

Happy and Sad, All at Once
Palm Sunday, April 5, 2009

Sermon by the Rev. Corinne Hodges, St. John of the Cross

- I. What a procession we have today—people, palms, noisemakers—wake up the neighbors...at least get them to check out their window and see what is going on at historic white church down the street, SJOC
 - a. Procession have a way of doing that. People look up and want to see what's going on, who's coming, what's the big occasion?
 - b. All kinds of processions in life: weddings, funerals, commencements, inaugurations, parades, red carpet
 - c. Most happy occasions

- II. Palm Sunday processions
 - a. First one is one of joy triumph: new king, long awaited Messiah, branches, cloaks (red carpet, royal treatment), cheering, raising up
 - b. Often wonder how Jesus felt with all this attention?
 1. Humility on a simple colt
 2. He knew what lay ahead: betrayal, pain, suffering, disappointment, death
 3. Perhaps he knew to take this procession in stride—that the tone would change and so he remained grounded, not getting caught up in it all. He knew there was more to the story.
 - c. Sequence moves from joy and great welcome to hatred and fear
 1. Jesus is arrested, interrogated, falsely accused, given a death sentence even though he is innocent and brutally murdered
 2. What starts out with glory & the arrival of the prince of peace quickly turns into darkness and the abandonment of him
 3. Loyalty wavers, even disciples scatter and desert Christ
 4. Second procession--Mocking, cruel, spitting, crown of thorns
 5. The vestments that are normally white on Sunday turn to red for the blood of Christ (merge of GF story)

- III. On no other day in the church calendar is this switch in tone and mood so apparent; happy to sad
 - a. Jesus has gone from a king to a slave
 - b. From being celebrated to persecuted and sentenced
 - c. From human life to death
 - d. No matter what kind of mood swings and situations in our own lives, nothing we experience can compare to what Jesus did last days of life

- IV. So our message today is not a completely happy one

- a. Although we wave palms and sing “Hosanna! Hosanna!” we know what lies right around the corner
 - b. 40 days ago many of us were here for Ash Wednesday
 - c. We were invited to contemplate what a holy Lent meant to us and how we could live it out. We did this with marks of ashes on our foreheads and the words “Remember that you are dust & to dust you shall return”
 - d. Wake up and are reminded, if only briefly, of the reality that death is real.
- V. We could easily try to avoid these reminders, Ash Wednesday, Lent, Good Friday, signs of our own mortality, difficult readings about Christ’s death...
- a. So much easier to gloss over bad and sad skip to joy of Easter (music and white vestments, lilies and chocolate)
 - b. But we are not there yet and our tradition holds value in remembering MTh and GF
 - c. God invites us to make this Holy Week exactly that, a holy week
 - d. Hear and ponder stories of Jesus’ last days: foot washing and Last Supper on Maundy Th, Vigil, Passion (John) & devotion on Good Friday
- VI. Through reflection and remembrance of darker times, we gain #1: Greater understanding/extent of Christ’s suffering and how to handle our own
- A. In Paul’s Letter to the Philippians today, tells us to be of the same mind of Christ, to empty ourselves, humble ourselves
 - 2. What do we need to empty ourselves of in order to follow Christ?
 - 3. One version of our Gospel reading today called the colt or donkey a “beast of burden.” What burdens do we need to lay down? Thoughts, concerns preventing us from living fully?
 - 4. Jesus will soon carry the cross for us yet again. Will we let him carry our sins and troubles?
- VII. Greater understanding of depth of God’s love for us=our response should be true appreciation for life we have been given--Story of Chris—emptied of all else, focus on blessings of today, not yesterday or tomorrow
- a. Our lives should be transformed after Easter. Reflect gratitude of God’s gift through Christ
 - b. Elizabeth Barrett Browning: “Earth’s crammed with heaven and every bush afire with God. Those who see it take their shoes off. The rest of us sit round and pluck blackberries.”
 - c. What will our lives look like come Easter? Will we have taken off our shoes? Will we tread this earth in a new way, greater purpose, energy and focus? Try to envision yourself...How will you proceed in life in a post-Easter world?