

Palm Sunday – Year B

There would have been *two* processions going on in Jerusalem that day we heard described in the short gospel passage at the beginning of our liturgy today. Every year at Passover, it was the “custom” of the Roman empire to have the Governor, with fully-armed escort, parade through the main, largest gate into the city – the Western Gate. It would have looked like a military parade – and the intention was to make clear who was in charge. It was a way of saying to the Jews that they could carry on their celebration of Passover, but only because the people in charge, the Roman Empire, deigned to *let* them.

And so, in telling us that Jesus comes through the gate at the *east* end of Jerusalem, riding on a donkey, with no weapons anywhere to be seen on his person or any of his followers... when the ground is covered before him by leafy branches and people’s coats... Mark is drawing a sharp contrast – between the kingdom of the Empire, and the kingdom of God; between the way of the powers that be, and the way of God.

When Pilate, the governor, rode in through the west gate, his military guard made sure everyone got out of the way. When Jesus came ambling through the east gate on the colt, he drew folks near by his presence. The Hebrew meaning of the “Hosannas” that they shouted is not, “Hail, O Mighty One” – as people were supposed to greet the Emperor. No, Hosanna means “Save us!” “Please, save us!” - And then they give voice to their deep hope but also to what is essentially treasonous, saying, “Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David.” In other words, save us from the powers that are crushing us. Bring us the kingdom, the rule of the Lord.” – at least the rule of the Lord as they understood it. But even as they shout “Hosanna” – “save us!” – Jesus *is* bringing in the kingdom of God, riding on a donkey, close to the poor, resisting injustice. The kingdom of God is hardly what they or we expect.

Are these *really* the same folks that only days later are all shouting “Crucify him!”?? When they bring Jesus to Pilate – who is only in town, remember, to make sure that the Jews and their Passover celebrations don’t get out of hand – when they bring Jesus to Pilate to be crucified, Pilate asks them, “Why? What evil has he done?” But they shouted all the more, “Crucify him!” -- One commentator raised the question of whether we ever stop to ask “Why?” When people, a movement, a political party, a government wants to do something, do we ever ask “Why” – or do we simply shout back what we have picked up as the slogan or demand that everyone else is shouting? I think sometimes we *don’t* ask why – because we don’t want to look at the answer. Why do we not want people to be able to apply for legal asylum? We do we not want people to be allowed to offer food or water to people standing in line for hours to vote? Why do we not want some people to have access to health care?

There is another place that the question “Why” comes up in the gospel passages for today. When Jesus tells the disciples to go untie a young colt and bring it to him, he tells them, “If anyone says to you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it...’”

I think we have there a great way to help us know what it is we are supposed to be doing. How would my life change – how would *our* lives change – if we made our decisions about what to do or say, how to live, based on whether we could answer that “Why” question with, “Because the Lord needs it...”

And needs it to do what? Jesus needed the colt to enter – to bring the way of God, the *kingdom* of God, into the picture... Jesus needed the disciples to prepare the upper room so that he could break bread and wash his disciples’ feet and speak his last words...

We may not be called to be the central figure in a non-violent demonstration against the powers of empire in our day – but we are called to help make it possible for the way of God to enter this time and place. We are called to do whatever we can, whenever we can, in whatever *way* we can, to let the kingdom of God enter – bringing with it a new way of life for us and for all of creation.

I have often asked myself “why” the crucifixion happened. This year, I will ask a different “why.” This year I will ask, “Why do I say, or do, or think, or espouse certain things?” And if I cannot answer, “because the Lord needs it...” then I may need to make some changes. Amen.

The Liturgy of the Palms

- [Mark 11:1-11](#)
- or [John 12:12-16](#)
- [Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29](#)

The Liturgy of the Word

- [Isaiah 50:4-9a](#)
- [Philippians 2:5-11](#)
- or [Mark 15:1-39, \[40-47\]](#)
- [Psalm 31:9-16](#)