

Sermon, Father William J. Albinger

March 16, 2008

Palm Sunday A 2008

In the Name of our one living God, ever creating, ever loving, and ever sustaining: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today we mark the start of Holy Week that will end with Easter. The Liturgies we celebrate, starting with today's, are rich and ancient. If we do not merely attend them but live into them, we will hear the story of God's love that is older than time itself. Indeed, our worship this week is intended to lead us to leave behind "kronos" (time as the world sees it) and enter "kairos" (time as God sees it, where all eternity is ever present).

How does one preach on the Passion of Christ that we just have heard read by the congregation? I am reminded of a comment made by my Old Testament professor at Drew, a Methodist seminary with students from all denominations. He was asked by a student why he left his denomination to become an Episcopalian. He said simply, "After being a scholar of the Bible all my life and writing many books and papers, I have concluded that some things truly cannot be conveyed by words alone."

I would like to invite you into the kairos of Holy Week by taking you back to that day Jesus entered Jerusalem seated on a donkey to the acclaim of the people as he came down from the Mount of Olives and the entered the city from the east to the acclaim of his followers. We don't know what he was thinking, but we do know he was fully aware. All four Gospels have Jesus' predicting his own violent death three times. He moves with clarity and determination because it is his calling. Every Palm

Sunday thinking about this, I am reminded of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, that great Lutheran theologian, leaving the safety of New York and the Union Theological faculty to board a ship sailing to his native Germany to confront the evils of the Nazis that were even eating away at the Church.

We tend to romanticize and aggrandize Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. Let's look at the reality: he was an itinerant preacher and wonder worker coming from the sticks of Galilee and he is entering Jerusalem from the back end of town on a donkey leading his band of peasant followers to the shouts of the people who lived in that area of town. His entry created some stir, but probably less than we imagine.

A much more impressive parade was entering Jerusalem at the other end of town through the Western Gate. Jews from all over came to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover and, in the past it was a time when zealots, some claiming to be the Messiah, tried to incite the Jews to rise up in rebellion. Thus, each year the Roman Governor – this time Pontius Pilate – led a column of cavalry and Roman soldiers from the port garrison of Caesaria into Jerusalem to make the authority and might of the Roman Empire very obvious. I would imagine the pageantry of a parade of Imperial banners and trumpet heralds with the Roman Governor riding at the head of the heavily armed troops created a huge stir. Whatever the people thought of Rome, Herod and the Temple authorities wanted no trouble. The status quo suited them just fine.

And so the scene is set for the events of the coming week. Our Palm Sunday service is a strange one. It has two names to reflect its two moods. Palm Sunday that celebrates a triumph that Jesus did not expect and Passion Sunday that records a horror that Jesus trusted the Father would transcend. It points to two Lords: Caesar and Jesus. It points to two ways: the way of empire - power and force or the way of

Jesus - repentance and transformation. Today's liturgy presents the reality that this choice faces each and every person, every nation and every generation!

We are called again into Holy Week to participate in its events, hear Jesus' teachings, and to again choose the path we will follow. This Sunday we witness what Caesar can do. We have to live prayerfully through this week to appreciate next Sunday just what God can do.

Amen.