**The Liturgy of the Palms**

 • Matthew 21:1-11

 • Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

**The Liturgy of the Word**

 • Isaiah 50:4-9a

 • Philippians 2:5-11

 • Matthew 26:14- 27:66

 *• or* Matthew 27:11-54

 • Psalm 31:9-16

We have arrived at Palm Sunday. Palm Sunday is busy. It is busy thematically and it is busy liturgically. However, at least since the 1979 prayer book, we have some traction in Lent which builds us up to Palm Sunday. Palm Sunday is its own special liturgy and doesn’t seem to come out of no where like it seemed to do so before.

There is also an inherent tension through Lent that comes as a crescendo to Palm Sunday and the rest of Holy Week. If we name it right, I would go so far as to say it is THE tension upon which this religion of Christianity hangs its proverbial hat. The tension shows up in pretty much all Sunday’s, but not nearly as dramatically as on Palm Sunday. It is as if we turned the drama and volume up on the Christian tension right up to the scary or breaking point. Palm Sunday can just make us feel scared of ourselves as humans.

Everyone feels it to some degree or another. We start the morning with the triumphant entry of Jesus on the donkey into the city. Of all the sites I saw in Jerusalem, this was the most moving to me. There is this serpentine smooth path that comes down a hill, now covered in stone, that begins from Beth Page, up on the Mount of Olives, and comes down to the city of Jerusalem.. You can really picture people dropping their palm leaves and clothing in front of Jesus for him to walk on. And we join this parade as the proud, the good people, the in-the-know, because we have accepted Jesus, we proclaim Jesus as King and shout Hosannah! We want to be the ones close to Jesus. We want to be the ones welcoming Jesus.

And then… we don’t…. There is a form of resistance, a resistance to goodness, a resistance to grace. Grace always seems so unfamiliar and so there is an abandonment of what is unfamiliar or what might stretch us into being more loving, there is a distrust of the very person who could help us, who then becomes the last person on earth we want to see. There is a distrust of God, of Jesus, of Christians.

if you have ever left the church, this might be part of why you left… All those religious folk wanting you to think outside yourself, and maybe you just wanted to go home, or not wake up on a Sunday morning in order to come to church, and maybe it is easier or better to take care of the self. Life is hard enough, there are enough challenges. There is too much going on. We lose jobs, we move countries and learn new languages, we are met with a divorce we didn’t want; a parent or child or anyone we are close to us dies, or gets so sick that we are scared they are dying and we stay there— away from God. Best to take care of self. Why be tangled up with religious folk? Why risk being real? Why trust grace?

And so what we don’t want, because it is scary, we turn away from… Crucify him! **Crucify him!** It gets louder and louder…if that seems too harsh, you could think of making his voice not heard. We can not hear by many ways. We can shout over! We can make God quiet in our lives.

Jesus was not the only one crucified, yes, on each side were bandits, but crucifixion was the preferred method of capital punishment for insurgents. Jesus was nothing if not an insurgent. He challenged authority of the religious folk of the time, and was painted as one who challenged the empire. Silence the people who challenge. Silence those who might make us change.

But this isn’t the way God works.

Now you can not come to church.

 You can silence the person who does the healing,

 you can crucify him.

 When things are less about proclaiming and more about standing in the hard spots, and being spat on and reviled, you can turn away, just like we turn away from a lot of other stuff. From poor dirty people, refugees, drug users, people who don’t even deserve our pity.

 but you don’t silence God. — this isn’t the way God works.

There have been many people who die for others. Typically we call those people heroes. There is one Jesus.

 Why does Jesus matter so much? (and I was going to ask why Jesus’s life matters so much?—-but it is his life, death, resurrection, ascension, it is all, even before we get there during this next week of Holy Week, it is all of those things). Why will Christianity keep going even if things look bleak?

 It is not that Jesus is a hero or even by itself that he is divine, but because Jesus defines what being divine is and what that means for our relationship with him. The crucifixion and then the resurrection reveals the self-emptying sacrifice and shows the essence of what divinity is. This is grace. Grace, being what grace is, is not merited. We receive this from Jesus, even when we turn our backs. There is always a home-coming. There is grace despite our resistance. Despite when we come or don’t come to church.

And yet, in some ways this is when we get to Easter, but “slow down” you say, we aren’t there yet, and that is true… but we are at the “not yet, but already” stage or more aptly put… we are at the “why does it matter?” phase… why does Jesus, the King to whom we give glory, laud and honor. why does he matter?

Jesus matters because through Jesus we learn to practice grace, and if we didn’t have it spelled out, Paul does for us in the Philippians reading, what is called the Christ Hymn, Paul says “Have the same mind that was in Christ Jesus.” Well, that seems daunting. No, no one wants you to play God, but we too are to be self-emptying, to sacrifice…. This seems like a moral exhortation, but instead think of it this way. Practice Grace… it’s not about winning or who comes in first, it’s about loving and giving, without keeping track, (you might want to keep track for the IRS, but other than that, make the IRS look twice at your return… let them think… “NO WAY”…)

It is so very easy to think of God’s grace as out there, somewhere else other than with me, something too good that we have not merited or achieved; it just comes, like life blooming in Springtime after Winter.. . And yet, we are disciples, we too are to practice grace. The notion of practicing means we are going to fail, our hearts will not be full and sometimes they won’t even be charitable but if there is ever a way to not turn from God, if there is ever a way to manifest how God works other than through Jesus, then it is to have the same mind that was in Christ Jesus…. it is to practice grace. Sit with sinners, don’t keep score, give to those in need, be Christ in the world.

As we journey the rest of the way in Holy Week, we will be challenged with personal grief from our own missteps— ways that we have NOT practiced grace, with our own turning away and tuning out, from knowing in our heart of hearts that sometimes we don’t want to be known, we resist, and yet…

the mind of Christ tell us to …

practice…

 grace.