

In the name of God, Creator, Redeemer, and Renewing Spirit. Amen.

“That we may enter with joy upon the contemplation of those mighty acts whereby you have given us life and immortality.” Those words in the prayer before the blessing of palms in our liturgy remind us of why we observe Holy Week. We actually contemplate those mighty acts throughout the liturgical year: Jesus’ birth, revelation to the Gentiles, baptism, transfiguration; and this week, the events of Jesus’ death and resurrection.

You may have noticed that we didn’t read the entire passion story today; this is so we have time and space to prayerfully and thoughtfully follow Jesus’ last week. Through the reading of Mark’s Gospel during this holy week, I invite you not to rush to Good Friday. Today let us look at Jesus entering Jerusalem and his words and deeds that so provoke those in power, that Jesus will meet the cross before week’s end.

At the beginning of our service, we read Mark’s account of Jesus entering Jerusalem, what we now celebrate as Palm Sunday. On the Diocesan pilgrimage to the Holy Land a year and a half ago, we got to walk the Palm Sunday route; we began at Bethphage, and walked down a steep hill,

whose cobblestoned street was worn slippery by centuries of pilgrims. Through the trees and across the Kidron valley, you could see the walls of Jerusalem. When Jesus traveled this route, news of his teaching and healing had already spread far and wide. People lined the road, and shouted in joyous longing for this Messiah, this new king to take up the throne of David and to restore their fortunes, the fortunes of Israel; to release them from the tyranny of occupiers. Assyrians, Babylonians, Greeks, Romans - Israel had not been free for a long time. And the work Jesus has done among the people has given them hope; hope that God's saving help has come at last and they will indeed be free.

Jesus does not take lodging within the city of Jerusalem; he stays in a village just outside, in Bethany. Between his entry into Jerusalem amid those joyous shouts of longing, and his anointing that we read of today, Jesus acts in a way that will bring down upon him the full weight of the dissatisfied authorities who see him as a threat. After his Palm Sunday journey on the back of the colt, Jesus returns to the Temple and overturns the tables of the money changers, and drives out the animal sellers. This is upsetting enough; but the authorities become even more alarmed when they hear more of Jesus' teaching. After Jesus has driven out the money

changers, a scribe comes up to Jesus and asks, 'Which commandment is the first of all?' Jesus answers, 'The first is, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength."

The second is this, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." There is no other commandment greater than these.' The scribe agrees, and says that to love God and neighbor is much more important than burnt-offerings and sacrifices. Jesus then tells him that he is not far from the kingdom of God.

Imagine the Temple authorities hearing this; Jesus has already physically driven out animal sellers and money changers from the Temple; and now one of the *scribes* has agreed with Jesus that the business of the Temple is not what God asks of us. God asks us for the hard, lifelong work of love; and that is not brokered by a Temple or burnt offerings and sacrifices.

Jesus is threatening to overturn the business of the religious authorities, taking away their reason for existence. Jesus is saying that God is with us when we do the work of love, not when we engage in the business of the Temple. All those centuries of people finding some sort of righteousness by coming to the Temple, offering sacrifices, and trying to follow every letter of the law, this was the scaffolding and structure that upheld the religious

authorities; and Jesus, by word and deed is doing away with that power structure. Jesus is the fulfilment of all the law; he is the new Temple where God dwells; and soon, those who will follow him and become Christ's body after the resurrection, they - we - will be the Temple where God dwells. God will be with us when our only law and our only work is love.

Most of the disciples don't quite get it. They don't want to hear Jesus talk of being arrested and killed; they want to skip ahead to this new kingdom Jesus has talked about, which certainly can't come through Jesus' defeat. But one disciple does understand. In the house of Simon the Leper, a woman, unnamed and probably uninvited to the dinner, enters the room where Jesus is at the table. She does not merely open a jar of perfume, which would allow her to pour out some and keep back the rest to use or sell later. She breaks open the jar so that it is completely poured out upon Jesus. Jesus says that what she has done is part of the good news that will be proclaimed after his death. Just as she has broken open this jar so that its rich perfume is utterly and completely poured out, so Jesus will submit to the events of the coming week, so that he is broken open and completely poured out. This woman's extravagant gesture of love is an echo of the extravagant act of love that Jesus will fulfill on the cross.

This is the essence of the passion of Christ; the word we use this week, *passion*, does not refer to fervent emotion. It is rooted in the Latin verb from which we derive the words passive and patient. Jesus' passion is about his submission and suffering, his being broken open and utterly poured out. Because Jesus is God incarnate, Jesus' being broken open releases riches far greater than any perfume; Jesus' being broken open releases such life that it reaches beyond death. God incarnate is emptying Godself in order to drown us in such love that we are given the grace to reach back to God and be broken open ourselves, and find our own inner divinity, our own immortality.

This week, we are invited to enter in remembrance those mighty works of love by which God gives us life and immortality; every day of our lives we are invited to enter in to those mighty works of love to which God calls us, love which is of more worth than any sacrifice or burnt offering. As we recall God's acts of love, may God's grace and inspiring Spirit fill us this holy week. Amen.