Happiness and Suffering.
David Brooks wrote an editorial in the NY Times this week that talked about the place of suffering in our lives.¹
He says we pursue happiness, but suffering shapes us.
Naturally I think that our life of faith has some things to say about happiness and suffering.

Happiness and suffering is borne out in our communal work today.

We began shouting Hosanna and waving palm branches. With a joyful, triumphant march into and around the sanctuary. Singing praises to our redeemer King.

And then we are taken into pain and suffering-

We heard in Isaiah of the suffering servant –
A servant who teaches and listens and gives his back to those who strike him... 
A servant who allows his beard to be pulled from his cheeks, Is spit on, is disgraced.

The psalmist cries for mercy, failing in strength he is wasted with grief, Forgotten, useless as a broken pot... Surrounded by enemies and pleading for rescue.

And, in Philippians Paul talks of Jesus, God, A slave, humble and obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

And, now we have just read the Passion, The story of Jesus’ last days/hours with the disciples. The Meal where he speaks of his body broken for them, His blood shed for them.

The prophecy of desertion and denial.
The hours of prayer, agitation and sleepy eyes.
The prayerful, anguished discernment for God’s will to be done.
The kiss of betrayal.
The arrest.
The desertion.
The examination by Caiaphas.
The denials and the crowing of the rooster.
The defenseless trial in front of Pilate.
The eruption of cries to crucify him, crucify him.
The washing of Pilate’s hands.
The violence before and of crucifixion.
A cry of abandonment and, finally, death and burial.

There is so much in this day that opens Holy Week.
And, it’s so important.
Sometimes I don’t like that we celebrate the
Palm and the Passion on the same day.
The Happy and the Suffering.
But this year, I do, and here’s why.

The close proximity of the happy shouts of Hosanna and
praise and happiness to the
angst of betrayal and suffering is a
description of real life.

Happiness and Suffering.
These two experiences are weaved throughout our lives –
from the mundane:

Cheering at a Little League game for a great hit
Only to have the play end with an out because
of inexperienced base-running.

To the more serious:

Like electing a politician to office and
then feeling abandoned when it’s revealed they are unethical.

Like the feelings of elation when a loved one in the hospital in critical condition rallies and then the rally falls short and you are planning a funeral.

When a loved one is in recovery from addiction for years and then relapses.

Happiness and suffering.

This is our experience.  
This was the disciples’ experience.  
This is God’s experience.  
God experienced happiness in the reception of Jesus by the twelve,  
By the many that followed and came to believe,  
The many that sought Jesus for his wisdom and authority.  
The many that waved palm branches and shouted hosanna.

God also experienced the suffering at human hands in Jesus.

I’m glad to have a God that knows what it means to suffer.  
And to suffer horrible physical pain.  
And a God that knows the emotions of confusion and abandonment.

That’s the kind of God we need when we turn on the TV and hear of a mass shooting, or a murder-suicide, or of a plane simply being lost.

This is the kind of God we need when we sit in a doctor’s office and hear a diagnosis of cancer, of MS, of a blocked artery.

This is the God we get in the suffering on the cross,  
A God powerful and loving enough to sweep all of our suffering onto the broken body of Jesus.

As we journey toward the cross in these last days let that pain and suffering pull you toward and be gathered into the open arms of Jesus on the cross.  
Amen.