

There is little that a preacher can or should add to the Passion Gospel. It is probably best to just quietly think and pray on what our Lord Jesus Christ endured for us. But I will take a moment to comment on the great dichotomy of Palm Sunday. Palm Sunday, as practiced in the Episcopal Church, has fascinated me since I first took part in the service last century. Growing up Southern Baptist, we mentioned Palm Sunday, but I never remember anyone making a big deal of it.

But in the Episcopal Church, we do tend to make more of a deal out of it. The way we do Palm Sunday brings to the front the range of response we humans have to an encounter with the Christ. On the one hand, we have the crowds shouting "hosanna!" On the other, "Crucify him!" We humans do not tend to do well when we are confronted with perfect love. It is the nature of sin to twist every good thing into something bad. Jesus comes teaching love and compassion, bringing food and healing, and we want all of that we can get. Hosanna, indeed. But it also shows our fallen nature, our dark side, in sharp relief. The more we are aware of Christ's perfection, the more glaring our failings become. And we want to push that away, kill it, bury it, forget it.

Even our hosannas ring hollow at times. Do we really praise God for what God has done for all, or just what we perceive we have gotten out of it? The crowds in Jerusalem didn't understand. They thought the Messiah was marching on Jerusalem, riding in to victory. And he was, just not a victory they could understand. After two thousand years, can we really say we understand the victory any better?

Sure, we are not looking for a military victory, but too often Christians still want a victory they can see. We want vanquished enemies, the losing side, so we can know we really won. We share in the victory of Christ, but we still don't seem to understand what battle he was fighting. His enemy is our enemy. He strove with sin and death, let them do their absolute worst, to the point where any objective observer would agree that he had lost. He was dead, buried, soon to be forgotten.

Of course, we know that the Crucifixion was not the end of the story. But we are not there

yet. Let's not rush over the next week. Holy Week is one of the oldest observances of the Church. For centuries, Christians have been telling and acting out the story of that last week. We will continue that tradition here at St. James'. We will celebrate the Resurrection; Christ will have his victory. But for now, let us join with those who knew our Lord, his acquaintances and the women who had followed him from Galilee, watching and waiting. Remembering what our Lord Jesus Christ did, and why he did it. Remembering that the battle our Lord fought was for the world, and not against it.

There are times when we join the crowd shouting "Hosanna!" There are times when we are in the crowd shouting "Crucify him!" And there are times when the most faithful thing we can do is stand and watch and wait. Our response to the Lord Jesus Christ should be complicated. Our walk with Christ should be a challenge. Otherwise, we are in real danger of taking it for granted. And our Lord loves us too much for us to do that. Just look at what he did for us, what he suffered for us. The price he paid, for us. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. *Amen.*