of Peter:
I do not know this man: I am more comfortable with the God.
The man speaks to me not in solemn commands, in law and majesty,
but in the touch of a hand, a baby crying, a death,
and expects me to hear and obey these voices of need and friendship
as if they were the voice of God...

I do not know this man: I do not want to know the human, the provisional and ironic,
tears and laughter, the future still to make....Take us away from all this;
like the ultimate romantic hero, sweep us into the world of distant panoramas,
magical controls, solved problems.
I do not want to be forced back to the earth where I must choose and travel and hurt.

I do not know this man.
We journey this week, through Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, with Jesus the man.
The human in the dark place of loss and pain –
I invite us all to let that pain do the work it can do.

For the one time in our church year,
we have the opportunity to live out our walk with Jesus. As Paul says:
Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus. The Christ mind.
An emptied self, perfect humility, perfect obedience, serving God at all costs.
Let the pain break open our hearts and make us ready to authentically accept
the unimaginable gift of God's grace.

It is necessary to experience the darkness –
we need that cross of Christ every bit as much as we need what follows it. Amen.