

Palm-Passion Sunday

What an odd kind of Lent we have had, with countries world-wide struggling with this novel coronavirus, many people staying at home in isolation, some getting sick, especially among the older population. And we are deeply saddened when we hear of deaths from covid-19, including of a Santa Rosa police officers just a couple of days ago. The economic effects of covid-19 are staggering, and the after-effects may linger on for quite a while. Certainly it has been a time of pondering and introspection, individually and as a nation, and it's been a Lent like we've never had before.

Today is Palm Sunday and the beginning of Holy Week. This last Sunday before Easter is a strange kind of hybrid-Sunday: it begins with a joyful celebration of Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem, with the waving of palm fronds or green branches; and we can do that even during our ZOOM worship! It's a happy event, filled with enthusiasm, anticipation, and hope.

Now we have come to the second part of this service, the reading of the Passion Story, which is always a somber time tinged with sadness and mourning. I want to thank Kip Spragens of Tomales and Sue Russell of Two Rock for reading our Scripture back-and-forth, the two chapters from the gospel according to Matthew that tell of the passion and death of our Lord Jesus Christ.

As you listen to this Scripture for the next 15 minutes or so, I want to suggest to you some themes to which you might pay special attention:

1. Notice the time. Notice the days when this is happening, and the time of day and night. Notice how quickly things are changing for Jesus and for the disciples. We might appreciate how fast these events are unfolding and how rapidly everything is happening after things changed rapidly for us this past month, changed for most nations all around the world; with new coronavirus developments unfolding day by day, sometimes even hour by hour. So pay attention to the length of time of this Passion event; to the time of day and night when it is happening; and to how fast circumstances are changing.

2. Matthew 26:36-46 narrates the prayer of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, shortly before he is arrested. Many of you will know these words from Matt 26:39, "*My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want*", and from Matt 26:42, "*My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.*" As Jesus asks if the cup of bitter suffering might pass him by, consider if there was another way, a way out for Jesus. Yet he stays the course and remains deeply committed to his calling as God's messiah and son. How about the deep commitment and sense of duty in our police officers who serve their communities, doctors and nurses who serve the sick, store clerks who serve the public? Do their actions reflect what Jesus modeled for us?

3. The late Rev. Fred Rogers of Pittsburgh, who created and produced a TV show for children "Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood" shared this memory from his own childhood: "When I was a boy and would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, 'Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.'" In this difficult-to-hear story of a conspiracy by the religious elite and of betrayal, denial and desertion by Jesus' disciples, do you notice any helpers, any kind of support, any sort of grace? Who are the "helpers"?

After Sue and Kip finish reading, we will observe a brief period of silence, reflect on this passage from scripture, ponder our own lives, and pray silently.