

PASTORAL PRAYER

Gracious and loving God, creator and lover of us all, you call us to wholeness and growth. We are called to make each and every day a path toward becoming more and more your children. It is not an easy path; it is filled with difficulty, struggle, and times when we just don't want to do it. That calling is not without grace, for your callings require time, failure, and repetition. We need to learn what it is to be your people, and that's not always easy.

Today we remember the triumphant entry of Jesus into the City of Peace, Jerusalem. At that time, it seemed like the City of Peace, but that peace disappeared as the people ran against Jesus. Help us to keep each of these events in context, to experience what it means to go through the greater journey, instead of leaping from joy to joy. That can feel momentarily good, God, but it, in the long run, lacks depth and structure. Help us to walk through this week faithfully, observing the joys and the trials of Jesus' journey to the cross and beyond. May we take in all of highs and lows so that we may reach the summit of Easter acknowledging what it takes to get there. We pray all of these things in the name of Jesus, the one we follow this week and every week, who taught us to pray...

SERMON

We are not always what we appear to be. For instance, you might see one of your friends and greet them lovingly, only to have them snap at you. You might have a friend or associate who completely goes off on you in anger over the smallest, inconsequential thing. If you're like me, the first thing you think is assume you did something wrong that made them go off. Sometimes, that may be the case; other times, we are taking too much responsibility on ourselves. The problem is, unless the other person tells us directly, we

don't always know what our associates are thinking. We can guess, we can surmise, we can try to put together every little piece of evidence to put together the puzzle, but we never have the whole picture. The whole picture does tell us the greater story, how things interconnect with one another, how one event gives meaning to another event. Getting a glimpse of the whole picture can give us a greater understanding of how things work. In this week, we need the whole picture to see how the dominos fall as they do. We need the whole picture to get why things happen as we do. We need the whole picture of this day and of this week.

This is not just Jesus coming into Jerusalem. Jesus, in all his actions and interactions, has a way of showing us something new in the midst of something familiar. He warped the ways of the world in a way that showed us what was really true. Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem shows us a whole lot that is under the surface. According to *The Last Week* by Borg and Crossan, this was one of two entrances into Jerusalem on that Sunday. One was Pontius Pilate, the Roman representative, who came into Jerusalem enacting Roman power. Jesus came into the city in the same way, but with a twist. Both claim to be royalty, but both don't claim to hold the same seat. This spectacle is not just about Jesus as a new King, it also lampoons the way Pilate came into the city. Jesus makes fun of the Roman officials who ride in on their great steeds by sitting on a humble, young colt. He mocks the Roman royalty by not wearing the great and grand robes of a monarch but his modest common-person's clothing. The people respond lovingly, with words from Psalm 118. The choice is not by accident, according to the New Interpreter's Bible commentary; Psalm 118 served as a liturgy for a King who was coming into a city, as well as a way to ordain a new King. By all signs, the people were dismissing one King in favor of a New King, Jesus, but this King may

not have lived up to their expectations. Perhaps they wanted someone to overthrow the Romans quickly, and that's why they turned on him. Maybe, maybe not. Either way, these cheers were not meant to last. Jesus would not be their next King the way they envision.

Jesus wasn't saying that he was there to overthrow the Roman authorities right away. Jesus was telling us something new about authority and what it means to devote one's self to an authority. Both require allegiance, but one requires a whole lot more. It's a lot easier to take comfort in the authorities that you see, but what lasts? He also asks a new question: what does it mean to have security? The Romans could provide security in the form of soldiers, kings, taxes, all of those things that we feel provide us bodily protection. Jesus doesn't promise bodily security. Indeed, we will see later this week how that is the case. But he does provide a security that lasts longer, a more full security that lasts beyond all time and space. This is security without limitation. This is a security from God.

Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem was the first chapter in a longer story. Holy Week's big attractions are Palm Sunday and Easter, but they aren't the whole story. This is a beginning, but, at the same time, an end. This is the traditional beginning of Holy Week, but it also is the end of Jesus' traveling ministry, which began to spread his name across the land. When I read this story, I have two conflicting emotions. On the one hand, I feel a sense of hope. I sense that something grand is about to happen. On the other hand, I feel a foreboding darkness in this story. This sense of hopefulness is not meant to last. I've seen this movie before, and I know how it ends. In Jesus' grand entrance into Jerusalem, we see one side of the coin of betrayal: there is trust or a sense of friendship which later is broken. But that's yet to come. When you really think about it, Palm Sunday really isn't anything special when we don't see it in the context of the rest of the story. By itself, it really doesn't

mean anything great as compared to the rest of the week. It's not really a big deal for Jesus to come to another city, even if it is Jerusalem. He's more or less continuing the ministry that he started earlier. When we see it as the beginning, the way that the tone is set for the rest to come, the story then creates a great deal of meaning. We see how the picture changes when the beginning of the week is about celebration, but that celebration later becomes the very height of betrayal. As we understand this story, we understand it is the prequel. It's not the story by itself, but it begins to set the tone for what will happen later. Between this and Easter is the rest of the story. We need to get the whole picture.

One of my favorite movie series of all time was Star Wars. Unfortunately, I got to know Star Wars in reverse order. There was one summer where I watched the only Star Wars movie we had, Return of the Jedi, the third and final in the series, every day. It was a tape that my sister recorded several years before. I loved the story, but I didn't really know what I was doing. I was actually doing myself a rather large disservice. It was only after seeing the third movie in the series quite a few times did I actually see the first and second Star Wars movies. From there, I could actually figure out why Obi Wan died, what was the big deal about Darth Vader being Luke's father, and how it was a big surprise that Luke and Leia were siblings. In the same way, you can't really understand the whole of the story until you go through each and every part. You wouldn't read a book by starting at chapter one and going straight to chapter thirty-one. I knew no better at the time, but you wouldn't try to get the feel of a whole movie series by watching the last one if you had the choice.

So what are we to make of this week? Do we just go from Palm Sunday to Easter? Allow me to tell you about one of my biggest pet peeves. No, indeed not. I believe that missing the middle of Holy Week is a huge disservice, for we cut from the middle of the

story to the end of the story. If that's the case, then the story makes no sense whatsoever. Just like Star Wars, I had no idea about what made the climactic ending of Darth Vader's sacrifice when I didn't understand what happened before. I had no idea why Luke's revelation to Leia about them being related was a big deal when I didn't know anything about how they came to know each other. In the same way, we can't just skip over the darkness of Maundy Thursday and the death of Good Friday just so we can quickly arrive at the dawn of Easter and new life. New life makes no sense whatsoever if you don't die to get there.

Despite what you may be thinking, this is not just a long advertisement for coming to Maundy Thursday and Good Friday services. But at the same time, it is important that we really do understand what it means to walk through this week. Jesus is telling us about a new sense of authority today, and each day of this week tells us something new as well. When we observe each of them as they call us to, then we understand more greatly Jesus and his calling for our lives.

This is just the beginning, friends, of the most climactic and important series of events in Christian history. This is more important than Christmas and any other holiday. We are coming to understand what it means to be a Christian through the sacrifice of Christ's love and showing us what new life can mean. It's a cycle we go through each year. It's a cycle we can go through each day, but we'll talk more about that next week. Jesus was greeted by people that heard he was the next big thing, but they turned abruptly. Jesus was the talk of the town one day, and then quickly became yesterday's news. That's the problem when, as Jesus said in a parable, the roots do not dig down deeply into the dirt. What is trendy becomes interesting, and then, when the trend becomes boring, the interest

fades away. I ask that we treat this week with the utmost reverence and observance.

Through a deeply appreciating stance of this week, we can better know what it means to be Christian, and, consequently, what it better means to be ourselves. Thanks be to God.

Amen and Amen.