

A Palm/Passion Sunday 4.2.23

Matthew 21:1-11; 27:11-54

Focus Statement: God sits with us in the tension.

Today is a weird day in the life of the church. Are we All Glory, Laud, and Honor, Hosanna to the Son of David, Blessed is the One Who Comes in the name of the Lord? Or are we My Song is Love Unknown, Are you the King of the Jews, Let him be crucified, surely this man was God's Son? I reflected on it, of all places, in the Facebook blurb where I posted the bulletin for the week, Palm slash passion Sunday is a bit of a whiplash. What are we doing here today?

What we're doing here today is not Easter. That's the first thing to hang onto. Today is not Easter. You'll get Easter, we'll get Easter. Next Sunday will be Easter, with trumpets and lilies and Doug finally getting to have a cookie. Easter is coming. But today is not Easter. The waving palms and shouting hosanna and parading around, it was not Easter. The disciples thought it might be Easter, they wanted it to be Easter. They thought Jesus was parading into Jerusalem to conquer it. To drive out all the Romans and establish a new Jewish state in the model of the great King David. They were all ready to sit at his right and his left in his glory. But that wasn't what happened. If they'd listened closely to the Palm Sunday processional Gospel, they could have guessed that wasn't what was happening. Conquering heroes don't usually come, "humble, and mounted on a donkey." But it was what they hoped would be happening.

The disciples wanted it to be Easter, we want it to be Easter, because it's hard to sift through, to sit in, the work of uncovering. But this is work that has to be done first. Last

week while I was in Minneapolis, we had the privilege of going to George Floyd Square. Remember back in the summer of 2020, when George Floyd was killed by members of the Minneapolis police department, and protests sprung up around the world, really, starting conversations about police practices and structural racism. The corner where Floyd was killed has become the heart of a community movement committed to really transforming with it looks like to live together. At the corner of thirty-eighty and Chicago sits an extensive memorial to not just George Floyd, but many others whose names have become tragically familiar, Briana Taylor, Eric Garner, Sandra Bland, even, from right here in West Michigan, Patrick Loyola, is memorialized on that corner. There are also a network of other community supports, including a clothing closet, a food pantry, pro bono legal advice, and an artist's collaborative. It is an interesting and thriving hub of social justice an activism, a place where people find community and purpose.

Before we visited George Floyd Square, we met with a panel of neighbors who told us their experiences in the place, what it had meant to them, and what their work going forward would look like. And one moment in that panel discussion stood out to me. One of the ELCA Church Council members asked a question about how the community was working with the police department to improve community relationships with the officers. There was an uncomfortable chuckle from the panel. Then one of the members spoke up, "the problem with churches," she said, "is so often you want to rush to reconciliation. Reconciliation is important work, but before there can be reconciliation, there has to be recognition of the pain that has taken place. There has to be time to heal the wounds and rebuild trust. Grief takes time."

More than any other part of our time at George Floyd Square, those words struck me. That as people of faith we want to rush to reconciliation. We want resurrection, we want Easter, we want everything to be ok and everyone to get along. We do this in all sorts of aspects of our lives. My uncle passed away recently, and while I was in California, my cousins were discussing their employer's respective bereavement leave policies, as if grieving is a process you can file with HR and will tidily wrap itself up at the end of a paid three days off. We're sick or we're well. We're grieving or we're healed. We're happy or we're sad. There's a problem identified, and we fix it, and move on.

And when that doesn't work. When grief persists past the time allotted by a bereavement policy. When healing doesn't unfold and instead becomes chronic illness. When deep societal hurt cannot be resolved by a single conversation or policy change or moment of reconciliation, it's tempting to feel like God's not working.

Dear people of God, today, and Thursday, and Friday, and all of this week, is the opportunity to rest in the uncomfortable tension that things take time. That it's ok to be not ok, because ours is a God who came in the middle of not ok and didn't rush to resurrection, but sat in the tomb. So if you're scared today. If you're grieving today. If you're hurt today, here is a God who doesn't need you to be where you are not, but who is ready and willing to sit with you right in the middle of wherever you are, and stay with you through that. Dear people of God, the Good News of our faith is that it isn't a quick wallpaper solution to the world's deep pain. There is resurrection, dawn always follows the night, but ours is a faith that

honors the fact that healing takes time. You don't have to fake ok here. You don't have to pretend together here. This is a place, ours is a God that is with you in the not ok. And in the sort of ok, and in the pretending ok because sometimes you fake it until it's true.

Dear people of God, bring yourselves to this week. Bring your questions, your uncertainties, your half-truths. Bring your open grief, your pain, your fear. And bring your joy. Bring your hope that doesn't make sense, your care in the face of disaster. Bring the desire to make art and laugh and dance in the street. Bring shouts of hosanna, bring palms. Bring laughter and tears, bring great memories and great longings. The truth is the world, our lives, ourselves, are not either or. We are, at the same time, happy and sad, grieving loss and remembering joy, afraid for what could be and excited for potential. All of this is held in a broken resurrected king. Who died not to paper over pain but to do the hard, holy, beautiful work of redemption. Thanks to be God. Amen.