

Sermon March 25, 2018 Palm Sunday

On a lot of Sundays there is a basic difference between what we are doing - worshiping in church - and what Jesus and the disciples are doing in the gospel passages we read. But that's not true today.

On Palm Sunday we do exactly what Jesus and the disciples do. They act out bible story and so do we. The passage from Zechariah 9 that they act out is one traditionally seen as a prophecy of the coming of the messiah, and they act out all the pieces of it, all the symbols of it. They take Jesus and they put him on a donkey, and they throw palm branches down on the roadway before Him and they cry, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" It's the prophecy from Zechariah of the return of a davidic king, the 'son of David,' who would be the anointed one - as kings and queen's still are, anointed with oil in their coronation rite. He would be the King of Israel who would restore the unity of the kingdom of Israel and gather all the nations of the world to himself, and would be a great political and military and spiritual leader. Its a prophecy that represents the deepest hope of a nation which had been under occupation, exile, and oppression for hundreds of years.

The exuberance and hilarity and hosannas of the crowd on Palm Sunday turn into the jeering of the crowd on Good Friday. That is important for this story. It is not pleasant or fun but it is part of the *mechanism* that drives this story, part of the dynamic of crowds and power that makes Good Friday possible.

So Jesus and the disciples are acting out a bible story and we do the same. We act out their acting out. But we don't have to do that. We could just make a mental note of Jesus and the disciples did. We could just say, "Oh. They went through the streets and they acted out Zechariah 9 and isn't that interesting?" and just make a mental note. But if we do that we won't understand. The reason we do the acting out is that unless we get and our imaginations, our hearts, our minds, and our *bodies* involved, we cannot see what the events of Holy Week have to tell us, not so much about Jesus, but about *ourselves*. We cannot see it unless we go there. We cannot learn the gospel as a theory - although the theory is wonderful. We must discover it in action.

There are lots of ways of saying what it is that Jesus wanted to reveal in the events of Holy Week and the Cross. We preachers have worked hard through the centuries to try to put it across.

Today I want to say it this way: The Gospels, especially John, tell us that we can live the resurrection life now. Deep down, this is what we are searching for, struggling for. But there is something extremely powerful that stands between us and the possibility of finding what Jesus called 'the little door,' the way *in* to this resurrection life. That powerful thing is our survival instinct. We are fighting for survival, fighting for life, all the time, even when we don't need to. Sadly we are often fighting not just in ourselves but we are fighting each other. We do this in big ways and small ways. All the little conflicts we have everyday, trivial and small though may seem, are on a continuum with all the big, serious, deadly conflicts in the world in Syria and everywhere. So we are creating everywhere these fights to the death which are actually about fighting for life.

In Holy Week and on the Cross and afterwards in resurrection, Jesus wants to show us that we are gripped by an illusion. We believe these conflicts are necessary. They are not. We believe we have to fight. We do not. There is another way, but we cannot see it. We have eyes, but we are blind to that truth, so strong is our survival instinct.

In Matthew's gospel, Jesus says it this way: "13 'Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. 14For the

gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.”

Finding this narrow gate is what Holy Week is all about.

To be able even to see the “little door” of which Jesus speaks, we have to go to the one very special place where that door is even visible to us. But that place is one to which none of us would ever choose to go. And only if we *choose* to go will we see the little door when we get there. Only Jesus knows to go there, so we must choose to go with Him. That place is the cross. We must go there, be *lifted up* with Him if we are to experience resurrection. There is no other way. Stay and continue fighting for a life which perishes in our defending of it. Or lay down our arms and our life and go with Him to a life which is a true life, needs no defending, and gives life not just to ourselves but to all, eternally.

So that is why we act out a bible story today on Palm Sunday: so we can get to the place where we can see the truth, the narrow gate to eternal life. We continue doing it all week for the same reason. I urge you, come with Him, walk in the steps of Jesus. Come with Him and find the little door. But we need to go all the way. Be there are Maundy Thursday and receive the sacrament

of awakening. Die with Him on the Cross, carry the cross, be nailed to it, on Good Friday. Rise with Him in the New Fire at Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday. Sing the Alleluias on Easter Sunday. That way, when the time comes we will have found the door and can truly say these words as we celebrate the Festival Eucharist of the Resurrection. They are the Fraction Sentence for Easter Season, the words we say at end of the Eucharist as we all are about to receive communion :

- **If we have died with him, we shall live with him;
if we hold firm,
we shall reign with him.**
- Lord, we died with you on the cross.
- **Now we are raised to new life.**
- We were buried in your tomb.
- **Now we share in your resurrection.**
- Live in us, that we may live in you.

When we have done all of that we'll be people of the resurrection, we'll be witnesses who can truly say, we were there, we took the first steps in His invitation to take up *our* cross and follow Him, now, in this risen life.