

NRS Matthew 21:1 When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples,
2 saying to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me.
3 If anyone says anything to you, just say this, 'The Lord needs them.' And he will send them immediately. "
4 This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, saying,
5 "Tell the daughter of Zion, Look, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey."
6 The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them;
7 they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them.
8 A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.
9 The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!"
10 When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, "Who is this?"
11 The crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee."

11 Now Jesus stood before the governor; and the governor asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus said, "You say so."
12 But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he did not answer.
13 Then Pilate said to him, "Do you not hear how many accusations they make against you?"
14 But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed.
15 Now at the festival the governor was accustomed to release a prisoner for the crowd, anyone whom they wanted.
16 At that time they had a notorious prisoner, called Jesus Barabbas.
17 So after they had gathered, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release for you, Jesus Barabbas or Jesus who is called the Messiah?"
18 For he realized that it was out of jealousy that they had handed him over.
19 While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, "Have nothing to do with that innocent man, for today I have suffered a great deal because of a dream about him."
20 Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus killed.
21 The governor again said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas."
22 Pilate said to them, "Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?" All of them said, "Let him be crucified!"
23 Then he asked, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Let him be crucified!"

24 So when Pilate saw that he could do nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves."

25 Then the people as a whole answered, "His blood be on us and on our children!"

26 So he released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

27 Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole cohort around him.

28 They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him,

29 and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on his head. They put a reed in his right hand and knelt before him and mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!"

30 They spat on him, and took the reed and struck him on the head.

31 After mocking him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

32 As they went out, they came upon a man from Cyrene named Simon; they compelled this man to carry his cross.

33 And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull),

34 they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall; but when he tasted it, he would not drink it.

35 And when they had crucified him, they divided his clothes among themselves by casting lots;

36 then they sat down there and kept watch over him.

37 Over his head they put the charge against him, which read, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews."

38 Then two bandits were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left.

39 Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads

40 and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross."

41 In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking him, saying,

42 "He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him.

43 He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to; for he said, 'I am God's Son.'"

44 The bandits who were crucified with him also taunted him in the same way.

45 From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon.

46 And about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

47 When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "This man is calling for Elijah."

48 At once one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink.

49 But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him."

50 Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last.

51 At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split.

52 The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised.

53 After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many.

54 Now when the centurion and those with him, who were keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were terrified and said, "Truly this man was God's Son!"

Loving Creator shine as a light before me that you may be seen and not I. Give me words that I may speak give us ears that we may hear and through your Holy Spirit help us understand.

Amen.

While I was paying a visit to someone this week, I could hear a voice from down the hall. This voice was somewhat mournful and plaintive; it was a cry for help. A man was crying out. It was not clear what he was saying, but it was in a way distressing.

As my visit continued the calls would fade off once in a while, only to resume with new vigor. When a doctor came in the room, we were assured that the person was not in pain, just confused.

Still, it was hard to hear a person in distress.

We don't want to feel distress, and we don't want other people to be in distress.

We would much rather have fun, throw a party, have a parade.

Parades are great, the festivity, the spectacle, they make us feel good.

Living right here on Main Street we are able to sit on our porch to watch the parades here in Monson. Bands play- we can hear the bagpipes long before they come into sight- antique cars and scouts and fire trucks and the whole to do. People come from all over and they line the street to watch. As the crowd grows, people hear the commotion and join the crowd.

People cheer, especially the children who are hoping to have some candy thrown their way.

I love hearing people lifting their voices in joy, it is much better than hearing cries of distress.

Today we began our worship with the part we really like, we began with the story of a parade, the story of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, we began with the big parade.

This is fun waving our palms and remembering that Jesus rode into Jerusalem with the cheers of the crowd. There were people who knew of Jesus, and they heard that he was coming, and they gathered around to see the rabbi, the teacher, the prophet and maybe even the Messiah, the Christ.

In order to fulfill the prophecy, Jesus the Messiah, the king, has arranged to ride a donkey. A king riding a donkey is just as odd as a king born in the stable. This humble king is different. But he enters as a king, so the people called out "Hosanna", which means save us.

They laid their cloaks out on the ground, and they cut palm leaves and covered the ground with them, because the king would not touch the ground. They were so hungry for a change, so eager to escape the oppression of Rome, that they were willing to grab a hold of anything that might save them.

A number of years after Jesus, there was another messiah figure who did just what the people had wanted, he was a military leader, he did oppose the Romans with military force, and, as a result, the Romans destroyed the temple and sent the Jews into exile of the Diaspora.

Over the years they may have had parades like this for other Messiah want-to-bees, other ticker tape parades for other heroes.

I was thinking about our modern day ticker tape parades.

Remember Malcolm Scott Carpenter? Come on, he had a ticker tape parade in New York, that is huge. Need more? Ok, June 5, 1962, that was when they had his parade. Anyone remember him? That was only 46 years ago.

The people of Jerusalem had seen many such parades. This one probably started quietly enough. A crowd gathered because Jesus was entering the city, and others came out to see. The crowd would have attracted people from the area. Travelers on the road would have been drawn into the commotion. After a while the crowd had grown and the excitement had risen. Soon there were people cheering and laying clothes down with palm branches.

As the crowd grew, more and more people were joining in the excitement and the scripture says: the whole city was in turmoil, asking, "Who is this?"

So there they are gathered around cheering Hosanna, hosanna! And they turn to each other and say, "Who is this? Do you know?" and they keep cheering because everyone else is.

A crowd gathered and they cried out, but do they even know what they are doing?

We love the parade of Palm Sunday. I always loved Palm Sunday as a kid. I particularly liked making a cross with the palm leaf. And therein lies the poignant reality of this day.

As this joyous scene unfolds and as Jesus enters the city with the shouts and cries of the people, we have a brief moment in the Gospel of Luke where Jesus weeps for the city. He knew that this ruckus and commotion were not for the right reason. He was not going to be crowned king, he was not going to gather an army or eject the Romans, he was not going to do any of the things the people wanted or expected.

The people as a whole were not rooted in faith, they were not grounded in righteousness and justice, and they did not want to hear a message that went counter to their expectations.

Most of us are like this. We have our expectations in life and when life does not conform to our expectations we may not want to hear the reality.

The trouble with Palm Sunday is what follows; there is reality.

I remember once a guy offered to sell me an MGB, I was 16.

At the time I remember thinking that God must want me to have a convertible, and I was not interested in listening to the cautions of my parents, the first being that I did not have any money, the second that the car was just barely functional. Fortunately reality was there to let me know that it was not happening – the guy wanted money and that was that.

Reality sets in.

The reality set in for the people. They wanted a military leader, they wanted to feel safe and free from their oppressors, they wanted a king. As Jesus entered they knew something big was happening, they wanted to get behind him, but they did not want to know what was this Jesus about?

But what was the reality?

God has sent us a king, this is great .. Hosanna, Hosanna... but wait, he arrives on a donkey rather than a war horse, he gets angry and messes up the Temple. He argues with **our** religious leaders, not with the vile Romans. He is the one who does not follow the traditions, he is the one who heals on the Sabbath, he is the one who disobeys the Law and makes trouble. Maybe he is not the one. Expectations were crushed and hopes were deflated as Jesus looked more like a simple every day trouble maker and less and less like a king.

Each day the people watched as Jesus let them down again and again.

This is often the way of religious leaders. People have their preconceived notion of what God is doing, and when a leader veers off the expected track, then people will turn their backs as quick as can be.

This continues to be a major issue within the body of the Christian Church in the United States. The current average length of pastorates in protestant churches is three years. A major reason for this is expectations. Pastors have expectations of congregations and

congregations expect things to be a certain way with a pastor. Expectations may keep people from seeing the truth. In Luke, Jesus says to the gathered crowd as he enters Jerusalem,

“If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you when your enemies will throw up a barricade against you, and surround you and hem you in on every side, and they will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation.”

That day would come 46 years later when the Romans razed the Temple following a violent uprising.

On Thursday, the day of Passover, Jesus gathered with his friends. One of them had resolved to turn Jesus in to the authorities, and the rest of the disciples were probably confused and worried about their friend and their own safety.

The day of celebration had now faded into the background. What was now just a memory would only make sense later.

By Thursday evening the celebrations were somber and subdued with Jesus saying his body would be broken and his blood poured out. His friend had turned him in, and the others fled.

On Friday was another parade, this time a gruesome one. A beaten and bloodied man carrying a cross was the reason.

Once again the crowd would form. People would come out in curiosity to see the spectacle. What is this all about? Who's the guy?

Really? Jesus, the same guy we shouted hosanna to?

He did nothing wrong, did he?
What is wrong with telling the truth about God?
Was it wrong to offer forgiveness and love?
Why are they doing this to him?

Some people probably wanted to cry out, “Stop this madness.”

This is the part of Palm Sunday I don't like, we need to remember where that road leads. It is wonderful to follow Jesus on the day when it is palms and praises, but the world is fickle, and the cries of “Hosanna” can just as quickly become cries of “crucify.”

And even if we don't join the chorus, we may be inclined to say nothing.

The witnesses of Jesus execution could have called for justice and mercy, they could have cried out for this to be stopped.

We may cry out at times just joining the crowd, and we may fail to cry out when there is a need.

Palm Passion Sunday gets us ready for Holy Week as we contemplate the death of Jesus. We have the images of a kingly entry into Jerusalem, of a betrayal, of a last meal, of an arrest and hasty trial, of a brutal spectacle of torture and the murder of an innocent man, and finally of a cold tomb.

If we allow these images remain with us throughout the week we may find ourselves drawn into the same questions.

Do I just follow the crowd?
Am I willing to have my expectations challenged?
Do I stand by and watch as others are oppressed, and abused?
How have I turned my back on Jesus?

These are the questions we can carry with us as we remember that Jesus died because we are bound by sin. And we need to come face to face with our shadow side, to see the evil that resides in us.

Jesus died because he resisted evil, because he would not follow evil, because he rejected evil in all its forms, for this he died, and were Jesus here today, it is likely that he would be the target of evil once again.

Countless martyrs of the faith have shared his fate and lost their lives because sin resides in our world.

Holy week brings us to a place where we are invited to cry out.

The fellow in the medical center was crying out, but he did not really know why. That is too often the way of the world, people crying out about this and that without really being sure what is happening.

As we begin the journey through Holy Week we might take time to reflect on how we respond to the cries of others, the cries of the oppressed and the cries of Jesus who says take up your cross and follow me.

May we all find fresh ways to hear Jesus crying out to each of us as our journey now takes us to the cross.

AMEN.