

Palm Sunday
April 13, 2014
Holy Trinity Episcopal Church
The Rev. Leslie M. St. Louis

In the name of the one who was denied....Amen!

Betrayal.

Denial.

Abandonment.

These words sound like sirens out of the reading we have just heard of the passion narrative, these three greet Jesus as he walks the longest, last week of his life. The joyful, jubilant Hosanna's of expectant victory descend into the horrible hounds of "Crucify, Crucify" in the beat of a heart.

Jesus is going to die.

He knows that.

He has told his disciples that.

He has tried and tried to tell the crowds.

But now the clock is in motion; Jesus has less than a week to live.

What a lonely moment this must be for Jesus, to be surrounded by screaming fans, buoyed by those who love him and yet alone, utterly alone; burdened by the knowledge of how brief, how very very brief; how thoroughly fickle, and just how sterile their acclaim will be.

This is the point of no return for Jesus.

With his entry on a colt, with the crowds, with the palms, with the ringing refrain “Hosanna to the Son of David!” he has triggered one prophetic tripwire too many.

The powers that be; Roman rulers and the Jewish religious authorities can no longer, will no longer pretend that he is insignificant. That he is a fad. That he is **not** dangerous. Jesus has deliberately provoked the crisis that will nail him to the cross.

The crisis begins for the disciples as well. Each of them wondering what the outcome will be here, are they themselves safe, and even as they profess their allegiance to Jesus wondering should they stay or should they go? And what of us? Here are we moving from palm procession to Passion, from joy to despair, from jubilation to rage... from life... to death, deliberately stepping headlong into our own crisis. We, just like the crowd abruptly transition, **in days**...days... from adulation and joyful allegiance to the one who came to save, God with us, to rage-filled demands for that very same one to be crucified.

The disciples, **we**, move from proudly marching at his side through the streets of Jerusalem, through the streets of life to slinking away in visceral stomach-clenching fear, insisting... insisting, **he is not known** to us!

While it is true that taking our place among the crowds on Good Friday shouting for Jesus to be crucified feels awkward and painful, it is also true that the disciples’ experience of simply not affirming that we know him, of finding that our fear prevents us from being present with another’s pain, feels all too familiar. We too know how to betray, deny and abandon.

Have you seen the movie *The Book Thief*? If you haven’t you must and if you haven’t also read the book you must do that as well, put it on your summer reading list. *The Book Thief* is a beautifully written memoir about a little girl in World War II who steals books, it is written in the first person by the one individual, if you will, who remains ever present with us....death. Death shares many wonderful lessons throughout the book but one of the lessons that has stuck with me as I have

wandered these last days of Lent and prepared for Holy Week is this, death says “here is a definition not found in the dictionary: to not leave: an act of love and trust.”

To not leave, an act of love and trust. This, my friends is the bequest Jesus makes on our lives, to not leave, to trust, to love not only him but one another. Faithfulness, affirmation and remaining these are the marks of those who walk the way of Christ.

Holy Week, which begins today, is our opportunity to immerse ourselves in this move from the false joy of Palm Sunday, a joy that is centered around our expectations of power and reward, through the pain of finding that our faith is often so weak, too weak when Jesus needs us the most, to rest finally in the deep and profound joy of the day of Resurrection, the day of forgiveness and new life. We have the opportunity to walk with Jesus in real time, in our life’s time, as his hourglass runs out, as he struggles with the knowledge that he has less than a week to live.

Holy Week is our opportunity to “not leave.”

To not betray.

To not deny.

To not abandon.

The gospel tells us, “At supper with his friends, Jesus was troubled in spirit, and declared, ‘Very truly, I tell you, one of you (one of my beloveds) will betray me.’”

The reason betrayal hurts so much is because it has to come from someone you know and love, a member of your inner circle, someone who has told you they love you. A stranger cannot betray you. Someone who hates you and always has, cannot betray you. And there is only one thing worse than being betrayed and that is being the betrayer ourselves, finding out that we are not the people we thought we were; the people we profess to be, the people we aspire to be.

Today we make a choice. We can choose to be present with Jesus as his disciples throughout this week, confronting the ways in which we betray, loving him and others as we see them struggle for the courage to endure death, or we can hide away, unwilling to let our composure be torn in two on Good Friday right along with the temple curtain.

There are truly only few tools we need; we need the scriptures, we need honestly open hearts and we need our presence, our real and full presence to make this journey along the long and oft times painful road that leads from Jesus to Christ.

Not unlike Jesus; our fear, our sin, our grief and our illusions about ourselves have less than a week to live. Just seven days.

How will you spend that time?

Amen!