

## **God's Time, Not Ours -- Palm Sunday C**

This is God's time, not ours. Of course that's always the case, but never more so than in this magnificent, jarring, fulfilling and disturbing time of year we call Holy Week. These are our High Holy Days indeed, and, like it or not we are on God's time.

One of the hardest things about getting older is increasing awareness of the part of our human condition we call mortality. I'm not talking about numbering our days because we think there are few of them left – that's tough enough, but can be withstood, softened, even sweetened by the gift of faith.

Aging is hard enough, but what's harder is the realization that comes with emotional maturity, the realization that the price of love is loss. That is to say, when we love someone, sooner or later we will lose them, at least in the worldly sense. Those of us who are fortunate enough to be parents know, however close by our kids may live, the only way they could be flourishing people themselves was for us to let them go – give them a vigorous and positive sendoff (and maybe a little dough), and hope like heck they come see us once in awhile.

This truth makes of our lives an emotional rollercoaster, that only gets steeper as we more fully live. Every surfer knows the bigger the ride, the more chance of a crash. The more we love, the more risk we face – in the worldly sense. God knows this too, and wants to give us as much help on the ride as we will accept. At this time of year, God's help comes in the form of drama. God's presence among us is

heightened, the narratives we relate and the ceremonies we perform are more intense; the stakes are higher. We are on a spiritual and therefore emotional ride that can seem frightening, challenging – even daunting, even though we know the outcome. We are practicing to be loving and faithful human beings by taking this ride through the stories and liturgies and mysteries of Holy Week, all in God’s protective embrace.

The betrayal by Judas, the glorious but ill-fated procession we just imitated, the trial and beatings and painful death seem like a horror movie: one we would never watch unless we knew it was going to end. It’s impossible for us to imagine how the disciples felt; unlike them, we are on the other side of the resurrection. Just as we know a movie is only a movie, we know Jesus will only suffer and die for a time. This is God’s movie, and our task, our joyous privilege, and our understanding lie in giving ourselves to the experience.

So we watch and wait. This is tough, especially for Americans. You don’t hear those Swedes watching an Ingmar Bergman film saying, “C’mon, cut to the chase!” We watch, we wait, and we care for each other – worshipping together, washing feet, feeding each other, keeping vigil, and listening deeply for the resonances in our own hearts that happen as this miraculous, world-changing story unfolds again as if for the first time if we let it.

Like Jesus, we are full of sentiment but also full of purpose. On the rollercoaster of joy and sorrow, serving and suffering, saying “Hosanna!” and hearing “Crucify Him!”

Two sides to this story as to each of our lives. Which will prevail? Stay tuned.

Will we end up as condemning priests or will we be one of the worshipping pilgrims? Notice Luke is very careful not to let us lay the blame off on Pilate the Prefect, or Herod, or even the Romans. It is a Roman who says “Surely this man was innocent” in Luke. No, it is the leaders of the people themselves, the supposedly wise and holy ones who make the big mistakes. The lesson is plain: the wiser and more powerful we think we are about things that really matter, the more carefully we had better look for signs of our own folly, misguidedness and self-righteous violence. We are our own worst enemies when it comes to listening to God.

Our great hope is that this story will work on us, that we can be still and available enough to be transformed, that we can become true witnesses through words and deeds to what can happen when we allow God’s time to order our lives. And this is the week we get to practice the whole arc of Christ-ian life.

We can’t worry about how our numbers are doing this week; they don’t matter. Even if we became silent ourselves, the very stones in the road would cry out the story of the glory. Imagine everyone here falling silent and suddenly Morro Rock began to sing a song of the saints of God! The very stones would cry out the whole story and it would keep on changing people for the better until the end of forever.

It is the story of God's love for humankind so prophesied by the portion of Isaiah we just heard: "See, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare. I will not grow faint or be crushed until I have established justice in the earth and the coastlands wait for my teaching!"

The great American poet Richard Wilbur, who is 95 this year, told the story this way:

A stable lamp is lighted, whose glow shall wake the sky.  
The stars shall bend their voices, and every stone shall cry.  
And every stone shall cry; and straw like gold shall shine.  
A barn shall harbor heaven, a stall become a shrine.

This child, through David's city, shall ride in triumph by.  
The palm shall strew its branches, and every stone shall cry.  
And every stone shall cry, though heavy, dull and dumb,  
And lie within the roadway, to pave his kingdom come.

Yet he shall be forsaken, and yielded up to die.  
The sky shall groan and darken; and every stone shall cry  
And every stone shall cry for stony hearts of men:  
God's blood upon the spearpoint; God's love refused again.

But now, as at the ending, the low is lifted high.  
The stars shall bend their voices, and every stone shall cry.  
And every stone shall cry in praises of the child,  
By whose descent among us, the worlds are reconciled