

Palm Sunday

Luke 19:28-40, Philippians 2:5-11, Psalm 31, Luke 22:14-23:49

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Palm Sunday is undoubtedly the most unusual worship service in our yearly liturgical calendar. We start with a parade of sorts waving our palm fronds and shouting hosanna to Jesus our King. But just a little later, we hear of his arrest, condemnation and execution. One crowd shouts for his coronation while less than a week later others shout for his crucifixion. This Holy Week condensed into one church service pulls us emotionally apart from joy and exhilaration to sorrow and bereavement.

Let's look a little more closely at the two groups featured in today's narratives. The Palm Sunday crowd is made up of the disciples and followers of Jesus who have been indelibly changed by Jesus' life – his message, his ministry and his example. They are the poor and hungry who have been fed by his multiplication of loaves and by his words of love and hope for the downtrodden and left behind. They comprise the sick and the maimed, who have been healed by a word or a touch from Jesus. They are the demon-possessed restored to their right minds by a command from Jesus' mouth. They are the spiritually inquisitive for whom the practices of their current faith didn't bring them as near to the divine as being in Jesus presence does. And they are sinners forgiven to begin afresh.

All these have been renewed, reborn, dignified, liberated or enlightened by their association with Jesus. Of course, they are willing to throw their cloaks on the road to make a red carpet for their savior and Lord. Of course, they cheer his entry into their capital city, Jerusalem. Maybe Jesus will lead all of Israel into a new and brighter future.

The other group that confronts Jesus on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday are the rulers of his day, both Jewish and Roman. They are the well off and most successful in first century Palestine. They don't go to bed hungry and can afford to take their sick to the best doctors. They make the rules and enforce them. They want to preserve the status quo because it is working just fine for them.

They have no need for Jesus because in their experience he is only upsetting the apple cart. He is making their lives uncomfortable by challenging their practices which enrich their small minority while adding no significant value to the lives of the masses. Jesus is presenting and representing a God who wants everyone included in the riches of their religious faith, where every person is as important as every other person regardless of rank or birthright. They want only the brightest and the best in their circle.

When they come to arrest Jesus, he says of their tactics to eliminate him, "But this is your hour and the power of darkness."

It is easy and a common practice to denigrate anyone who makes us uncomfortable or threatens our equilibrium?

Are we part of the group that has been unquestionably changed and uplifted by our faith in Christ and our participation in the life of the church, or are we in the group that has to control, find fault with and exclude any individual or group that seeks greater equality for everyone, especially the weakest among us?

The common masses adored him. Peter, a true friend, denied him. The religious leaders despised him. The Romans caved to pressure and nailed him to a cross.

We have to see ourselves among some if not all of these most human groups and characters in today's gospel.

Jesus is truly divine and deserving of our feeble loyalty, worship and followership because somehow he is always ready and able to forgive us and accept us.

Father, forgive us, for we don't always know what we are doing even now. AMEN.