

RCL YEAR A, THE SUNDAY OF THE PASSION, PALM SUNDAY

Liturgy of the Palms: St. Matthew 21:1-11

Liturgy of the Word: Isaiah 50:4-9a; Philippians 2:5-11; St. Matthew 26:14—27: 66

St. Edmund's Episcopal Church

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I recall, when living a couple of months in Madrid, heading one morning by train to Segovia. My parents were visiting and I wanted to show them that splendid, navigable, medieval city. We began walking up one of the main streets from the aqueduct heading toward the Plaza Mayor when we found ourselves engulfed in a parade. Unbeknownst to us, we had visited Segovia during the Feria of San Juan Baptista (June 24th-30th), and festivities were in full swing.

The parade had a surprisingly Gallic flavor and that was educative. There were bag-pipers and flutes and lots of huge “cabazones,” giant paper mache figures animated by somebody inside walking on stilts. Everybody became part of the parade. When we arrived in the Plaza Mayor festivities continued, including pranks played on visitors by the cabazones, one of whom memorably goosed my father!

Parades are great things, as we know here in Rose Parade country. They are spectacles and celebrations and you get caught up in them, even if you don't quite understand what they are all about.

Some of the folk who waved palm branches and threw their cloaks on the road for Jesus riding on a donkey might not have known quite what they had stumbled onto, but hey, they were up for a good time!

Jesus was presenting himself as a Messiah in fulfillment of the prophecy in Zechariah 9, which predicted the Messiah's arrival in Jerusalem on the back of a donkey's colt. Most who thought they knew what was going on in that parade believed Jesus was declaring Himself to be a Messiah of a particular sort, a latter day King David who had come to lead a revolution against the Roman occupation and reassert the national sovereignty of Israel...sort of Hamas in reverse. These folks would have been disappointed with Jesus' teaching during subsequent days in Jerusalem, and more than ready to turn on him at his public trial.

Here we are 2,000 years later, contemporary disciples of Jesus' obliged to tease the meaning out of these last days of his ministry, his hours in Gethsemane, his arrest, torture and death. Some of us are just sort of caught up in the parade of Christianity, here more by accident of birth or upbringing than by reflective intent. Others of us have a specific agenda to impose on Jesus, just like the zealots in the crowd hungry for revolution. We know what he should mean for the world today, and precisely which political party he would identify with.

We might all of us do well to focus on the word “*Passion*,” used to describe these days of suffering, but also perhaps what got Jesus there. Jesus' passion for God and others, his passion for the poor, sick, oppressed and marginalized, his passion for an active, living and practical faith transcending the legalisms of religion, the insufficiency of politics, insurrection and militarism...of all ideology and every “ism;” his insistence upon acting in accordance with a deeper vision without regard for consequence...isn't this what contemporary disciples of Jesus are summoned to?

One of my little whines is that I have more things I feel passionately about than I have time to pursue them. I'm passionate about Latin American art, about books and language and hiking and travel. I love American history, and a seven part series on one of my Federalist heroes, John Adams, starts tonight and I hope my DVR is working! Such passions should mark a human life, but the life of a Christian is to be marked also by the passions which marked the ministry of our Lord.

How am I passionate about the ideals and teachings of Jesus? Most of my personal energy in this regard goes into trying to shape a parish that reflects Christ's values and draws others to learn about them, though I save a bit of energy for CRISTOSAL and El Salvador. St. Edmund's is the place I want most to see marked for the real Christ. We believe politics is important here at St. Edmunds, but we eschew partisan agendas because all of them fall short of the kind of transformation Christ pursued. We are obviously religious, but not uncritically. We know religion in our day has to be reformed as surely as in Christ's day...reformation is an ongoing commitment. The heart conversion of individuals and communities is always the best ticket to creating meaningful change.

Our lives are to resemble the life of Jesus in that we are marked by Christ's concerns, by a passion for a religion that extends itself to those in need and troubles the self-satisfied.

To walk the Way of the Cross this Holy Week might mean reflecting on how the concerns of Jesus are mirrored in your own passions and commitments. Christ, this Holy Week, leaves little room for complacency in the lives of those who claim to be his disciples. The poor, marginalized and oppressed are still among us, injustice abounds; the way of Christ remains a path of visceral engagement. Now *that's* a parade worth joining! Amen. GFW+