

NEED TO REMEMBER

Sermon for Palm Sunday A—Mt. 26:14-27:66

LPC, 4/13/14

The way we do Palm Sunday these days is problematic. For many years now the lectionary has appended the Passion narrative to the story of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. At one time, the Passion was observed in "real time," so to speak, with the story of the Last Supper reserved for Maundy Thursday and the Crucifixion read on Good Friday.

The problem with that was that so few people came to church on Thursday or Friday of Holy Week that these important stories were not heard. And it is absolutely vital that Christians hear the story of the Passion. We need to remember.

We need to remember that our beloved Eucharist, which we observe every Sunday, had its foundation in Jesus' own actions, in Jesus' love unto death, and in the depths of God's own supreme sacrifice. And we need to realize that insofar as we neglect, ignore or downplay Christ's Great Commandment to love and serve one another and the world, we are complicit with the forces that brought Jesus to ruin two thousand years ago. That is why today we shout both "Hosanna!" and "Crucify him!"

I know this is difficult. I know there are people who avoid the Passion Sunday service because it is so difficult. It is profoundly difficult to see ourselves in the role of Jesus' accusers and scoffers. And it's downright dizzying to go from "Glory, Laud and Honor" to the cruel sarcasm of "Come down from the cross!"

But isn't this how people often behave? As a race we glom onto to fashions and trends and as quickly abandon them. We welcome new heroes, then we tire of them. Barack Obama isn't the first president to hit an all-time low in his popularity rating during his second elected term. He is simply the most recent. The same thing happened to his predecessors.

Sometimes, the extent of the enthusiasm with which a new star or trend is welcomed is matched by the disdain later shown for the same object. The sharpness of the swing may be due to disillusionment, or to cover embarrassment at having been taken in by something that later apparently fails miserably. It's not that hard to see how Jerusalemites would welcome Jesus, expecting him to overthrow Rome, and then turn on him when he ends up on a cross instead.

Don't we modern Christians welcome Jesus on Sundays, and then turn on him later in the week? Don't we betray Jesus when we leave the table of grace and then act with cruelty, greed, selfishness, annoyance or superiority in any degree? The swing of our fickleness may not be as dramatic as the Jerusalemites', but we do the same thing. No matter how we try, it's just so hard to be true to Jesus, every minute of every day, in every way. We fall so short.

The Very Rev. Cynthia Byers Walter

How we do need Jesus.

And we have Jesus.

Today we hear of Jesus sacrificing himself even though we fall short, while we are still falling short: while we persist in welcoming Jesus on Sunday and betraying him later in the week through sinful behavior.

We need to hear this. We need to hear of the lengths to which God is willing to go for us, while we are still sinners. We need to hear of what Jesus did. We need to know how deep that love goes.

We need to remember.