

Palm Sunday 09

Why are we doing this? Why assemble and walk around and wish we were in a place where the church didn't ask us to embarrass ourselves? Why feel silly and read the passion all of one piece when on Friday we get to say 'crucify him' ourselves? Why join a parade that doesn't feel like a parade but more like a play where we are drafted as extras?

Today we participate in a pattern of incarnation; palms in hand we take our places in a parade of embodied hope. Some are on the curb of this parade, watching the strange mixture of somebodies and nobodies, the franchised and the disenfranchised, the hopeful and the disappointed. There are some who have given up on their own participation in the dream of God for all humanity. This parade is a planned counter demonstration to what regularly occurs on the other side of the city walls, through another gate, into Jerusalem.

(Vignette: power parade re: Rome)

Let's see who showed up to walk the way with Jesus. There are the disciples, Lazarus still looking dazed from his exit from the tomb, his sisters, the curious, many who had been healed, children as well as adults, the rural poor, Peter's mother-in-law, those whose lives had been turned upside down by rabbi Jesus. There are some who know the scriptures, some who are hoping that the prophetic words are being fulfilled, some who believe that a new Davidic reign is coming, one marked by peace, by healing and abundance. One marked by non-violence. But death hovers in the air, threats are ever present, the hill is filled with crucifixions.

(Vignette: voice of the woman anointing Jesus)

"Jesus' entry into Jerusalem was not against Judaism as such, not against Jerusalem as such, not against the Temple or the high priesthood as such. **It was a protest from the legal and prophetic heart of Judaism against Jewish cooperation with Roman imperial power.**" (Crossan, God and Empire) Zechariah the prophet imagines an entrance, a movement of the Messiah, not through business as usual which would have been a devastating conqueror's welcome into a conquered city. Jesus' entry was one meant to evoke images of something quite different and the crowds were meant to escort him to his rightful place. Mark's gospel, written after the destruction of the Temple, relocated the place of the Holy into the body of the faithful. But first, all must survive crucifixion, all must practice resurrection.

(Vignette: voice re: the temple scene)

The rest of this story is important, so important that knowing the whole story of this week, we will still choose to come to the offerings of the week, listening to faith stories of others on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. Thursday we will gather as the friends of Jesus in a Middle Eastern type meal with Jewish table blessings and candlelights, some honoring of friendship, some sense of remembrance with the origins of the eucharist. On

Friday we honor the way toward Golgotha, the walking again in community and then our own voices in the passion narrative and the responses in drama. On the Great Vigil we will baptize into the faith, with some important milestones on the history of salvation recounted in song, in story, in dance. The Church believes that since the early part of the 4th century, this week must be lived in some way before we get to Easter, so that our proclamation is one of lived discipleship. This week, like the voices intruding into the sermon, should interrupt our lives. And it should also restore them.

This is a week of wonder and prayer, of great mystery, of being met by God in ways we don't expect. Why are we doing this? Because we want to be with him.

Comments from Andrew Moody after the sermon

Yesterday, I had the "pleasure" of providing cleaning services at Cornerstone, a downtown women's shelter. Properly attired with protective clothing, I cleaned the rooms of three residents. The first was a woman in her early sixties, divorced and without any living family members. Alone and without financial support Cornerstone took her in. The second was a single woman in her early thirties. Her mother had died about five years ago and it took its toll on her. Her father wanted nothing to do with his daughter and threw her out of the family home. With no life skills to cope with her losses and unable to hold a job, she turned to Cornerstone and has lived there ever since. The third woman was in her mid-fifties and has lived at Cornerstone for ten years. A heavy smoker, her room was the toughest to clean, but with the winter grime removed from her window and the spring sun shining in, hopefully, it will improve her outlook on life.

Stories of these women were heart-wrenching to hear, and it is indeed unfortunate that there are so many women who need safe places like Cornerstone to live. At the same time, it is encouraging to know that places like Cornerstone exist to help these women cope with day-to-day life.

For me, the call for helpers at Cornerstone was not a hard decision to make. Like many of us, I have tended to focus my efforts over the years on St. Michael's -- the building. The call to work outside our building, and in the greater community for a few hours was easy, especially when my gift of time was so graciously received by these women.

I believe the true calling of Christians is to go beyond ourselves and to reach deeply into the community. Cornerstone gave me that opportunity.