

First Trinity Lutheran Church
March 24, 2013
Palm Sunday

Jesus, the Savior we Need

When we look at the events from Palm Sunday to Good Friday it's almost like one of those "Good news and Bad news" jokes. The good news is that Jesus Christ reached the peak of his popularity this week, riding in a triumphal procession into the holy city of Jerusalem. There was a big parade with lots of pomp and circumstance, everybody turned out, the disciples were very impressed, and the Pharisees and the Sadducees realized that they had underestimated this simple Galilean teacher. Riding this crest of public approval Jesus went to the temple, the very center of the Jewish faith, and began to teach and preach. From Sunday to Thursday Jesus was unstoppable. His enemies tried to trick him several times -- but to no avail; each time he turned the tables on them and exposed their treachery.

This year we are reading Luke's passion account but in John's passion story we read that during this time Jesus established the greatest new commandment, the one that says: "Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another" and He began a new ceremony with bread and wine which would later on, become the sacrament of Holy Communion which we continue to celebrate today 2000 years later.

So, what's the bad news? On Thursday he was betrayed and arrested and on Friday he was hung on a cross and killed. Today the palms - tomorrow the passion -- good news and bad news - but not a joke at all. The grim truth is that the same people who shouted "Hosanna" which Hebrew means Savior on Sunday shouted "Crucify him," just five days later. Everybody's hero became a bloody sacrifice, an object of scorn and hatred.

Is there anything we can learn from this? Perhaps it is easiest to get at this by asking a second question: "What if Jesus had stayed in Galilee and retired an old rabbi full of wisdom and compassion?" The question helps remind us of something we often don't focus on and that is the fact the Jesus CHOSE his path, that he CHOSE to leave the relative safety of Galilee and his rural ministry, and CHOSE to confront the powers of both politics and religion in their very center; in Jerusalem. The reminder is that all the uphill - downhill, good news - bad news, palms one day - passion the next, had nothing REALLY to do with what Jesus was about. Jesus saw the purpose of his life in terms of proclaiming a new relationship with God, a relationship of intimate love, and Jesus was not interested in popularity or acceptance. He was not deceived by the applause of the crowds, nor discouraged by the desertion of his followers. As we have heard during the last few weeks of Lent - Jesus knew what would happen to him, he even knew, as we heard today in the story of Peter's denial, that his closest disciple and friend would claim to not know him when put to the test.

In both popular acclaim - and in denial and rejection Jesus made it plain to everyone that he was not ruled by the feelings or events of the day, but rather was walking step by step along a path which would lead him to the only source of true and lasting meaning for Him and ultimately for us, that he was moving towards the fulfillment of God's will, for him and through him for the world. It didn't matter if the path seemed to reach a peak from which there was no way to go but down. Jesus knew that his goal was not the top of the mountain, not popularity or power or applause. Equally it did not matter that the path seemed to lead into, and end, in the valley of the shadow of death. Although being human he might have willed for himself some other course if that course could still be true to the will of the Father.

Regardless of appearances, regardless of the popularity that Jesus found, and regardless of the suffering that he knew he would undergo, Jesus chose to be true to his mission, he chose to be obedient; knowing, hoping, praying that in that, regardless of what might happen, he would be undergirded, surrounded, and encompassed by the presence, the mercy, and the love of God.

It is a lesson for all of us to remember. If we depend upon the events of life to give us reward and satisfaction then we may never achieve them or we may have them snatched away in the very moment of tasting victory. We may be at the peak of our lives, with money, health, security, friends, but - in those terms - there is nowhere to go but downhill in the weeks, months, and years ahead.

On the other hand, we - like Christ - have the opportunity to walk our own unique path of obedience toward God. It is a path which may see us surrounded by enjoyment, possessions, and popularity, or it may lead us into loneliness, misunderstanding, and poverty. But none of these things will finally give life its meaning.

Uphill or down, it is the destination which counts and no one's life can be more well spent than in seeking to find and do God's will. Because, after all, the journey from Palm Sunday to Good Friday wasn't just a good news - bad news joke.

There was the final good news which redeemed it all and which reminds us that God can take any situation - no matter how bad it seems, and make it into good news for all of us.

Practically everyone has known the taste of Palm Sunday, the sweetness of success and popularity, and nearly all of us have tasted the bitterness of Good Friday, of failure and rejection.

What saves us from an endless circle of ups and downs, what frees us from the oppressiveness of events over which we have no control is our commitment to press forward in obedience to God. It is to trust in God's love to bring about Easter morning, - knowing that the meaning of life is to be found in the knowledge and love of God, - and in sharing that knowledge and love with those who accompany in this journey. Palm Sunday is about the agony of Jesus suffering and the joy of His resurrection. On this day we can shout Hosanna knowing that Jesus is not the just the Savior we hope he will be but Jesus is the Savior we need. Amen