

The Sunday of the Passion: Palm Sunday
Year C
April 13, 2025
Trinity, St. Louis
The Rev. Dr. Paul Jacobson, *Rector*

Isaiah 50:4-9a

Psalms 31:9-16

Philippians 2:5-11

Luke 23:1-49

In the Name of the One, Holy, and Living God. Amen.

Don't you just love a parade? Is there anyone who doesn't? There's the anticipation of getting up early to get ready ... the joyful confusion in finding parking ... seeing old friends ... who has the cooler? did you remember to get ice this time? ... make sure you have your banners and palms ... let's get in line...

Finally, we're ready! The crowd buzzes with anticipation. You can hear the music getting louder. Any minute now ... then – wait, here he comes!

The excitement is almost unbearable! What a great morning! *We're going to see the King! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna to the Son of David!*

And then...

And then, in a matter of moments, we are fast-forwarded into a surreal, horrific, series of events: betrayal, anguish, degradation, and death. Wait a minute, we cry! Something's gone horribly wrong. Why are we headed out to Golgotha? This is not the parade I signed up for. Look, I have the flyer!

This day, which started out fun, suddenly turns "funny," and the procession that we joined with joy turns into the Way of the Cross. And we are knocked off balance. A friend of mine calls this "Whiplash Sunday." And I think that's kind of the point of the day.

Throughout the coming week, all manner of paradoxes will swirl around us: strength concealed in humility, betrayal hidden in friendship, victory veiled in defeat, life shrouded in death, God emptied out into human form.

What's even harder is to look at are the paradoxes and contradictions within ourselves, and within our community. Today we are reminded that, at the drop of a hat, we can turn from adoration to abandonment. We all shout "Hosannah!" and we all cry "Crucify him!"

It is true that we retell the Passion story every time we say the Creed, but today there is no escaping the power of the story fully told. Today, we hear St. Luke's version, a gripping drama, full of details we know well.

But it's worth remembering that the details of the story were written down long after the events had taken place – sometime around the year 85. About twenty-five years earlier, before the Gospel writers began to piece together the "who" and the "what" of the Passion story, St. Paul was writing to the church at Philippi about the "why."

Into his letter to the Philippians, St. Paul weaves a hymn that was already being sung, a hymn aching with beauty about the God who loves us so deeply, so thoroughly, that God pours God's own self out, to be born in human likeness. Listen again:

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.

Human likeness. Like you; like me. And in that human likeness, in the flesh, Jesus becomes obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross, that shameful, degrading, excruciating instrument of execution.

What the heck is going on here? Our God, on the Cross? No wonder St. Paul called the Cross a stumbling block and foolishness (1 Cor. 1:23). It makes absolutely no sense to us...until we remember the Incarnation.

Everything about Holy Week, everything about the Way of the Cross, reminds us that the Incarnation and the Crucifixion are intimately connected. There is a saying attributed to the 4th century theologian Athanasius of Alexandria (c. 298-373), which goes like this: "That which is not assumed cannot be redeemed."¹

In other words, God in Christ takes on, Christ assumes, the fullness of our human nature, everything that we are, except sin, in order to redeem and restore our

¹ This is perhaps a paraphrase of "For we were the purpose of his embodiment, and for our salvation he so loved human beings as to come to be and appear in a human body." Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation*.

Cf. also Hebrews 4:15, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin."

humanity. By being born in human likeness, Jesus assures us that anywhere we find ourselves he has already been, and that where he is now, we shall one day be.²

As we walk together as a community through Holy Week, with all its paradoxes, and its twists and turns, we are called upon to pick up our cross and follow Jesus. It may not be the parade you thought you were in line for this morning, but it is the procession that leads to life. After all, we know that the grave is not the end of the story.

To walk in the Way of the Cross is to remember that God has given Jesus the Name above every other name. To walk in the Way of the Cross is to remember that Jesus poured out his life for us, and that he calls us to the willing service of others. To walk in the Way of the Cross is to remember that Jesus tramples down death forever, setting us free from our slavery to sin.

To walk in the Way of the Cross is to have the opportunity to become more fully human and more deeply humane. To walk in the Way of the Cross is to acknowledge that what the world tells us about success isn't really true because, at the foot of the Cross, the ground is level, and we are, all of us, children of God.

Let us pray...

Lord Jesus,
On the first Palm Sunday
You entered the unruly city
Where you were to die.
Enter our hearts, we pray,
And subdue them to yourself.
And as your disciples blessed your coming
And spread garments and branches in your way,
Make us ready to lay at your feet
All that we have and are,
That we too may bless your coming
In the name of the Lord. Amen.³

² Cf. Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*: "He became what we are that we might become what he is."

³ *Common Order*, page 664.