

Sunday of the Passion, Palm Sunday. Are we still in Lent? And is that different than Holy Week? Our vestments are not the purple we use for Lent, but red. And yet, the altar vessels are the glass, ceramic and wood that we use for Lent and not the silver that we use for Pascha. It's not entirely clear where we are.

Lent overlaps into Holy Week and ends on Maundy Thursday. This morning, the liturgy for Palm Sunday melts into the liturgy of Passion Sunday.

That's the nature of Holy Week.

We feel our way into the Holy Mystery of the eternal now encompassing and interacting with the timebound "used-to-be" and the "ain't-yet." Palm Sunday's expectations for what should have happened, what used to happen, are blown off-balance by a shocking death and unfulfilled promises of peace.

We are in the presence of God's creating energy; energy that has already created, is creating now and will create a new thing, all in the one eternal Now.

You and I may think we know the end of Luke's story. Though we didn't hear about it this morning, we certainly know about God resurrecting Jesus from death into the life of God. We did hear about Luke's Jesus entering the Holy City of Jerusalem to complete his work as the Anointed.

Before that, however, there was this: "We come together to begin this solemn celebration...Christ *enters* the holy city of Jerusalem...the people *welcome* him with psalms...we *join* him on his exodus from the glory of the palms...to the glory of the Resurrection...This is the moment our Paschal journey begins..."

All of it present tense.

Not past tense, as though simply remembering our history, but celebrating in awe with God who *is*, present throughout the entire Kosmos; present throughout all time and in all people; present in you and in me.

We do more this week than simply visualizing Jesus riding into 1<sup>st</sup> Jerusalem or even dying on the cross, although those images are welcome. On this last Sunday of Lent, in the mystery of Holy Week, we hear an ancient story that coaxes us into realizing that our gathering is a manifestation of the New Jerusalem, present here in this holy space and transcending all time.

Heaven's eternity is now peeking into our temporal, earthly lives.

And so, we participate in Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, his last supper and arrest, his suffering and death. Luke provides in excruciating detail the intricate succession of events, misfortunes and blunders that follow Jesus from his exciting entry into Jerusalem to his being betrayed and murdered.

Luke's ancient and timeless story compels us to consider the world in which we now live; obliges us to contemplate our purpose as individuals and as a community shaped by this story. We are among millions of people hearing this story this morning; many of us living in a nation increasingly polarized by blame and hostility; self-centeredness and abuse.

Here, in this holy place at the onset of Holy Week, we do more than re-enact the drama of past events. We do not weaken the mystery into a tidy and trivial tale. Nor do we distract ourselves with the alarming rhetoric and behavior that waits for us outside these doors. We set aside the very real cares of the world for a time so that we can turn our attention to the real life of Christ, realized right here in this congregation.

Baptism doesn't exempt us from the suffering inherent in our real human lives and so we bring cheer *and* sadness; health *and* sickness; thanks *and* frustrations. We bring all our personal passions into the liturgy of Passion Sunday. And we rightfully expect to see God's presence in our own lives and loves, and from there, in the lives and loves of the world around us.

Preparing to come into the sanctuary, we heard Luke's account of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. After Jesus mounted his colt, his followers yell joyfully: "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!"

And in the passage that immediately follows that reading, Jesus stops and weeps over Jerusalem just across the Kidron Valley where he and his followers walk. He laments: "If you, even you, had only recognized *on this day* things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes."

Luke's Gospel mentions peace more than all the other Gospels combined. The theme begins with our matron St. Elizabeth's husband, Zechariah, who sings of their son, John the Baptizer, who comes: "to guide our feet into the way of peace."

At the nativity of Jesus, the angels sing: "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom God favors!" When Mary and Joseph present Jesus to the Temple, Simeon holds the baby and sings the song we recite at Evening Prayer: "Lord, you now have set your servant free to go in peace as you have promised."

Another word that Luke uses more than all the other Gospels combine is “today,” used most often in reference to a significant event of God’s saving activity. Luke’s notion of salvation “today” is not *limited* to one moment in historical time. Luke’s Gospel bears witness to audiences of all times and all places to inspire and generate actual experiences of Christ’s saving power.

Clearly, for Luke, that salvation is a multi-dimensional reality that involves healing and forgiveness, restoration and redemption, and social reversals that allow us to live in peace with God and with each other – Jews with Gentiles, rich with poor, women with men, and not least of all, even progressives with conservatives.

Living in peace, living that is, by following the example of Jesus, is not rejecting conflict. If anything, to live in peace like Jesus is to be in conflict with those values and socioeconomic structures that benefit only some people at the expense and domination of others.

To live in peace is to reject both violence and passivity. Defending yourself or someone who is unable to defend themselves is not the same as giving in to retaliation, revenge and retribution, especially in a world where technology is increasing the levels of destructive capabilities.

There is so much within us as individuals, as groups, that wants to fight or just walk away. And yet, Luke’s telling of the passion of our Savior presents a more complex and nuanced path requiring more discernment.

In the face of violence, we hear Jesus say: “No more of this!” and then we witness a gesture of healing. To live in peace following the example of Jesus is to engage in conflict non-violently wherever possible, aiming at eventual reconciliation – healing – or at least resolution of the conflict. We act on behalf of the peace of Christ by changing systems and practices without descending into rejection of other people or harboring hatred.

In the face of betrayal, Jesus forgives. His response to mocking, insults and torture to the point of death, is to say: “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they are doing.” Forgiveness is not condoning harmful behavior or calling evil behavior good. Forgiveness is not denying reality or abandoning justice. Rather, it is God’s mercy, working within us and between us, to release ourselves and others from deathly spirals of rage and retribution and revenge.

The peace that Luke’s Gospel teaches involves a commitment to humanity, a devotion to the genuine security that comes with human rights, equality and a fair distribution of resources. For most of us, in our everyday lives, the most effective way to overcome evil is by resisting the impulse to

react with evil long enough to find another way. When someone speaks poorly of us, it's far more effective to respond with kindness than with more hurtful words. When someone slights us, it is substantially more fruitful to find a loving response instead of either rolling over or retaliating.

Some days, maybe even that seems beyond our capacity. Even so, until we change ourselves and refuse to carry cruelty and resentment in our own hearts, we will never change those systems and practices that make violence and war an option.

Fortunately, the peace we hope to see has roots in the baptismal vows that we will renew next week: To persevere in resisting evil and, whenever we fall into sin, repent and return to God. To seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbors as ourselves. To strive for justice and peace – to strive for the peace that Jesus embodies – peace among all people. And to respect the dignity of every human being.

Today, we enter the mystery of Holy Week. We leave the very real cares of the world to turn our attention to the real life of Christ, realized here in our own suffering, our own lives and loves.

We have entered the New Jerusalem with Christ this morning. And over the rest of this week, we will experience what the peace that Christ gives can demand from those who seek to take it on. We will encounter moments of temptation to fight or to flee, and we will see the what happens to those who reject both violence and passivity in the pursuit of God's lasting peace.

Jesus, weeping over Jerusalem, says: "If you, even you, had only recognized on this day things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes."

Our hope is that when we light the new fire in the dark of the Easter Vigil, our eyes may be opened to see. God gives light and life and peace to the world; to your world and to mine. In that new light, we can choose to move into the next chapter of Luke's story about God resurrecting Jesus from death into the life of God.

And us with him.

It is a chapter yet to be written about the love and life of peace in Christ.

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