

Palm Sunday March 24, 2013 Matthew 21:1-9 (triumphal entry w/palms) Mark 14-15 (Passion)
“Why Mess Up Palm Sunday?”

One Palm Sunday morning a woman in a former church accosted me and demanded of me in her characteristically blunt way, “Why do you insist on messing up Palm Sunday by having us read all that stuff about Jesus being mistreated and crucified? Why don’t you let us enjoy the day? I used to love waving the palms and thinking of all the children yelling Hosanna, all excited that it was just one week until Easter. But now, the way you’re doing it, I’m thinking of putting Palm Sunday on my ‘MISS CHURCH’ list! You have taken the joy out of it!”

Why mess up Palm Sunday? My first reason is that not everybody who is here today will be able to make it to the Maundy Thursday service. If we only celebrated the palms today and then the empty tomb next Sunday, then those who don’t make it out on Thursday would not really have much grasp of what happened in “Holy Week” that made it so holy.

So we mess up Palm Sunday, and hopefully as we go through the long and disturbing story, we will grasp and be grasped by just what Jesus did for some pretty undeserving people. Hopefully we will notice that nobody stood up for Jesus, and in fact that those closest to him let him down in huge ways.

Why does this matter? Because we let him down, too, probably every day. Jesus asked us to do two basic things: Love God with everything that we have and are; and love others as much as we love ourselves. Love God, love neighbor. But we don’t, at least not so often. We mess up. We get turned around in our lives as to what’s important, and we get turned upside down when it comes to the way we respond to things life throws at us.

A man was trying to pray, and he ended up saying, “Lord, I am so distracted and disorganized inside that I don’t even know if I am praying or not....I feel so mixed up and so disappointed: everything I thought I would do with my life I haven’t....and now I can’t see which way to go or even if there *is* a way. How can you even want to help me?”

We try to pray or try to figure out what we’re doing with our living, and maybe that man’s question finds a home in our hearts: How could God even want to be with me, as half-hearted, unsure and messed-up as I am?

So we read the story of Jesus being let down, being plotted against, being denied by his best friend, having to go through false trials, then being tortured, mocked and crucified - killed on the cross... He did not die for innocent, sweet friends. He died for people who really failed him, who cheered him on as long as they thought he would do for them what they wanted, which was to kick the Romans out of their country. He died for those who turned on him or ignored him or deserted him in order to save their own skins. Jesus did not give up his life for good people; he gave up his life for sinners, sinners including - thank God! - us!

Pastor John Vannorsdall made the following statement about Palm Sunday: "Palm Sunday is not

a day when we throw up our hands because Jesus was killed. It's not a day of pessimism when we condemn the people who went home to supper, the crowds which later became ugly. It's not a day when we get morose over the money changers in the temple and declare that nothing ever turns out well; that even God's small parade was a fiasco. Palm Sunday, rather, is a day when we say, knowing all this, knowing that people are fickle, get tired and go home, knowing that religious leaders like things neat and tidy and kill reformers, knowing that the humble truth-teller is walked upon, knowing that people will sell their soul for a handful of silver, knowing that even good friends will sleep while we suffer, it's a day when knowing all this, Jesus came riding." ("A Small Parade," in *Lectioary Homiletics*, April, 1993).

Palm Sunday is “messed up” because it was messed up from the start: We human beings wanted our own way, not God’s way. But in spite of this, and in spite of the fact that we keep on wanting our own way, and we keep on butt-headedly living our lives without all that much concern as to what *GOD* might want of us, God has saved us from ourselves and our greed and our ugliness and our wasting of what God has given us by meeting all the yucky stuff about us with the forgiveness and undying love that Jesus offered and made real for us as he hung on that Cross.

So let this day be messed up, and let its message be like a poultice for your messed-up places: the anger that threatens to control your life; the resentments you just cannot let go of; the fear you have of tomorrow and maybe even of today; and the guilt that has such an acute memory and an insatiable appetite.

Remember how Gospel-writer John explained the life of Jesus and perhaps especially this week: “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him may not perish but have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.” (John 3:16-17)

May our Savior, who gave up his life for a messed-up world, help us to find new faith, new hope and new life in him this week. Amen.