

Palm (Passion) Sunday – March 20, 2016
Luke 22:14-23:56

Before we get too caught up in the preparations for Easter Sunday, we need this Sunday.

Today the gospel is proclaimed by others along with the deacon – and, in effect, every individual in this church takes part. It literally gives us a role in the action. We become a part of the drama of the Passion.

We need to remember that today we started out singing “Hosanna.” And we ended up just being the mob.

Remember that...

...the same crowd that cheered Jesus as he entered Jerusalem also condemned him.

...the voices praising him also called for his death.

...those who loved him and promised loyalty also abandoned him, denied him, and betrayed him.

What did we say? What lines were we given?

You will have denied me three times...

I do not know him!

A rooster crowed...

Peter went out and wept...

Take him away!

We want Barabbas!

“Hail, King of the Jews!”

“Crucify him!”

If you want to know who did that, just look at the palm branches in our hands. We might not want to admit it, but we too are guilty of these things. And I am as much a sinner, as responsible for them as anyone.

We see Jesus every day, read about him in the papers; hear about him in the news. He is everywhere there is someone who is small, or neglected, or disrespected, or discarded.

How often do we shrug Jesus off when things become too difficult or the rules too hard or the demands of Christian life too taxing? **How often do we treat love as just a sentiment for greeting cards, and not a command for living?** How often do we see suffering in the faces of those in need, and simply turn away?

We encounter Jesus all around us...we see him on the bus and look away, we step over him on the sidewalk, and we go out of our way to avoid him when we feel like he might make demands on our time.

He is with the unwanted and unloved, the bullied and abused.

“Why have you abandoned me?”

Do we hear him?

We find ways to justify our choices...whenever we choose death over life, sin over the gospel, popularity over integrity, indifference over love – whenever we turn away from Jesus – we who claim to believe in him, instead, betrayed him.

We have said, *“Give us Barabbas.”*

We have said, *“Crucify him.”*

These palms challenge us not only to remember what we have done to Jesus, but **what he has done for us.**

Before we look ahead to next Sunday, look back and look within. Look to these palms. Look at what we are called to do...and who we are called to be. The way to that new life is through the road that Jesus traveled. He accompanies us along the way today and every day.

Being honest with ourselves can seem threatening—even scary. Instead of being an intimidating process, Jesus wants the experience to bring us healing and freedom as he offers us forgiveness and grace for positive changes.

All we can do sometimes is echo the words of the one thief... words we heard just a few moments ago: “Jesus, remember me.” That moment is the only one in any of the gospels where someone ordinary calls Jesus by his given name.

And in our own brokenness, and sinfulness, we ask that Jesus remember us. We pray that we may be better than we are, and receive better than we deserve. We pray that we, who often deserve to be forgotten, may be remembered.

Each of us comes into this world with nothing. Everything we have is from God. We only give back to God that which we have received from God. God gave us one of the greatest gifts imaginable when Jesus came to us in human form...given to us out of love for us...not because we are good, but because God is good! And Jesus followed up with the gift of being able to love another as he loves us...even to his death on a tree.

We will leave this chapel today in sorrow and in sadness as witnesses to both his triumphant entrance into Jerusalem and his death at our own hands.

But we know the continuation of this story. We know the love and forgiveness of Jesus. We know his triumph...we will celebrate it at the great Easter Vigil where his love for us will be manifested with great anticipation as we wait in joyful hope for the coming (again) of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

May this story of his suffering and death refresh our faith in his love poured out for us. And May the words of Jesus' passion, embedded in our hearts, bring us to the peace and joy of Easter.

Deacon Greg Cecere

March 20, 2016

(with excerpts from Deacon Rick Fisher and Deacon Greg Kandra)