

The Reverend Kathleen Killian
 Palm Sunday and the Sunday of the Passion, Year A

The dual nature of our service today is evident in its title—Palm Sunday and the Sunday of the Passion—and that we read not one but two gospels: first, of Jesus entering Jerusalem on a colt as a large exuberant crowd paves his way with palms and shouts of *hosanna! hosanna!* this Aramaic word meaning *save us! deliver us!*; and then of Jesus departing Jerusalem on foot, the same crowd in sudden about-face paving his way with the cross and shouts of *crucify him! crucify him!*

Triumph and tragedy; innocence and guilt; victory and defeat; faithfulness and betrayal; king and criminal; savior and slave; the curtain of the temple torn in two, the earth torn in two, our worship torn in two, our hearts torn in two.

From acclaim to condemnation, how do we reconcile these splittings of conscience? Can we even? For we are part of the crowd, as capricious and as volatile, the crowd in the gospel of Matthew of distinct corporate persona and character.

1 crowd, 2 outcomes; 1 question, 3 answers: *for when Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, Who is this? The crowds saying, This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.* But after Jesus is stripped and scourged, the answer is mocking: *Hail, he's the King of the Jews!* And in the end it is acknowledged: *Truly this man was God's Son!*

This is the question we must carry with us during this holiest most ancient and sacred time of the Christian year, *the whole church in turmoil, asking, Who is this?* Though the answer may seem obvious and the question even impertinent, how we get to it, how we arrive to Easter morning matters. This is the journeying of Holy Week, and our attention is required: will we bear right through the palms or left through the passion? traverse the way as we always have or take an alternate route? will we amble along or hurry with haste? is it an uphill climb or a downhill slide? we will take a break or break a sweat? what shoes are we wearing? or do we walk bare-soled?

In our Epistle today, St. Paul tells us: *let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus*. In the Greek, the word for mind is *phroneo*, which refers not simply to intellect but also to direction and purpose of heart. The verse from Philippians 2:5 might read: *Let the same affection be in you that was in Christ Jesus; or let the same wisdom be in you that was in Christ Jesus; or let the same understanding be in you that was in Christ Jesus*.

But bearing the affection, wisdom, understanding, and mind of Christ is not as simplistic as asking “what would Jesus do” but rather our meditating upon what *is* Jesus doing, *now*? What Jesus is doing *now* is perpetual and unending—even as we speak—Jesus is emptying himself out in complete and utter abandonment to love.

In answer to the cries of *hosanna! hosanna! save us, deliver us, Son of David!*
Jesus empties himself upon the cross.

In answer to the cries of *crucify him, crucify him!* Jesus empties himself upon the cross.

In answer to his own cries: *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?* Jesus empties himself upon the cross—he lets go of everything—even the light, this emptiness of even the light illumining the black of the tomb.

In answer to our own cries in the dark, *where are you Lord?* Jesus empties himself upon the cross.

The Passion of the Lord is here *in* truth, shaking the earth, rending the rocks and opening the tombs; and His Resurrection also is at hand (*Keeping Holy Week*, St. Bernard of Clairvaux).

1 Holy Week, 1 outcome. But how we get there matters. St. Augustine writes: *Do you wish to rise? Begin by descending . . . Lay first the foundation of humility*.

During this final week of Lent, may we be so humbled that we follow Jesus to the foot of the cross and to the tomb sealed shut, faithful to his sufferings, emptied ourselves bit by bit, step by step, finally to be received into his death; to then rise from the grave with the new life and light of Christ on the dawning of that first day of the week.

Matthew tells us: *all of this has taken place, so that the scripture of the prophets may be fulfilled* (26:56). May we take our place in the great drama and mysteries of God's redeeming love, and accept our responsibility in its fulfilling. May we worship in truth.

A blessed Holy Week to us all.