

Palm Sunday

March 28, 2021

"My God, my God. Why have you abandoned me?"

Psalm 22:1

Warm sun, shouts of laughter and joy, riding on the back of a donkey. Holy Week begins victoriously on Palm Sunday with Jesus welcomed into Jerusalem as one who "comes in the name of the Lord." A crowd lines the streets with palms and praise for the teacher and healer they love. A ray of hope and light promising to break the darkness. In contrast, Good Friday is much different, condemned to death, Jesus is sent out from the city with the cross as a burden on his back. The crowds lining the street on that day are not full of praise, but here to watch his gruesome death. We live our faith in this juxtaposition.

Like all our experiences of life, Palm Sunday and Holy Week are a mixed bag of joy and sorrow, intimacy and rejection. It is easy to wonder, as the Son of God, did Jesus know what the darkness growing over him meant? Even as he rode triumphantly into Jerusalem, did he know how he would leave? That he would soon be abandoned by his followers, that his death is at hand?

Did he know what would happen, or did he go forward trusting God's plan? Does it matter? In his walk through despair and desolation, he walks with us, to be with us, truly as our brother in both joy and sorrow. He walks willingly into a place that feels so devoid of God that he sweats blood in the face of the terrors before him. He feels the abandonment. He knows pain and suffering.

Amidst his deepest, darkest pain, Jesus cries out to God. "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" This passage from Psalm 22, lives deep within Jewish memory from the time of Egyptian slavery, Babylonian exile and in Jesus' time, Roman occupation. Our own darkness comes from so many places in our lives – unfulfilled dreams, broken relationships, tragedy and disaster. Some we can see before they manifest, while others set upon us without warning. They leave us feeling the same abandonment and loss shared by Christ in his passion and death. We too, know the cry, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" Our faith of juxtaposition tells us that

it is precisely by entering into this pain, by allowing it to happen and, yes, even by questioning God, that our healing begins. On Thursday evening, just before the joy turns to horror, Jesus himself promises, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy." (John 16.20).

Can we hold onto this promise in the face of what is to come? Can we walk each day in faith trusting in God's goodness?

Brief daily reflections for the remainder of the week:

Monday, March 29, 2021 – On Palm Sunday Jesus enters the gates of the city in triumph, being praised by others. When have you felt the support of friends and loved ones in this challenging season?

Tuesday, March 30, 2021– This week is one of joy and suffering. The elation of Palm Sunday, the intimacy of the Last Supper and the devastation of Jesus' arrest and death. How does God help you hold these conflicting experiences?

Wednesday, March 31, 2021– The light is just a glimmer. The hope seems still out of reach. This Lent and last year's Lent seem to run together, holding us hostage as we long for release from the pandemic. How can we hold onto the light and joy that are just glimmers and promises of what is to come?

Thursday, April 1, 2021 - Holy Thursday reminds us of another meal where God promised to be with us, and to go before us. In the Passover before the Exodus, God pledges to be with God's people. In ritually remembering this meal, Jesus makes the same promise to his disciples now and forever. Who needs your steady faithfulness?

Friday, April 2, 2021 – It should have never ended this way, but it was the only way. God promised Abraham that if ever the covenant was broken, God would fulfill it. Where have you felt God step into your darkest moment and fill them?



Reflection for Palm Sunday

Saturday, April 3, 2021 - For the last year, many of us have found ourselves feeling like the disciples on Good Friday and Holy Saturday, huddled with those closest to us in confusion and heartbreak. Who has been in your upper room? Who have you leaned on in your darkness?