

Intro to Palm Sunday

April 9, 2017

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In finding our place in the story for this Holy Week and this service in particular, I want to help you know some of what to expect in the experience. Though it's the same old story, we approach it freshly as time goes by. Jean and Fred Loichinger have a different view of marriage, I'm sure, celebrating their 64th wedding anniversary than when they were first married. Cubs fans enter this baseball season unlike the past 108 seasons. And this Holy Week centered on the same story is not the same for us as it was a year ago. I'm not going to enumerate what has changed, but to press ahead with this brief introduction, offering a little roadmap, a guide, to illustrate the frame we set around the story this year.

The overarching lens for us is that "Jesus incarnated God's passion to liberate the oppressed." That indicates a specific moment of God always striving to overcome bonds of captivity, to break the yoke of burden, to address our afflictions, to repair the breach, and bring light to dark places. That *should* be obvious standard framework of our faith; when some say "God helps those who help themselves" or that wealth is a blessing or troubles are part of God's plan—those are fundamentally lies. They may fit our human imaginations, but aren't the shape of things for followers of Jesus.

Still, although we might observe that liberating from oppression is the story of scripture and is God's desire, God's will in our lives and much more broadly in the world, it remains to continue addressing how exactly that might be lived out or achieved, what God *does* to unshackle from tyranny.

So as we live into the story this week, the very core in the faith of Jesus, we will be focusing on the fact that God's passion to liberate the oppressed involves risk. Most truly it means risk for God. It isn't easy. It's messy and complex and dangerous and so, so heartfelt. "Passion" is the term not only for eagerness, but for an arduous love, and most specifically in suffering. God's desire, this yearning, is embodied in a story of emotional impact. And since it's com-passion, it's catchy. It begins to sweep you up into further embodying the passion, sharing the risk.

In that way, the story approaches us today with the risk to confront power. Fredrick Douglass understood in struggling against slavery that "Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never has and never will." If Jesus was—and we are—meant to live in resistance to the oppressive and destructive powers controlling this world and our lives, then we have to face them, own up to them, understand their warped influence, have to have an intervention, have to risk confronting power. That is where our story begins as Jesus rides up into Jerusalem, moving from his lakeside homebase for an incursion against the temple and the military headquarters, against the high priest and the governor, in the face of rulers, as this cannot be done from afar.

Yet, also for our sake, today reminds us it isn't just scary or intimidating to confront persecutors. Faith is also...fun. With exuberance and the humor of satire, with a parade and multitudes cheering hosannas, with our delights in being together around rousing music, with practice offering and reconciling, with eco-palms that insist on collaboration and refuse exploitation, with little children who shall lead us by their example, we catch the wind of God's passion, and—we hope—are caught up in the risk for good.