

ST BART'S



A Sermon by:

The Rev. Lynn C. Sanders, *Chief of Parish Ministries*

It's Not the Same River

Sermon preached at the 11 a.m. service, April 13, 2014

The Sunday of the Passion: Palm Sunday—Based on Matthew 2:1-11 and Matthew 26:36-27:54

What can any preacher say at this point? With a story this powerful told in words and music, less is more. I offer a very few words for your reflection.

We began this Palm Sunday by raising our palms and shouting, “Hosanna!” (“Save us!”), by making a parade and singing, “All glory laud and honor to thee, Redeemer King.” Only minutes later, we are shouting, “Crucify him! Crucify him!” How quickly excitement and hope turn to betrayal, violence, death. How quickly things change. How quickly we change.

Today is Palm Sunday. Over this next week, which we call Holy Week, the entire story we just experienced unfolds one day at a time. So why pack both the Palms and the whole Passion story into one service? As one person asked this week, “Why can’t Palm Sunday just be about celebration? Why does it have to turn into such a downer?”

Today we experience spiritual and emotional whiplash. Many of us know something about that. Things are going along so well, you’re seemingly on top of the world, on top of your game and then—in an instant everything has changed, everything seems lost.

Experiencing both Palms and Passion in such a compressed time feels to me like flying, as in a small plane, flying low over the hills and valleys and desert. We see the landscape. We recognize its basic contours. We see the path Jesus takes—leaving Bethany and the house of his dear friends Mary and Martha and Lazarus, the procession forming at the Mount of Olives, people joining in as it makes its way across the rocky Kidron Valley into the city of Jerusalem, into conflict. A last supper with the disciples, then back to the Mount of Olives, this time to the garden of Gethsemane, then back into Jerusalem to pain and death.

Palm Sunday shapes us, pulls us into the heart of the matter. There can be no Palm procession without the Passion. The Passion can’t stand alone without the Palms. The parade points us toward the cross. The “Hosannas”—then as now—have a political dimension. The kingdom that Jesus is already bringing about threatens to upset the order of things. The response of the powers-that-be is swift and predictable. [<http://www.christiancentury.org/blogs/archive/2011-04/against-passion-Sunday>]

Starting today, and every day of this next week, we have the opportunity to experience, in some small way, the same emotions of those closest to Jesus. The movement from Palms to Passion offers a visceral experience of Jesus' experience that week—the quick and horrifying turn from praise to persecution.

It's been said, "No [person] ever steps in the same river twice, for it's not the same river and [you're] not the same [person]." - *Heraclitus of Ephesus, c. 535 - c. 475 BCE.*

Maybe this is your first Palm Sunday. Or your 5th. Or your 50th. No matter how many Palm Sundays we may have experienced, this story becomes new for each of us this year. We are not the same person we were last year.

I encourage you, to the extent you are able, to observe Holy Week in community. Be physically here with us at St. Bart's if you can. If you have to be elsewhere, find a church to attend. If you can't be physically present in a church, go to a church's website, find the readings for each day, read and pray and meditate on them as you can, and feel that you are in community with us here.

Walk this next week as best you can with Jesus. Enter as deeply as you can into this last week of his life and into his death— a death that teaches us so much about life.

Walk with Jesus with an open mind and an open heart, which is to say, with a degree of vulnerability.

It's not the same river, and you're not the same person.

What—or Who—might find you this Holy Week? Whom might you find?

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St. Bart's, 325 Park Avenue at 51st Street, New York, New York 10022