

Palm to Passion Sunday 4/14/19  
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"This is not the end.  
It is not even the beginning of the end.  
But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning."

History buffs will recognize these words from Winston Churchill,  
famously said in November 1942 after the Allies' victory in "the Battle of Egypt".  
As important as that victory was,  
it wasn't the end or even the beginning of the end of WWII,  
which sadly dragged on another three years.

For us as Christians, today is not the end or  
even the beginning of the end.  
As important as it is to observe Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem,  
as much as we enjoy the tradition of waving palms and  
admiring the palm crosses,  
as much as we get a kick out of seeing our battered donkey  
pulled down the aisle by the children,  
it's not the end.  
It's not the be-all and end-all of our faith.

Even in today's liturgy we have a way yet to go,  
a way to travel from the Palms to the Passion.  
So savor those "Hosannas" but brace yourself to shout "Crucify him!" --  
all in the span of a single liturgy.

Oh, we'll hear a few more 'hosanna's" in our prayers and from the choir.  
We'll partake of the bread and wine of communion,  
Jesus' body and blood to fortify us for what is to come.

And then, only then, we'll experience the drama of his Passion.  
We'll do so with our children present, helping us tell the story.  
We'll do so knowing that even this is not the end of the story.

We have this whole holy week before us,  
this invitation to "set apart" (which is what "holy" really means)  
this precious time to enter more deeply into the life of Jesus.

The simplicity of candles extinguished in the dark church  
during the brief service of Tenebrae on Holy Wednesday.

The joy of sharing an agape meal of potluck soup and bread  
on Maundy Thursday,  
remembering Jesus' gift of the Lord's Supper in Holy Communion,  
as we commune one another around the tables in Wilkinson Hall.  
Followed by a silent procession up here for  
the Stripping of the Altar,  
each of us of all ages invited to help take away the dressings from the altar  
just as Jesus was stripped bare in his sacrifice for us.

And then comes the Nightwatch Prayer Vigil  
overnight from Maundy Thursday to Good Friday,  
in which we answer Jesus' request to "stay awake" for one hour  
with him on the night he was betrayed.

Ah, the stark beauty of the Good Friday service,  
in which we're encouraged to, literally, write out our sins and burdens  
on little sheets of paper  
and leave them at the foot of the cross.

Scarcely 24 hours later,  
out in the Memorial Garden during the Easter Vigil,  
all of those crumpled slips of paper bearing our sins and burdens  
go up in smoke, purified in the Easter fire,  
celebrating the resurrection of Christ Jesus who makes us new.

Each event so powerful in its own way,  
packed into a single week – holy, set apart, unlike any other –  
to prepare us to receive the glorious, renewing, transformative,  
life-changing, healing grace of Easter.

All packed into this "holy" Holy Week.

So this day, my friends, is not the end.  
It is not even the beginning of the end.  
It is but the end of the beginning.

Let us not stop here  
but go on, together, every step of the way with – and to -- Jesus.

Amen, and amen.

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