**March 25, 2018**

**Palm Sunday**

**First Presbyterian Church**

**21 Church Street**

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**The Rev. Dr. Jeffrey Weenink**

**A COLT, A CROWD AND A CRUCIBLE**

**Palm Sunday Meditation 10:00 am Service**

Mark 11:1-10

Prayer for Illumination

 Open your word to us in Scripture this morning, gracious God, even when it’s so familiar and worn smooth from handling. As we hear the story yet again, plant it in our imaginations so that it may take root there, flower beautifully, and bear good fruit.

Today’s not just Palm Sunday; it’s also Passion Sunday. The Palm Sunday part recalls that ironically joyful entrance into Jerusalem we just reenacted with the children. It’s “ironically joyful” because we all know what lies in that parade’s path a few days later. The Passion Sunday part of today remembers the last days of Jesus’ life – his arrest and trial, the torture, and finally his death on the cross. Folks generally prefer the Palm Sunday over  Passion Sunday. It’s more agreeable to remember the crowd that shouted “hosanna” than the crowd that shouted “crucify.”

The week began with palms, accolades and hosannas.  It concluded with disciples slipping off to sleep, a brutal betrayal, an arrest, cruel beatings, a mock trial with trumped up charges, a denial from one of his most trusted disciples and death on a cross.  When He was born, there was no room for him in the Inn.

His last days on earth, it seemed there was no room for him in the world.

One really can’t come fully to the light of Easter morning without passing through the dark of Thursday and Friday. That’s how the whole story goes. And equally to the point, that’s how life goes. We need to hear the whole story because it contains the complete truth about Christ and about us.

 The Passion story is the definitive enactment of a God who loves you and loves me passionately, compassionately. The Passion tells the whole truth about a God who loves us – quite literally – to death.

Passion means suffering. It is precisely in Christ’s suffering that God enacts the promise to be with us through it all. By the cross, God declares in a way deeper than any words: "There is no pain that you may bear that I have not born; there is no darkness that can overtake you that I have not seen; there is no fear that might grip you that I have not known. All that might come to you, I have passed through. And when you come to it, I will see you through it, because I have been there, and, I am with you." None of this explains away suffering; it’s simply the sign of the ages that God is with us. Through it all, God is with us. Mozart’s work, unfinished when he died in 1791 brings an enduring and dramatic message of timeless hope and reconciliation.  The movements he completed will be offered this morning.  May we all be reminded of the unfinished work God in Jesus Christ has entrusted us to invest ourselves and be about.

**A COLT, A CROWD AND A CRUCIBLE – 8:30 Service Gospel Readings:**

**Mark 14:1-2; 10-16; 14:1-2; 10-16; 14:17-20; 32-41; 43-45; 53-65; 66-72; 15:1; 6-13; 17-20; 27-32**

Prayer for Illumination

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JERUSALEM

Jerusalem has been aptly described as the "port city on the shores of eternity."  Today we recall Christ's entry to that 'port city' and we come to understand the way he took to the 'shores of  eternity.'

Palm Sunday has been called the Trojan Horse of the Christian Year. You recall the story in Greek mythology “in which the splendid wooden horse given by the Greeks to the Trojans turned out to have soldiers hidden inside, soldiers who slipped out, opened the gate, and let the Greek army in.”[[i]](https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/" \l "m_884390569631304186__edn1" \o ")  Today seems like such a splendid day, full of joy, but beneath the surface, undermining is underway, opposition to Jesus is mounting; hatred and resentment and toxic sentiment are making a foothold.  Soon Jesus will be confronted directly by the powers and principalities, and before you know it shouts of Hosanna will be replaced by shouts of “crucify him.”

COLT

At Bethany, a town only a couple of miles east of Jerusalem, Jesus instructed two of his disciples to find an animal that had never been ridden.

His disciples were more than ready for the hard times out on the road to be over, for the arguments with the authorities to be finished, for the murmurings and the plotting against him to come to an end. At last, Jesus would be greeted as royalty, and he ought to ride as royalty on a gallant horse, but it did not play out that way.

What the two found in the village was not the grand stallion they had expected or wanted, not a horse with mighty legs and flying mane, but a lowly beast of burden.

And so it was. The crowds turned out, shouting their praise in the city that was the heart of Jewish worship and the seat of Roman authority as he rode in peace and humility on a Colt.

CROWD

To the shouts of "Hosanna" which means "save us" and the waving of Palm branches - an ancient symbol of independence, the people throw their cloaks on the road before him.  This was a rallying point for the Jewish people so harshly oppressed by the might of the Roman Empire. One can only imagine the sense of excitement, exuberance and jubilation and incredible hope that characterized His entrance.

The crowds remind us of how fickle, flighty and unreliable humanity can be.  The week began with palms, accolades and hosannas.  It concluded with disciples slipping off to sleep, a brutal betrayal, an arrest, cruel beatings, a mock trial with trumped up charges, a denial from one of his most trusted disciples and death on a cross.  When He was born, there was no room for him in the Inn.

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CRUCIBLE

Palm Sunday moves from festivity to solemnity.  Most of us latch onto the festivity and avoid the solemnity.  Most of us skip from Palm Sunday to Easter.

Truth be told, many of us don’t want to think too much about what happens between Palm Sunday and Easter … Some avoid Holy Week because it interferes with the joy and the trumpets on Easter. And others of us skip over the events of this week because they’re just too painful … because we have experienced Good Friday all too intimately in our own lives. Jesus’ betrayal brings back all the shame and anger we felt when we were betrayed.  And Jesus’ trial brings back the sting of injustice we felt when we were dealt with unfairly. And Jesus’ death: it brings back all the losses we have ever felt, all the grief that has accumulated over time, all the hopelessness watching someone we love struggle and suffer before our very eyes.

CONCLUSION

It’s tempting for us to skip over Holy Week – to shortcut the burn of betrayal, the helplessness of injustice, the sorrow of death – to cut to the glory of Easter. But there is no shortcut between these Sundays, any more than there is a shortcut in life.  Jesus took all these things upon himself for us.  And the truth is this: the glory of Palm Sunday and Easter is empty without the events in between.

Closing Prayer

[[i]](https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/" \l "m_884390569631304186__ednref1" \o ")  Fleming Rutledge, *Not Ashamed of the Gospel,*William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007, p. 79.