

Palm Sunday, 2011-04-17

Forty days ago we marked the foreheads of those who gathered for worship. As did much of the rest of the Christian church. The ashes are a sign of mortality – remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return. Or the words with the oil – remember that you are from God and to God you will return. Even if the oil smells better and doesn't drop little flecks of black on your nose or mark your shirt, the message is the same. All of us are going to die. Some people, certainly not all, say "thank you" as they leave the liturgy.

Lent is one long time of identifying with Jesus; we set out on this journey with him and all of us were marked for death. The practices of this season are meant to mark our faith with life as well, encouraging us not to miss this opportunity to go deeper with each other. Some have done house church, some added prayer, some have read, some have done art. We need to carry the life bits of that into this week.

Sara Miles, author of *Take this Bread and Jesus Freak*, and several members of her congregation took the life bits of ashes into the California world – at bus and train stations, in coffee and beauty shops, ashes were offered. This year she says she marked a girl on a tricycle, a man in a pickup truck, and a baby a week and a half old whose mother gently unwrapped her and when the ashes were given, said "thank you." Thank you for marking this newborn with the sign of Jesus.

Why would anyone say thank you when a stranger tells you that you are going to die? Sara says it is because we are longing for someone to tell us the truth. Jesus said when we walk in the truth we walk in light.

So, today is the day when we see if we can once more face the truth; actually we have a whole week of times where we can do this here. And our senses are heightened – or should now be – so that we can see the truth in the world too. Jesus is going to die. We cannot pretend that all sorts of terrible things are not happening. Betrayals, false judgments, injuries, loneliness, a last meal with friends and humility are served up. Following him this week means facing the truth.

The word *passio* in Latin means suffering. It will seem clearer this week – some will suffer. You can't prevent the pain of family and friends. Loved ones and strangers will betray you and stab you in the back. And you will hurt and betray others. That's part of the passion of being fully human.

And Jesus certainly was human – he got hungry, tired, sad and angry. Just like us. I'm remembering a warm Palm Sunday as we moved with Chester the donkey down to the main street, Massachusetts Avenue. We encountered traffic and shoppers out on their morning errands. Every one of them might have had it with institutional religion, with the money changers – the taxes, the tolls, the empty promises of those in charge. Each one of them carrying their own crosses and wanting a parade of recognition, of change.

Maybe every one likes a parade, a protest march. We didn't pick up any strays but most people knew what we were about; we were telling a truth. We were facing a story; we were living The Story. We were

taking ourselves into a suffering world with all that we had to offer, some solidary, some truth telling, some longing for light.

“There was no donkey this time

But a borrowed Honda 550.

Jesus riding into town

With a black leather jacket,

Jeans frayed at the knees,

And L-O-V-E tattooed

On the knuckles of his right hand.

Those who saw him

Said his smile was like the sun,

Warming shadowed corners

And causing the way to blossom

Unexpectedly.

Those who saw him told

Of all the light left over

To be taken home and set

In eyes, in hearts

And at windows for strangers.

It was like a miracle, they said.

The rest of us missed it. We

Were in another part of the city,

Waiting for the Messiah” (Joy Cowley, New Zealand)

Walk in the truth. Walk in the light; walk every day toward an Easter rising. Everything, everyone is called to new life in the midst of death. Overturned, we are headed for eternity. Say “thank you.”

LFP