

Palm Sunday

Mark 15:6-15

From Hosanna to Crucify Him

Holy Week shows in stark contrast the varieties of human responses we have to the Good News that Jesus shared and towards him personally. On Palm Sunday we have many in Jerusalem shouting “Hosanna!” We celebrated his triumphant entry this morning by waving our palm branches and joining our hosannas to that ancient parade. Yet, we read that some objected, challenging Jesus and asking him to quiet his followers. Later in the week we have Jesus in the temple teaching. Many people flocked to him to hear what he had to say. Mixed within his teaching moments were conflicts with the Scribes and Pharisees. They were asking him questions, trying to trip him up, so they could discredit him or worse, have him arrested for sedition. We have many reminders of the faithfulness of the disciples but as we heard in our study this Lent the disciples denied, lied, ignored and betrayed. We have the crowds proclaiming him Messiah while the leaders were plotting against him because his teachings were politically unacceptable and might cause them to lose their positions of power. Finally, on Friday we have some shouting “Crucify Him” and though the Bible doesn’t say it, we can imagine the pain those words caused for his faithful followers who must have been in the crowd. Yes, all the responses of humankind are present. Jesus accepts them all, embraces the good and glowing and forgives the rest.

So, what does this say to us today? I want us to explore the emotional journey of Mark, the writer of this Gospel through his Holy Week. Much of what I am going to be suggesting are my assumptions based on his account in the Gospel that bears his name and the traditions that come down to us. Mark is believed to be a young man who was one of the second ring of disciples around Jesus. Tradition has him being one of the 70 that Jesus sent out during his teaching ministry. Tradition has him bringing water to the upper room and serving. History even associates him with the young man who, in alluding capture in the garden, leaves his tunic in the hands of the guard and runs away naked. So tradition places him in Jerusalem that fateful week and has him present at

some of the important events. Since he was present for at least some, we can assume he was there for most, if not all, of the happenings recorded in this Gospel.

We begin with him in the crowd surrounding Jesus as he enters Jerusalem. We can picture him shouting hosanna. We can imagine his joy and sense of importance at being involved at a moment such as this. Nothing like this had ever happened, as far as he knew. What would it mean? I am sure he and most of the rest were hoping, believing that this was the beginning of the reign of the Messiah. They were expecting all Jerusalem to join them resulting in the overthrow of Rome. Was he a little uneasy when he noticed the leaders looking at them with scorn, perhaps even anger? Did his hosannas become a little quieter? As the realization began to set in that not all celebrated this moment with him and the others and so the future might not be so grand and glorious, did his feelings shift? Maybe, just a bit.

We all experience those times when we get caught up in the enthusiasm of the moment. We are with good friends, doing something awesome and we throw ourselves whole heartedly into the activity. We, at first don't even think about what others' opinions might be. We are running on adrenaline and expect all to feel the same way. Then reality sets in and this can change our responses, mute them or even silence them. We know that if what we are doing is good and positive we shouldn't let the opinions of others shape our actions, but it is so hard to keep shouting hosanna when others don't join in.

Tradition does not place him at the temple but can we doubt that he would have been there when Jesus was teaching? We can imagine the range of emotions he felt those days. Certainly there was some pride in knowing he was one who had chosen to follow Jesus early on. The crowds gathered to listen to Jesus would have shown all that Jesus was an important teacher. But these feelings would have likely led to him being filled with indignation as he watched the leaders try to trip Jesus up with their questions. With disgust he would have wondered why they were trying to tear Jesus down. In seeing this sparring between Jesus and these leaders unfold, would he have allowed a bit of doubt to enter his mind? After all, these are the authoritative teachers of Judaism. If they have doubts and questions maybe Jesus is wrong, not all together, but maybe he

doesn't quite have it all together. Perhaps these thoughts would have pushed him so far as to doubt, just a bit, that Jesus was the Messiah.

When people who are supposed to be experts challenge what we are thinking, it is good to reflect but when we let them sway us just because of their expertise, it is not a good thing. We need to be sure of what we believe and be willing to stand by it, after careful reflection, even when challenged because sometimes the so called expert is wrong.

Then we move onto Thursday. I don't have time to unpack all the likely emotions of that day and night. In eating the Passover meal, even if he was one who was serving instead of being seated at a table it would have been an awe inspiring time. To listen in on the conversation, to hear the predictions of denial and betrayal, to perhaps even be given a bit of the bread and cup, my, what an opportunity. We have all had those times where the environment has conspired in a positive way to help us experience the Holy. We need to savor them but to also remember that God can be as vitally present at other times, even when there is no one to "set the stage."

But the night continues with them going to the garden. Tradition has him there. He would have listened to Jesus praying. I am sure the touch of the Holy from earlier would have bathed that time with tenderness. Then he would have heard the sounds of the soldiers, seen the kiss and when one grabbed him, he would have known fear as he wriggled out of his under tunic fleeing the garden naked, exposed for all to see, exposed to his own fear and failings. Fear can often challenge and change us. Fear exposes us for not being as strong or as faithful as we think we are, pretend we are.

We end the week in the courtyard of Pilate. As the crowd began to yell crucify what would he have felt, what would he have done? It is only conjecture that he was there, but could he have stayed away? I doubt it. It would be a way to atone in some small way for the fearful flight of the night before. My guess is he would have been wracked with doubt. No one was singing hosanna. A messiah would not be crucified. Had he been duped? Were others right and he had been wrong all this time? Or would there be anger? Don't they realize what they are doing? We don't know but we can

guess that in the end he would have angrily pushed his way out of the crowd as the sentence was given. There is no mention in tradition or scripture of his being at the cross or with the disciples on Easter. It seems that for a time he separated himself from them and it was only later that Peter found him, won him back and he became his traveling partner and finally became known as Mark the Evangelist and the writer of the gospel.

Fear, doubt and anger can twist us and change us. It can cause us to give up good ideas. None of us want to be wrong. It is hard to take a stand. It is hard to hold convictions when it seems that we are against the world. But that is our challenge.

Often we, like Mark, are in the middle, being pushed back and forth by the crowd around us. We are challenged with what it means to live faithfully today; to not let our surroundings dictate our feelings. Then we will find ourselves shouting Hosannas even if others doubt, perhaps standing up when we see others tearing someone down, feeling the presence of God not just on Sunday but every day. And when the inevitable fear and doubt hit us, we stand against it, not letting it dictate our actions and remaining faithful, even when it seems the whole world is against us. Mark had to learn this and it is a message that we need to continually relearn.