

The Rev. Patricia Rose  
Sunday of the Passion: Palm Sunday  
St. Paul's Episcopal Church  
April 13, 2025

We've heard a lot of words today, but it's not just words we're receiving, not even just sacred stories. What is being conveyed, in grace beyond words, speaks to something that resonates in the depths of us, a longing toward the greater something we sense we are part of. What we heard today and will be hearing throughout Holy Week invites us to a terrain that can't be taken in by just hearing about it. It's something we have to walk through ourselves, day by day, moment by moment. Something that must be lived, and practiced.

This holy terrain is about the possibilities of who we are in God, and how to live our lives to realize that. It's about the preciousness of life.

Last Sunday when I was preaching at the 9:00 service, I had kids come up on the altar to get blessed and bless each other with fragrant oil to remind them of abundant love. Towards the end of this, as I was reading, a quote, a little one raised her hand and kept it up for a long time. You never know what can happen when you call on a child in a sermon when you have a time frame, but I thought, I can answer one little question. So I said "Do you have a burning question?" And she said, "Um, yeah. What is life?"

Just a little question! But the time for the sermon was up, so I told her to ask her mommy and daddy.

From the mouths of babes. What indeed is life? What do we do with it? What is possible? These are questions for all of us. Questions to ask earnestly, and from our innocence and open hearts. To really want to know, and letting go of the idea that we already know.

This morning and throughout Holy Week, we are immersed in stories about Jesus walking through his last days to his death and resurrection. And all through these stories are endless gems of wisdom about how to be truly alive, about how precious each moment of life is, the opportunity to know God's peace, to know freedom, and love.

Doesn't it seem contradictory that these Holy Week stories around death lead us to the Truth about life? This is one of the gems of wisdom we are given to consider this week. That life, that

Truth, seems full of contrasts and contradictions, and yet, we have the capacity to walk through them as Jesus modeled, walking close to God as we traverse a Truth that can and does encompass all things.

For example, today we read about the excited welcoming of Jesus as he joyously entered Jerusalem, though he himself knew where it was all headed, and others suspected it. Still the crowd was joyous as they watched the beloved one, whose power and presence even in that moment were solid and warm.

We might consider also how God may come riding into our lives on a humble colt. Will we notice? Will we inhabit our full joy, even in times when there is much to feel bad about?

Maybe there's the joy of a new insight, or in overcoming a bad habit. Maybe the joy of say, in Cleveland, a sunny day, warmer than 20 degrees! Maybe we feel Christ in feeling deep compassion for another, or they for us. Or maybe there's the joy of laughter, or even - joy for no reason.

But the question is: can we give ourselves fully to moments of joy, even in difficult times or even if we feel guilty for our joy when there's so much suffering? It does no good to shut down our joy and stay in near constant worry or anger. It doesn't help anyone. In fact, it's detrimental, because moments of well-felt joy connect us to God's presence and bring us strength to offer *more* to the world.

We are able to feel and be present to a large spectrum of emotions, joyous and painful, and remain grounded in the strength God gives us. Jesus arrives in Jerusalem in joy, sharing it with others, yet still weeps later over Jerusalem. And Jerusalem itself is a contradiction. The name means City of Peace, yet it is not always that, and it is here that Jesus is crucified, betrayed by a friend, abandoned by many friends who were terrified.

Jesus walks in all these contradictions while remaining present, seated in his heart, present to God. In this way, he invites us to realize our capacity to do the same, to learn be alive in this way, seated in the truth, staying close to God and God's peace, not shutting down to parts of life.

We also see the contrast between the one who, as we heard in Philippians today, "though he was in the form of God did not regard that as something to be exploited ...and humbled

himself” He didn’t flaunt his power or use force throughout entering the city, when he was taken away, or in his trial.

His way of being also emphasizes the contrast between outward appearances and Truth, between oppressive systems and the realm of God’s Love, between the way things can seem on the outside and divine purpose unfolding in unexpected ways.

How might we be attentive to being in life as Jesus, not flaunting our knowledge or strengths for selfish purposes, yet using them. Not favoring outer appearances over Truth, and living in patient vigilance for deeper purposes to guide us.

In the Torah, Jerusalem is spoken of as a bridge between heaven and earth. Jesus is such a bridge, bringing heavenly truth to earth, not just in words, but in the consistency of his words and actions, even through the horrific conditions of crucifixion. He models living in prayerful closeness to the Truth God is always revealing, the terrain of Truth out beyond opposites and seeming contradiction.

In following Christ through the death of what we think life is into new life that is much more expansive, we are shown the way to inhabit this precious life more fully, in all its possibilities. When we do this, we will radiate light in the world in words and actions.

The light of God, the light of truth, love, and justice.

And what is the point of our faith,  
of all these stories of Holy Week,  
of our precious lives, if not to do that?