

“Palm Sunday Thoughts”

sermon, by Pastor Joy Smith, April 5, 2020

Jesus knew it was dangerous. He came to Jerusalem because he had to—had to be who he was - to teach what he taught, **and live the values that were central to him,** not only in the safety of Galilee but Jerusalem, the capital, the living, breathing center of his people’s history and culture and life.

It would have been so easy to stay away. Jesus was a young man, adamant in his committed life . . . and alone as he confronted his final destiny.

And yet he believed – that if God required anything from him – he was not going to not fail. **Soon he began to see more clearly, this path of God might to lead to the cross.**

He knew - that he had to follow it, still uncertain as to whether he was indeed “the one who shall bring it to pass,” but certain he would only know by following the road to the end.

There you have it – that is the internal dynamic of this day—a young man who has to be true to himself; who faces his own fears and uncertainties, the risk of failure; who summons the courage to walk into the face of opposition and threat and conflict and danger; a man whose integrity will not allow him to do anything other than what he did.

That is why he went to Jerusalem. It is the very essence of Christianity that **God is in this story** and every human story, **including and especially stories of injustice and suffering.**

Everybody wants to know especially these day “Where is God in this pandemic that separates from those we love. Where is God in the 4.9 earthquake last week in San Diego County, bankrupt business, unemployment. Where was God when the 5-year-old child dies of the Corona Virus 19.

Where was God when a good, honest and brave young man who was guilty of nothing other than loving - everyone and unconditionally - was nailed to a cross and left to die alone, abandoned between two criminals?”

The answer is in Palm Sunday. In the midst of this terrible drama, and when you and I experience our own suffering of any kind.

Because Jesus came to the city, you can trust God to be present, to be your companion, your support, your strength, and when the time comes to meet head-on sickness, debilitation, pain, death itself, God is there with you. God embraces your suffering. God weeps when you weep.

I never had a thunder and lightning conversion to Christian faith. Rather it has – and is a process – a journey. The changing point for me was when I finally understood - that Jesus Christ in God experienced everything it means to be human, to be you and me; that Jesus in God, knows what it means to doubt and despair, when from the cross Jesus himself cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” I must believe God knows and understands and experiences the worst moments you and I will ever experience.

(Quote) William Sloane Coffin, who adamantly and passionately followed Jesus – put it like this: *“Though the sky on Palm Sunday was bright without a cloud, he knew the throne awaiting him was a cross. Yet – **and this is truly remarkable**—he loved people when they were least lovable”.*

When I think of how Jesus never lost his love for those who were trying to kill him. When I think of his absolute courage, the depth of his tenderness and passionate anger, I realize why Palm Sunday is so important.

Sloan concludes, “at the very least, it should make all of us want to be people for whom words such as courage, tenderness and passion carry resonance”.

I am thankful to know, that after the turmoil ended, Jesus sat down in the temple, with the children—who loved him, trusted him, and maybe understood him best— came to him and sang, “Hosanna to the Son of David.”

And so, like children, let us come. Step out of the crowd. Follow him with throngs of believers. Follow him to his cross and to the bright dawn of Easter morning and beyond—all the days of your life.

Remember – Good Friday comes first. Easter is coming soon. Amen

(Thanks for William Sloan Coffin, John Buchannan, Barbara Brown Taylor, and many others.)