

Palm Sunday Reflection, April 17, 2011

“Hosanna, hosanna” is what they are shouting at Jesus as he makes his way through the streets of Jerusalem.

Since we have no Sunday School today so that we can be all together, children and youth and grown-ups – (Hold up “map”) I want to show everybody a road map that the children have and adults can too. It’s this, available at the deacons table. And if you have crayons, it’s even better – for learning the steps Jesus takes as comes into the city of Jerusalem, like a parade, with the people shouting: “Hosanna”! --!!-- Hosanna is the Hebrew word which means “save us.”

Christians call this day “Palm and Passion Sunday.” Both words “palm” and “passion” together reflect what is happening in those moments and in the steps which follow. The palms that the people wave before Jesus in praise at the beginning of this holy week give way to the passion and pain of the way of the Cross. “Passion” here means the struggle, which Jesus endures.

The cheers become jeers. Happy hoorays become angry shouts. The hosannas --!!-- become hisses and cries . . . to crucify him! Imagine, even our voices – young and old together – just the sound of it, with all of us in one moment, happily crying out “hosanna,” ---!!!--- and then the feeling of the mood turning from praise to denial.

Then, the One who is treated in ways fit for a king . . . the One who is cheered and welcomed, with so much riding on him, as he rides a donkey – a colt – into the city, he – Jesus -- becomes the very one who is shunned, betrayed and rejected. And the shouts of “hosanna” become ugly.

In a few days, the crowd would get to see Jesus labeled as a king. But it would be on a placard – a little sign -- which Pontius Pilate ordered placed on the cross of Jesus, more out of mockery than anything else.

Today on Palm Sunday, our friends in the Giacomo family – Robin and Olivia and Zoe -- Read a version of the story from the family Bible which is “child friendly.” That is to say it is not R rated, or any of those ratings which parents and grown-ups are extra-concerned about – and rightly so -- because of things which are too much for children to see or to hear.

So it is that we grown-ups need to filter out, or turn away from, the ugly, bad stuff. We may want to avoid it. I have a young friend who once suggested that we might just skip ahead past Maundy Thursday and Good Friday to the resurrection; she describes all this in her drawing of the empty tomb – which had an Easter Bunny outside the empty tomb – everlasting life and a basket of chocolates – Now, you’re talking!

We don’t really want to be presented with the pain of the story and the Cross. But we see it in this story, it appears. Just like we see it in the pew Bible which Carina read from:

Religious people wanted him to keep quiet. Friends denied him. The people who cheered one day, wanted him to be killed the next.

Palm/Passion Sunday we tell the story and share the word of the Palms and the Passion of Christ realizing and referring to something bad that happens to Jesus – really, the cross – what happened on the cross represents the worst that humanity can do, to the greatest of God’s gifts. And then, Christ overcomes and rises above.

Echoing the words of the great spiritual hymn, we can see the cross and take a look at the story of Jesus this week and say: “Were you there when they crucified my Lord . . . Sometimes it causes me to tremble.” Sometimes all of this stuff that hurts just makes us shiver and feel that way.

If you were in the crowd that day, how would you want to act? How would we respond as the days proceeded? How would we want to be remembered in this story? And throughout the story of our lives? Let it be in the way of compassion, love reaching out, the way that we see in him.

Still, he comes to us in our failing, our falling short. He comes with forgiveness, loving us even in a way so extraordinary as we see in this holiest of weeks, and always. Hosanna, hosanna. Amen. Amen.