

Palm Sunday, Year A
April 9, 2017
St. James, Wheat Ridge

By the Rev. Becky Jones

Everybody has a job during worship.
That's what the word "liturgy" means.
It means "work of the people."
It's never about just gathering to passively be instructed or inspired
and definitely not to be entertained.
Each individual worshipper is meant to be an active part of things,
and while we all have different roles,
we all participate.
That's why it's called a "liturgy."

Yet on this Sunday,
more than any other Sunday of the year,
the participation level jumps up a couple of notches.

We began outside with the liturgy of the palms.
Then many of us marched in procession,
waving those palms and singing,
calling forth from the past Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem,
and inserting ourselves into that moment in history.
We put their words into our own mouths:
"Hosanna! Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord."
That part was fun.

But Palm Sunday is also Passion Sunday.
Like "Good Friday," which seems anything but good,
Passion Sunday seems to us an oddly-named event,
since to our ears passion has a slightly sultry meaning.
The English word comes from the Latin word *passio*,
which means, simply, "suffering."
It's only been in the last 900 years or so
that "passion" has come to mean any sort of strong emotion.

So while the name "Passion Sunday"
wasn't originally intended to refer to how it makes us feel,
it is indeed a day of strong emotion.
For on this day,
we also call forward from the past
the story of Jesus' betrayal, his suffering, and his death.
The crowd that welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem
becomes the crowd that turned on him and called for his death.
That puts some very different – and very painful –
words into our mouths.
"Let him be crucified."
"His blood be on us and on our children."

Of all the words that are spoken here this morning,
those may be among the most difficult to speak and to hear.
I can never say them without getting ... emotional.
Because I know that this is not just a little make-believe drama.
It really happened 2,000 years ago.
And it's a scene that metaphorically plays itself out in my life every
day.

Hardly a day goes by that I'm not forced
to choose between Jesus and Barabbas,
between my will and God's will,
between proclaiming the faith that is in me
and denying that faith, when it is expedient to do so.
I know how often I choose Barabbas,
and send Jesus to the cross once again.

And so, less than a week
after he was greeted with palms and hosannas,
the Prince of Peace was deemed a threat to national security,
led outside the gates of Jerusalem
and crucified.
He hung there on that cross for three hours,
while darkness covered the land.
At last he cried out,
"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"
Then he died.
And the earth shook; and rocks split open.

Our reading for today ends in terror.

We know that that's not how the whole story ends.
We know that Easter is coming, and what awaits Jesus, and us.
But today is not Easter.
Not yet.
On *this* day, we wait in that uncertain, terrifying time,
in between his death and his resurrection.

Jesus is dead... yet our worship continues.

In a few minutes, we will once again be invited to gather around the
table, the table where time does not exist;
where the past, the present and the future are all one;
where Christ has died,
Christ is risen,
and Christ has come again.
And once again Jesus takes bread and breaks it and blesses it,
and offers it to us as his body;
then offers us the cup and tells us to drink it,
ALL of us.
Even Judas.
Even those of us who send him to the cross again every day.
"Drink this, *all* of you," he says.

So we are given a chance, once more,
to say, along with the Centurion on that fateful day 2000 years ago,
"Truly this man was God's Son!"

Judgment and fear and hatred put Jesus to death.
But neither judgment nor fear nor hatred
get the last word in this liturgy.
Nor do they get the last word in our lives.

Jesus stretched out his arms of love on the hard wood of the cross
that everyone might come within the reach of his saving embrace.
Those of us who experience Christ's presence in Word and
Sacrament
can leave our worship this day
strengthened to reach forth our hands in love.

And on this Passion Sunday,
let us also make Jesus's words our own:
"Not as I will, Lord, but as you will."

Amen.

* I am grateful to the Rev. Canon Frank Logue, Canon to the Ordinary for the Diocese of Georgia, whose [Palm Sunday sermon](#), "[Strengthened to Reach Forth Our Hands in Love](#)," inspired my own.