

Palm Sunday

It all happens so fast. At one moment we are in the bright sunshine of a Jerusalem morning on the coronation route of a new King. The parade is loud and joyous, waving and singing, and praising God for the healings, the blessings, for liberation and freedom...

...and then the next, we are a distance from the foot of a wooden cross, on a littered hilltop in a strange noonday darkness, watching, as the King breathes his last. We come down at the entrance of a rock tomb with our Lord wrapped in Linen.

We are stunned, and surprised and even shocked. How did we get here? How did we get from Palm to Passion, from parade to persecution, from garden to Golgatha, from praise to mourning? How could things have gone so terribly wrong, so terribly fast....

We are astonished...except that the feeling is so terribly familiar.

How did we get here? From well to sick, from hope to despair, from peace to war, from life to death? How did we fall so far so fast?

Only moments ago, we were on top. Only moments ago, everything was as it should be. She was getting better, or they were getting along, or he was safe, or they were just kids, or we were in the black. Only moments ago, our loved ones, our relationships, our finances, our bodies, they were intact, and in an instant BAM, things went terribly wrong.

BAM, we were at a parade and now we are at a graveside.

How did we get here? And dear God, how do we get out of here?

This day, this Palm, this Passion Sunday...in fact this whole week in the life of the church, we act out this narrative to be reminded of these questions, to walk through the range of emotions—the cruel injustice, the self doubt, the anger, the exhaustion and the all-encompassing grief. We walk through this week so we can find out how we got here? And remember how we get out of here?

Truth is, God never promised us we wouldn't end up here. God only promised us that if we did, we would be met there with an invitation to get out.

I mean, of course, we end up here. From the beginning of time, we have been self-sabotaging, hanging our heroes, persecuting our prophets. From the beginning of time we have fought God's reign in the world. Even today, even in the church, even people of deep faith, we choose the devices of the world over the devices of God.

We got here because you and me, we are just like the chief priests and Peter and Judas and the crowds. We got here because of pride. We got here because of hate. We got here because of fear and greed and denial and jealousy. We got here not because we are bad, or deserve it, or God is punishing us or rejecting us... but because we are human, because we fell here, because when we choose our way over God's way, this is the place you end up. This story, could happen to any of us; it is certain to happen to all of us.

We got here because when a man this good can be treated that bad...there is little to be said for how far we have fallen.

We got here because, if you live long enough, you realize out that you can't go from glory to glory forever. Even those of us with the most charmed lives know... You can't skip from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday anywhere, except in church. Life is full of trials and tribulations and cruelties and crucifixions.

Life is fraught with death and dying. Life is full of little deaths that need to die, deaths to ourselves and our addictions and the things that draw us away from God, and deaths that nearly break us, they seem so painful and pointless.

We got here because death comes, and it is something we just can't stop. It is even something that God chooses not to stop. Defeat yes, but not stop.

It is no surprise that we got here, but the surprise is what we LEARN here...the very things that help us get out—

How to be like Simon, and faithfully carry the cross
How to be like the penitent thief, and ask to be remembered

How to be like Joseph of Arimthea, and look for the kingdom of God.

How to be like the women at the tomb and prepare the body.

How to be like Jesus, obedient even unto death.

We learn this here, in community, in worship, in prayer. We learn who we are, and whose we are, and what God is going to do with our big ol messes.

Ours is not a God that leaves us mixing the spices. We may be hurt and suffering and sinful, we may be overcome with death and darkness and despair, we

may get ourselves in some pretty horrendous spots, but we will find something there. GOD. In fact, God may be the only person waiting for us there, when the rest of the world has gone back to the business of living, while the rest of the world has gone on from here.

God is going to stick around to get us out of here. God is deeply committed to us, and to the world. God is working things out.

Watch.

And see that there is something in the movement from Palm to Passion that reveals God's redemptive powers, that is feels complete once Christ is lifted up. See if you can see that there is something sacred about being here. In the thief's awareness, in the centurions proclamation, in the silence at the cross, in the preparation of the body, in the purchase of the tomb, in the mixing of the spices... It is here, by the rock-hewn tomb, that the realization of Christ's kingship sets in.

But only if we pay close attention, only if we walk this week, pray this week, watch this week with a watchman's eye, at a painfully slow pace ever so intentionally. If we live into each moment of the passion we will see where God is lingering, see how

God is stirring up something big, so big that that tomb will be emptied, so big that we will get out of here too.

Keep watch... God redeems in insignificant moments, in unsuspected places, in unlikely people. Think about the stable, and Mary's oil, and the coming of spring. Sometimes big things start small.

And get ready... because that thing God is putting in motion is so powerful... even if we were to be silent, the stones would still shout out.

Let today be an invitation... an invitation into the story, an invitation into worship this week, an invitation into the stations tonight, an invitation to journey with Jesus all the way to the end of the story... to carry the cross, wipe the face, weep and walk and watch, to buy the tomb, prepare the body, mix the spices, and wait.

Pay attention to what happens to you if you let yourself fully feel things this week.---Death and destruction, denial and deception, disappointment, and distress and disillusionment—even the longing and anticipation, let them overwhelm you.

Name yourself in the corruption. Hear your voice in the echoes of the crowd. Walk up the hill and stare at

death. Sit by the tomb and mourn your losses. Find out how you personally got here.

Sit in this place of deep discomfort, wrestle with God here--both in the story of Jesus and the troubles of your own heart.

Fully feel----For it is here that God has a chance to make a change, turn a heart, resurrect a body. It is here that you may begin to feel fully alive.

In the pain and beauty of this day, of this week, of this life, as we work out our faith in this broken world. In the healing of the sick, the reconciliation of the sinful, the binding up of the broken hearted...this is where we see God. In the dark corners of existence, the hidden places of deep grief, the loneliness of mourning...Seek, and you will find God. Sit and you will find solace. Live intentionally, and observe how God is working on you, too, to overturn the dark places, to overcome death in you.

And then watch as a new fire is lit in our church and in our heart. Watch as Christ is risen. Watch and see how God gets us out of here.

It is an extraordinary story...it is your story...how from these depths, there arises the grace of a god that

heals us, the mercy of a God that comforts us, the love of a God who chooses life over death.

But that is a whole week away. There is something for you here in the silence of the rock-hewn tomb, that makes the *there*, ever so much sweeter.

Sermon by Mtr. Lissa Smith,
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Palm Sunday (March 28) 2010, Solemn High Mass