

Gospel Lesson for the Week

March 16, 2008

Palm Sunday

Please read:

[Matthew 21:1-11](#)

Read also:

[Psalm 118:1-2](#)

[Psalm 19-29](#)

[Isaiah 50:4-9a](#)

When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, just say this, 'The Lord needs them.' And he will send them immediately."

This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, saying, "Tell the daughter of Zion, Look, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them.

A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.

The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, "Who is this?"

The crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee."

--- Matthew 21:1-11

Palm Sunday is a strange day in the Christian Year, a celebration based on a misunderstanding of who Jesus was and what his entry into Jerusalem was all about. Maybe we need the excitement to prepare us for the somber days ahead. However in many churches, (maybe your church), the day is devoted to a long reading of the passion narrative from the Gospels as Holy Week begins. We suggest that you take time this Holy Week to make your own exploration of the passion narrative. Read through in one sitting the entire story in Matthew's

Gospels, chapters 21-27. Then as the week unfolds, read the same story from each of the other Gospels. Note the variations in the way the gospel writers tell the tale. And let the words speak for themselves and speak to your heart.

The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them...

--- Matthew 21:6

The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting...

--- Matthew 21:9

Palm Sunday Reflection

They knew, but they did not know.
They knew his name.
They knew his home town.
And somehow they were convinced
that he was someone special.
So they took palm branches
and garments
and lined his path.
And they shouted,
Oh, how they shouted!

Borrowing an ancient liturgy
They sang and screamed "Hosanna"
as if, by their shouts
they would enthrone him
and make him king.
It didn't work,
for he was already king.
A different kind of king.
A King with a capital K.
And a capital-K King
doesn't need that kind of branding.

A case of mistaken identity,
you might say.
In a day when oppression was rife
and emotions were raw,
they stamped him "Messiah"
and "Son of David."
Their fantasy was that he,

like their ancient king,
would lead them in battle
to face the legions of Rome
and liberate their land.
It didn't work that way.
Five days hence,
on a way station
between Olivet and Calvary,
he'd tell his prosecutor,
"My kingdom is not of this world,"
and climb that final hill
to cross-shaped death.

A strange contrast, this.
Two strangely different Sundays.
What seemed to be a triumph
was on reflection, tragedy,
opening the door a week hence
to an enduring celebration
when tragedy was transmuted
into triumph,
and not for just one day.
It was for all time and for eternity.