

Palm Sunday and the Passion Gospel of Mark

Holy God, Lover of our Souls, open our hearts to feel your power and presence in this place+. Amen.

We have walked this long road together from Ash Wednesday, through the long days of Lent, all the way to Golgotha. Our hearts have just stretched from the joy of waving palms and proclaiming “*Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the Highest!*” to hearing ourselves shout, “*Crucify him!*” to the final shocking grief of nails and cross, and the devastation of Jesus’ dying words.

We’ve just endured a spiritual “whiplash” of sorts, this moving so fast from joy to grief, and our hearts are bruised. But what comforts me in the midst of this darkness are Jesus’ clear indications that none of this was a surprise to him; nothing that happened to him was unplanned. Somehow knowing that he had willingly taken it on, with foreknowledge, helps *me* to bear it. Jesus knew he was being anointed for burial with the alabaster jar of nard. He knew where the little colt was tied, waiting for him to ride on into Jerusalem, fulfilling the scripture. He knew when and where his last meal would take place, and exactly how the disciples would find their way there. He knew that Judas would betray him, and Peter would deny him. He knew his time in the garden was finished before the soldiers arrived. He knew he would be crucified, and three days later rise again from death.

He knew all of this because it was all part of the plan he had said yes to, the plan that began with his incarnation. He knew his life would begin in the rough hard wood of the little manger, and would end, hung upon the rough hard wood of the cross. He knew there was no other way to encompass all suffering, and all death, but to offer himself in solidarity with the complete spectrum of what it is to be fully human. All this for love: so that we would never suffer anything without the comfort of his presence. All this, even though his disciples abandoned him, and hid in fear as he suffered so completely, even though he suffered so humanly that he felt forsaken even by God.

Our hearts are very heavy with the reality of what we’ve just relived. But let’s remember that this is not the end of the story. In fact, it’s only the beginning of Holy Week, where we will offer ourselves into an even closer walk with our Lord through his last days. We will remember together his last meal, when he instituted the sharing of Holy Communion; we will obey his charge to serve each other, washing one another’s feet. We will strip the altar as he was stripped; we will suffer with him through the hours of Good Friday. We will close the church as his tomb was closed shut. But let us remember that the story, our story, continues on! Into the Great Vigil of Easter Eve when we celebrate the first Paschal Fire of the Resurrection, when he awoke and rose again from the tomb! And on into the glory of Easter morning, when our joy is complete with his triumph over death, bringing all of God’s children into new life with him.

Let us offer the fullness of our hearts, the whole spectrum from grief and despair to joy and relief, as we gird ourselves for the final stretch of our Lord's earthbound life, remembering that it was all in the plan, and it was all for love.

Let us pray.

Lord Jesus Christ, accept our heartfelt grief and pain over all that you suffered willingly for our sakes. Move our hearts to ponder the vastness of your saving gift, sweeping all of creation into the reach of your saving embrace. Accept our deepest and most humble thanks for welcoming us into the joy of eternal life with you. And now, Lord, as we turn to approach your altar, change us; form us; fill us and strengthen us to be your people, to be your hands in a world longing for your love. Amen.

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March 27, 2009