

Preparing our Hearts for the Holy Week Ahead
Palm Sunday, April 2, 2023
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Today is the start of Holy Week. We begin watching Jesus enter with pomp and circumstance and joy into the city of Jerusalem, but by the end of the week we watch as Jesus is crucified, dead and buried, and we wait in silence for the hope of Easter morning to be revealed.

Palm Sunday

The long awaited Messiah enters on a humble donkey, not like Pontius Pilate on a horse and chariot with soldiers, but simply riding on a similar animal to the one who carried his mother to Bethlehem years earlier. God's promises were being fulfilled. The air crackled with excitement and dangerous hope that things would change- hope to some, dread and fear to others. Jesus' entry into Jerusalem came after many people had begun to believe that Jesus was the Messiah and Son of God with the power to heal and even to raise the dead. The Jewish leaders felt threatened and had set out to find a way to end this man who was doing things that only God had the power and authority to do. Jesus didn't quietly enter but came in surrounded by loud shouts of Hosanna. This was a politically charged moment. It was radical.

Jan Richardson offers this blessing for the day:

"This blessing can be heard coming from a long way off.

This blessing is making its steady way up the road toward you.

This blessing blooms in the throats of women, springs from the hearts of men, tumbles out of the mouths of children.

This blessing is stitched into the seams of the cloaks that line the road, etched into the branches that trace the path, echoes in the breathing of the willing colt, the click of the donkey's hoof against the stones.

Something is rising beneath this blessing. Something will try to drown it out.

But this blessing cannot be turned back, cannot be made to still its voice, cannot cease to sing its praise of the One who comes along the way it makes."

Today let us hope and celebrate with joy that Jesus entered Jerusalem with all that it meant.

Joan Chittister in her book *The Liturgical Year* wrote, "These first days of Holy Week confirm there are some things worth living for, even if we find ourselves having to die for them as well."

Let us ponder these first days of Holy Week the blessing of Jesus.

Thursday we come together again here for Maundy Thursday at 7pm. Maundy is from the Latin word meaning commandment. Jesus gave his disciples the commandment to "love one another" as he washed their feet. It was also the first communion celebrated. It is a tender night, the night before Jesus died, where he tells those dearest to him how to go on living the message he brought, a message of radical love. Only a servant would wash the dirty feet of the guests who

entered. Jesus was a humble servant and a great leader. Peter resisted the washing at first. He was shocked by it. I imagine we would be too.

Hear this blessing (Jan Richardson):

“As if you could stop this blessing from washing over you.

As if you could turn it back, could return it from your body to the bowl to the pitcher, from the pitcher to the hand that set this blessing on its way.

As if you could change the course by which this blessing flows.

As if you could control how it pours over you- unbidden, unsought, unasked.

Yet startling in the way it matches the need you did not know you had.

As if you could become undrenched.

As if you could resist gathering it up in your two hands and following the arc the blessing makes.”

Friday the St Helens Ministerial Association is hosting a Good Friday service at 3pm at the Episcopal Church. This will be a beautiful service of singing and reflecting on the death of Jesus. A somber and mysterious day. A day of sadness and gratitude.

We will read some of the Scriptures today of the Passion describing Jesus’ death. I know that I prefer to jump ahead to Easter Sunday and to walk quickly through Good Friday, but we miss something when we do that. There is sadness; there are valleys of the shadow of death. There is a deafening silence sometimes where injustice and evil seem to win.

Imagine how well the disciples knew Jesus- the tenderness and compassionate presence of Jesus and the courageous tough talking Jesus who was not hesitant to say what needed to be said. The disciples loved him so deeply. They must have been so confused and absolutely lost on Friday. His mother and his friends loved him. Love and loss...

A blessing for Friday:(Jan Richardson)

This day let all stand still in silence, in sorrow.

Sun and moon be still.

Earth be still.

Still the waters.

Still the wind.

Let the ground gape in stunned lamentation.

Let it weep as it receives what it thinks it will not give up.

Let it groan as it gathers the One who was through forever stilled.

Time be still.

Watch and wait.

Still.

Today this sermon will be posted. Feel free to find it on the website and read the blessings this week. My prayers are with you as we ponder all of this.

- May your week be one of hopeful reflection and gratitude at the mystery of Christ’s death and resurrection. Amen.