

Palm Sunday: 4/5/20
St. Paul's, Wallingford CT
The Rev. Dee Anne Dodd

*Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest heaven!*

I don't know about other clergy, but for me this Sunday,
Palm to Passion Sunday as we call it,
is usually one of the most hectic of the year.
I'm not complaining, but there are a lot of logistics.
One type of palm service for the 8:00 up here,
and another very different beginning downstairs in Wilkinson for 9:30.
There's the bagpiper to deal with for the beginning of the 9:30,
and the timpanist who accompanies the passion gospel at the end.
One year was total chaos when I forgot to get someone to prop open
the outside doors -- with my liturgically correct red bungee cord.
Can you imagine 100 or so people, plus church school, choir and musicians frozen in
place
for the first few minutes of what's *supposed* to be a procession?
I can, because I let it happen a few years ago.

But not today. None of those pesky little details to worry about this year.
And of course, now, I miss them. I *mourn* them.

It almost seems quaint to think there was a time when
I had the luxury of obsessing over such details,
as if we here could somehow craft a perfect Holy Week.
It may be that this year, scared and shell-shocked as many of us are,
we have more in common with those folks who first greeted Jesus
on that occasion we've come to call Palm Sunday.

They didn't have every little detail worked out.
They didn't receive a Holy Week schedule telling them
what was happening when.
They just showed up looking for Jesus.
It didn't matter if they were waving palms (Matthew's gospel doesn't mention palms.)
It didn't matter if they were holding something from their backyards.
It didn't matter if they were empty-handed. (We're all empty-handed. . .)

What mattered is they were looking for Jesus.
They were calling out to Jesus, "Blessed is the one who comes

in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

It's dawned on me that in years past I've focused too much on getting all the details right, and not enough on that single word we most associate with Palm Sunday: Hosanna! Do we know what it even means, really?

It's sometimes translated as "God save us". But it's actually simpler than that -- literally, "Save, please!" Maybe it's my state of mind these days, but it feels a little frantic: "Hosanna! Hosanna! Save, please! Save, please!"

There had to be some frantic people out there as Jesus entered Jerusalem that day. It says the whole city was "in turmoil" -- trembling, as if an earthquake were shaking the foundations of life as they knew it.

"Hosanna! Save, please!" they called to Jesus.

We know that in the longer, Passion Gospel with which we conclude this service, the shout soon becomes "Crucify him! Crucify him!" We know from our own lives how easy it is to make this shift, to turn from Jesus our Savior. To forget our need of the one who can answer when we call, "Save, please! Save, please!"

Perhaps this is the year we realize that Holy Week is not something we come to a beautiful building to do. It's who we are, wherever we are. People who need *saved, please*.

I still mourn not having you here with us today. I even miss all those details that drive me to distraction. I wholeheartedly believe that we need to come together to uphold one another *as church*, to learn from one another how to *be church*.

For this season, we must strengthen our capacity to be church, together, when we are apart. To realize anew that it's not always easy or tidy following Jesus.

That sometimes we have to give up our pretense of perfection
and just throw up our hands and cry,
“Save, please! Save, please!
And in God’s name, help us save others!”

This is not to say that God has visited this pandemic upon us
in order to “teach us a lesson”.

No, no, and NO that’s not what I’m saying!

I *am* saying that God in Christ is with us in this situation,
in whatever mess we find ourselves.

To accompany us through that journey described in Eucharistic Prayer B,
words I long to share with you again from the altar:

In Jesus, Savior and Redeemer of the world,

“God has brought us out of error into truth,
out of sin into righteousness,
out of death into life.”

Today we are at the beginning of that holy equation,
the beginning of Holy Week.

Holy Week is not cancelled; it’s not postponed.

It’s more urgent than ever.

As I read somewhere, this could be the *holiest* Holy Week ever.

When you consider that the word “holy” means special or set apart,
well, this week is nothing if not different.

So then let it be different. Let it be holy.

Let us show up wherever we are looking for Jesus.

Let us practice what we know in our hearts to be true:

We are the church, together, even when we are apart.

We can be spiritually connected even while we must be physically distant.

Let this week be for us a time to extend our empty hands.

[Please do this at home, and include any children who are watching...]

Can you feel how open and vulnerable you are?

Even as we mourn that we cannot stand together,
that we cannot reach out to clasp one another’s hands,
we’re still in this together.

We’re a mess of messy people

just like those on that first day we call Palm Sunday.

In turmoil and trembling, not knowing what the future holds.
Not knowing where following Jesus will lead,
but each one, together, crying out,
“Hosanna! God save us! Hosanna! Save, please!
Hosanna in the highest heaven!
Hosanna!”

#