

Palm Sunday Luke 19:28-40
Christ and Grace April 14, 2019
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Each Gospel writer records the events in the final week of the life of Jesus. There are a number of similarities in the stories, and there are some striking differences. The difference is always in the details, isn't it? Luke begins his gospel, all the way back in chapter one, by asserting that he's giving us "an orderly account of the events, just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word." He also makes clear that he decided, after doing his own investigating, that his facts are the facts. I can get behind that.

So, if Luke is telling us the facts, how would you have reacted if I had invited you to take off your jackets and sweaters and spread them on the ground as we began our procession? What would your reaction have been if you had entered the church to find not palm branches, but cloaks and robes strewn in the aisle of the church? Because, in case you didn't notice, Luke never mentions palm branches. How could we possibly have Palm Sunday without palms? We expect palms, but in Luke there are no palm branches. What we get, are cloaks. And, there are no hosannas. Instead, the people sing praises that are almost identical to the songs the angels sang at the birth of Jesus. When life gives us cloaks instead of palms, when things do not go as we expect, how do we react?

We might wonder if the people were remembering that Jesus had said earlier that if someone takes away your coat, give them your shirt also. Perhaps the people had expected their king to arrive regally on a fine horse, but instead he rode in on a donkey, in all humility. Luke is telling us that the people recognized this, that they were honoring him, remembering what he had taught them, and giving to him that which was most precious of their possessions. They were giving Jesus the very thing that they thought protected them from harm, from the world. Perhaps this is where the idiom, "to give the shirt off one's back" comes from – to act in a very generous and selfless manner.

[We are not hearing the Passion Narrative at this early service today, but I encourage you to take your lectionary insert home and take the time to read it. It is powerful and filled with strong emotions of anger and sadness. But it is also filled with love. For people to let go of their cloaks, probably their most valuable belonging, that which they held closest to them, was an act of generous self-offering and love.]

The Passion Narrative we just heard is powerful and filled with strong emotions of anger and sadness. But it is also filled with love. And for people to let go of their cloaks, probably their most valuable belonging, that which they held closest to them, was an act of generous self-offering and love.

We are all participants in this parade of life. Sometimes the parade is like a Palm Sunday entrance into Jerusalem, while at other times our life seems to be a parade of sadness with too many crosses lining the way. Life's journey takes us from times of joyful praise to times where circumstances are beyond our control, and then we find ourselves, like those first followers of

Jesus, in a place or a situation we never expected. How do we react – with power and rage, or with praise and humility?

The significance of Palm Sunday - the truth of the passion narrative - is that here is where we are brought face to face with the very real extremes of our own lives. We must admit our all too human tendency to abandon those to whom we have pledged our loyalty, to betray those we love, or to deny even knowing the Holy One who has changed our lives. The Holy One who made himself vulnerable on our behalf, a self-offering for our salvation waits for us to share our own vulnerabilities, fears and failures; waits for us to spread our cloaks of self preservation in the aisles of life; to lay down that which is closest to us –the thin fabric of pride and power we mistakenly think can protect us.

And when we are at the other extreme, at our most vulnerable, Jesus does not abandon us. When we receive an unwanted diagnosis, struggle with work, care for wayward children or aging parents Jesus does not deny us but promises us a place in the Kingdom.

May we spend time this week considering where we fit into this story. Who are we, what are our expectations, and what are the cloaks we will we lay down before Jesus?

Amen.