

RUNNYMEDE UNITED CHURCH  
'From Palms to Passion'  
March 28, 2010  
Scriptures from Luke 22: 14-62  
'The Cock Crows for Us': A Meditation

The cock crows for us this week, in The Passion of Christ. That's what the story of Holy Week is called: the Passion, the suffering of Christ. This week we move 'From Palms to Passion'. The Latin verb, 'passio', means 'I suffer'. Holy Week, which we enter as spring begins to promise fresh radiance, is a dark drop into suffering.

Although they differ in details, all the gospels agree that in this week, we come to the heart of the matter. Christians cannot discover Easter's light by bypassing the pain, horror, denial, betrayal that come through the Passion.

Bypass it, of course, is what we would rather do: rather hear a bright, buoyant story, like the one that seems to begin Palm Sunday. For the people, the time was right. They knew what to do: scream with delight, wave palm branches, shout 'Hosanna'. We forget that although Hosanna may have come to mean 'Hail' or 'Hooray', with a triumphant edge, even by Jesus' time, its roots mean 'Save us! Save us now!' It is no synonym for 'Hallelujah! Praise God!'

Before we can unpack those 'Hallelujahs' the children boxed away at the beginning of Lent, the Passion story asks us to ponder how quickly, how appallingly, 'Hosanna!' can change to 'Crucify!'

And perhaps we will go away, having absorbed another truth: the palms aren't being waved in some sultry city street far away and long ago, but here and now. It is not just the people of Jerusalem who shout 'Hosanna' and then so soon after 'Crucify'; it is both they and we. It is not just Peter who hears the cock crow but each one of us.

To sing 'Hosanna' is to believe that the one we worship promises farewell to sorrow. When we sing 'Hosanna', we seek easy salvation, a glamorous gospel. But soon the cock will crow Palm Sunday's reality: 'Bitter was the night: saw you passing by, told them all I didn't know you.'

The one who comes on a donkey threatens the God whom we make over in our own image: a God of majesty, power, triumph. This one shows us that we deny God in those very expectations. Jesus' trial and crucifixion bring us face to face with God's chosen vulnerability, God's willingness to know our pain, to be rejected as we are rejected, to suffer as we suffer.

Jesus knew that even those closest to him would soon hear in the cock's crow the truth of denial and betrayal. Holy Week awaits us. Maybe we wish we could just watch the parade. But those who stick around for the horror to come learn the truth.

The place is the ancient city of Jerusalem and Toronto's towers and neighbourhoods; the people are those of long ago and we, today, whose voices howl strange combinations of

'Hosanna' and 'Crucify!' along the corridors of time. As we shudder at a cock's crowing truth, let us remember times we have denied God's call for justice, for an end to poverty, for care for God's world, for protection for the vulnerable and for children, for an end to abuse of all kinds, have avoided the way of the cross or refused Christ, in offices or kitchens or on Bloor Street, have defiled in our living even the waters of life promised us in our baptism. Here we remember, and like Peter, learn to live into another truth: that the One who comes under the palms and dies on the cross is always with us, offering another chance.

It is hard this week, but here, even as 'shadows gather, deep and cold', we can hear that this is the one place where 'Hosanna' can mean 'God saves us', where 'Jesus teaches us to pray, not my will, but 'thine be done...'. This week, as we move, with palms through passion, we learn that God is with us, not in false hopes of glory, but in the depths of our pain. That is the reason we must tell this story, not bypass it, enter into the world's pain, not run away from it, bear the suffering of others, not avoid it. Here we know God's passion for the world, for us, for all God's children. Thanks be to God.

Please turn to # 150 in Voices United... Let us pray together 'A Prayer for Holy Week'.

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