



Dear People of God: It is Palm Sunday, a day of triumphant entry and agonizing accusation! It is particularly difficult to express and pastor to the emotion of this day in this time of COVID19. And so, at the end of this meditation are two links, one to Sherry playing *Were You There* which I imagine myself listening to and singing and praying all week and the other is my voice recorded in our sanctuary offering this meditation to God and to you. Perhaps you will listen as you hold your own branches cut from your yard or perhaps you listen at an altar created just recently in your home that you might be still and know...wherever and whenever know I am with you and care for you! Please know we walk together this week!

Blessed be God who animates our lives and offers us the path of Holy Week, marked by compassion and grief, lit by love and loss, which nevertheless leads us through the Paschal mystery to Resurrection!

When I traveled to the Holy Land in January I did not realize it was as though to live out or enact or prepare for a Holy Week before the pandemic; I did not realize I was preparing to witness death and resurrection in the most difficult of wildernesses!

I did realize I was walking in the footsteps of Jesus and I did realize that as I did I was praying for courage and strength and patience and mercy. I just did not realize how those gifts and revelations would be received and used...almost immediately. Reprised!

The trip from Jericho to Jerusalem took place on a day of weather changes, dramatic ones. Rain pelted, then misted, then clouds parted revealing rainbows and blue sky. Wind gusted, then diminished, then gusted again. Darkness shrouded the differentiated landscape causing it to blend. Then just as we were lulled into this blandness the skies would part, the colors and shadows would define. Each of these changes contributed to the rotation of anxiety and expectation we were feeling. Anxiety because of threatening signs of the West Bank. Anxiety because of uncertainty and strangeness. Expectation because we were constantly interrupted by beauty, of the landscape of the people, of our community of pilgrims. Expectation because we were going to Jerusalem!

But like Holy Week, Good Friday itself, we had to go through dark, hard times before arriving at the empty tomb.

All of this came together quite surprisingly when the bus pulled over in the midst of the mountainous desert and we were told to disembark, trek the gentle hill, and gather for Eucharist. The wind was whirling, hats were flying, my own stole for celebrating performed like a kite as I wrapped it around my neck twice and said a brief prayer of forgiveness lest it seem sacrilegious.

Along the way we were encountered and accosted by Bedouins selling their wares. Where did they come from? Even children were as persistent as any salesperson I had ever encountered having been trained to bargain and cajole.

Near the top we heard gunfire which needless to say stopped us in our tracks. Upon realizing it was an exchange far away reminding us and them of fear and Holy Week misunderstanding and blame, we continued to the summit which was as dramatic a space as I had ever witness. Shadows accentuated the rolling hills and darkened the valley beneath us, the Wadi Qelt. We envisioned a donkey, a horse, a family fleeing, pilgrims returning. Surely a wilderness!

I have written elsewhere of the Eucharist we shared there. Of the unification of all opposition: gunfire, wind, rain, cold, discomfort, anxiety into silence, sunshine, warmth of bodies close, comfort of the bread and wine. All was momentarily sanctified by the breath of the Spirit.

I looked at the faces and there among us standing still was a Bedouin's donkey and three desert dwellers themselves. Holy pause.

It was enough to kindle courage, to evoke hope, to express gratitude. We were readier now to continue into Jerusalem.

And that brings us to today. Palm Sunday as we look out over a week which will be like none other we have ever known before. We did not know we would be waving forsythia and evergreen instead of palms. We did not know we would be shut in rather than bumping up against each other and lining a street. We did not know we would be doing all this differently!

I cannot help but feel that the wilderness created by coronavirus, while teeming with grief and loss and fear, also offers us important opportunities of faith. Not just tests and tears, but opportunities and imagination.

While I enter this week with a heavier heart and something in the pit of my stomach which just won't go away, I also enter this week with hope. I have witnessed in the Holy Land compassion and communion right next to the heart of God. I have felt the tears of the pieta! And I have witnessed here in Sharon not to mention virtually compassion and communion which fill me to the brim. I have witnessed new life giving ways of being church. I have recognized sacraments not to replace the Eucharist and Baptism but certainly to be laid alongside and to amplify.

I wonder whether this different time we now experience is an opportunity to sacramentally welcome Jesus to our worlds, our lives here in CT. To welcome Him as the Body of Christ! Goodness knows the Living Christ is among us. But rather than try to reenact the triumphant entry into Jerusalem actually, perhaps we ought to enact His reentry into the paths of our hearts and souls. Perhaps we might mark the signs and create the altars in new yet holy sanctuaries. The sanctuaries of our lives! The sanctuaries in our homes!

The challenge for us this Palm Sunday is to still shout triumphantly and affirmatively: Hosanna!

It means Save Us! Goodness knows that is a cry which we desperately need to pray right now! It is also the cry which launches us...propels us to walk the holy week walk!

This cry which comes up in full: Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest, is the cry which not only marks the beginning of the holiest of weeks but is the cry which disrupts chaos and pierces shrouds of grief. This is the cry of hope which will be even more gravely tested but will nevertheless prevail.

We learn from our readings on Palm/Passion Sunday that God continues to hear our cries for salvation—and that God will answer them, just not in the way that we might expect.

This blessed assurance is mysterious and sacred. This blessed assurance comes at the empty tomb, after the cross, after we fall several times, to our knees only to rise up and be blessed by the blessing of all blessings...the Risen Lord!

As you travel through Holy Week with grief and anxiety may you know you travel toward Resurrected Love, the Love Incarnate, the Risen One who is always, always in our midst! May the triumph and the splendor of Palm Sunday become like a cloak of radiance around you, the cloak you wear and the cloak you share. And as you travel may you always know the sureness of Goodness and Mercy in pursuit of you, urging you on!

Let us pray:

Almighty and everliving God, in your tender love for the human race you sent your son our Savior Jesus Christ to take upon him our nature, and to suffer death upon the cross, giving us an example of his great humility: Mercifully grant that we may walk in the way of his suffering; and also share in his resurrection; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Be of good courage
Hold fast to that which is good,
Render to no one evil for evil,
Go forth into the world in peace
Rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit,
And may the blessing of God
Father, Son and Holy Spirit
Be with you and remain with you
Always.
Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FfjIhP6Tdmc&feature=youtu.be>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x3ipxsZQylo&feature=youtu.be>



Thank you Cathy for the picture of our blessed home!

Remember there are many on line worship opportunities this week just visit the ECCT website or the National Cathedral.

I will be offering a Maundy Thursday meditation and a Good Friday one.

Also please note that there is a brief family service at 4PM today for which Cathy has sent the ZOOM information. email one of us if you don't have it.

Meanwhile find ways to pray at home by gathering flowers, lighting candles, assembling sacred items and icons! God will know!

Rev. Dr. Martha Tucker

"And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and walk humbly with your God"

--Micah 6:8

"We seldom notice how each day is a holy place Where the eucharist of the ordinary happens, Transforming our broken fragments Into an eternal continuity that keeps us."

— John O'Donohue, To Bless the Space Between Us: A Book of Invocations and Blessings

I would love to live like a river flows, carried by the surprise of its own unfolding.

— John O'Donohue