

Palm/Passion Sunday  
Sermon for April 2, 2023  
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Los Alamos, New Mexico

Matthew 21:1-11  
Psalm 118:1-2,19-29  
Isaiah 50:4-91  
Psalm 31:9-16  
Philippians 2:5-11  
Matthew 26:36-75, 27:1-66

Today we observe two events: Palm Sunday and Passion Sunday.  
I wish there was a way to separate the two  
because it is not enough to savor the triumph of Palm Sunday  
before we must endure the agony of the Crucifixion.  
So we compress three days into one this Sunday.

For me, this Sunday is a day of ambiguity.  
This is a day of ambivalence.  
This is also a day of ambition.

On the one hand, we celebrate the triumphal entry of Jesus the king into the city of God – Jerusalem.  
And on the other hand we observe the tragic arrest, trial,  
sentence and execution of the man named Jesus.

I call this Sunday ambiguous because of the book ends it represents.  
In one service we leap five days from the procession  
amidst the cheers of the “multitude of disciples”  
to the jeers of the crowd before Pilate  
demanding that Jesus be crucified.

I call this Sunday ambivalent  
because I’m not sure how we’re supposed to feel about the two events.  
On the one hand we have Jesus recognized for who he truly is:  
The King of the Jews, and treated accordingly.  
And on the other hand, we have Jesus crucified – a  
n absolutely horrible death that we bemoan and cry over.

But how are we to feel.  
If it were in our power would we have the crucifixion halted?  
According to our tradition, this is the event that must happen  
so that three days hence, Jesus will be resurrected from the tomb.

I call this day ambitious because we see,  
what I think, is the fulfillment of the dreams of those who followed Jesus  
– to see Jesus take the place as the Messiah of the people of God.

To us, based on 2,000 years of tradition,

Jesus becomes the Messiah when he dies on the Cross.  
To the people who followed him,  
he became the Messiah when he was called  
“Blessed is the King who comes in the Name of the Lord”  
by those who lifted their voices in praise as Jesus rode into the city on a colt.

The Messiah to the people of Jesus’ time was not one who died  
but one who conquered in the tradition of David: A Davidic Messiah.

The disciples did not understand this,  
even though Jesus told them repeatedly.  
Peter names Jesus as the Messiah  
eight days before he witnesses the Transfiguration,  
but immediately turns around and contradicts Jesus’ declaration that he will die. I believe that when John  
and James were asking to sit at his right and left hands it was not in Heaven, but in Jerusalem, in the palace  
of the King.

And it was a highpoint in the ambitions of the “multitude of the disciples”  
and for all the Jews in the land.  
They expected Jesus to take the throne  
and throw the Romans out of the country,  
just like the revolt of the Maccabees  
drove out the Syrian overlords 200 years before.

It must have been a most anxious time.  
That’s why the Romans had extra legions on hand  
to squelch anything that looked like a revolt.  
The anxiety among them must have been contagious.

So, it is no wonder that there is this reversal of the crowd mentality  
between the Sunday of the ride into Jerusalem  
and the Friday of the crowd’s demand for blood.

The man they had hailed as the King of the Jews  
was now standing before them being treated like a convicted criminal.  
What they had yearned for did not happen.  
All these years of pent-up anger at the Romans was unleashed against Jesus.

I have heard it said that these were two different crowds.  
That is probably so,  
but the excitement of the first event must have percolated throughout the city, and put the people’s teeth  
on edge  
waiting for the Romans to disappear by act of God alone.

It didn’t happen.

Don’t get me wrong.  
I am not trying to lessen the culpability of the High Priests,  
the Scribes, the Sanhedrin, and the Temple Authorities in the death of Jesus. I’m not diminishing the role  
of Herod and his court,  
and I’m certainly not acquitting Pilate and the Romans in the crucifixion.

What I am saying is that there is more than enough blame to go around.

No one, no individual, no group of individuals, stood up and said  
“no., this must not happen.”

They, we, are all culpable.

They, we, all participated in the death of Jesus on the Cross.

But, we see through the cross to the tomb at Easter  
when Jesus Christ arose from the grave.

This is Holy Week.

Each day this week,

we observe the days that led up to the death of Jesus on the Cross  
and his resurrection from the dead in the tomb on Easter.

I invite you to come share the healing oil and Eucharist  
at 12:30 p.m. Wednesday.

On Thursday at 7:00 p.m. we will have Eucharist,  
the foot washing, and the stripping of the altar,  
and the procession to the Altar of Repose in the Chapel.

From 8:30 p.m. Thursday to Friday morning,  
we will observe the vigil in the Chapel.

There we will pray and keep vigil as Jesus asked his most trusted friends:

“Wait with me, just one hour...”

The vigil will end with a service at 6:30 a.m. followed by Holy Communion from the reserved Sacrament.

At 12:30 p.m. Friday we will observe the Stations of the Cross, and have communion from the reserve  
sacrament, and at 7 p.m. we will observe the Good Friday service.

Saturday morning the Altar Guild will gather to clean the church for Easter, and say the Holy Saturday  
service when we're done.

The first service of Easter will begin at 7:00 p.m. Saturday with the first fire of Easter and the Great Vigil  
of Easter.

We will burn the regrets of the past in the first fire,  
and celebrate the first Eucharist of Easter,  
and be able to say “alleluia” once more.