

Remember the Crucifixion

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The Sunday of the Passion According to Mark: Palm Sunday

Pilate spoke to them again, "Then what do you wish me to do with the man you call the King of the Jews?" They shouted back, "Crucify him!" Pilate asked them, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Crucify him!" So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

There has been a lot of action taking place here at St. David's over the last few months. We've had some really big changes. The most obvious change was the retirement of our former rector, the Rev. Frank Allen, after he faithfully served this community for twenty six years. Then the calling of our interim rector, the Rev. Devon Anderson to help us transition into this new phase of life at St. David's. We've journeyed through liturgical seasons together, Advent to Christmas, Christmas to Epiphany, and now Lent to Holy Week, and we will soon be celebrating Easter day together. We've marked these changes in our liturgical calendar with worship and with great celebrations like the Christmas Pageant, an Epiphany Tree Burn, and a Pancake Breakfast. We have moved from one thing to the next.

Part of this period of transition, part of all of this action for this community has involved a lot of death. Since the new year, we have had seventeen total funerals take place at St. David's. It seems that every weekend, we are honoring and remembering the life of someone in this community. It's been an honor and a privilege to walk alongside some of these families after the death of their loved one. What I often notice is that death is something that us humans like to avoid. We avoid it because the idea of losing someone we love so much is unthinkable. Although, it's something that is inevitable for all of us.

In almost every funeral homily that I preach, I like to quote a passage from Romans that is actually in our Book of Common Prayer as well. On page 507 of our prayer book it reads, "The liturgy for the dead is an Easter liturgy. It finds all its meaning in the resurrection. Because Jesus was raised from the dead, we, too, shall be raised. The liturgy, therefore, is characterized by joy, in the certainty that "neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." I want to remind the family and friends of the departed that life hasn't ended for their loved one. As Christians, we believe that life continues beyond this world. We will never be separated from the love of God in Jesus Christ. We will never be separated from that love because of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. Because of his suffering, persecution, crucifixion and resurrection, we will never be absent from his love.

Today, on this Palm Sunday, as we remember Jesus' entry into Jerusalem and as we just finished reading the passion narrative from the gospel according to Mark, we are once again in the midst of a transition as we move into Holy Week. We focus our lives on the teachings, persecution, and crucifixion of Jesus Christ. We are at the tail end of the season of Lent and are that much closer to Good Friday, and Jesus' death. We are that much closer to the ultimate sign of love that Jesus showed us.

Not unlike us today, Jesus' disciples were unprepared to lose the person they loved the most. They were so unprepared that they fell asleep! They could not even stay up through the night and keep watch. For us as the readers, it signifies that they were lacking the awareness of the moment. They lacked the knowledge and importance of who Jesus really was. Then, Judas, willingly handed Jesus over to the authorities. Which showed a complete lack of trust, and knowledge. Then, when Jesus was arrested all of them deserted him and fled. Then, when Peter was asked if he knew who Jesus was, Peter denied him.

The disciples' grief and unpreparedness, caused them to act out in negative ways. Their responses denied the person they were following. Their whole experience of being Jesus' disciples was altered. In Jesus, they didn't see a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice for the whole world. If they did, they wouldn't have behaved in the manner they did. However, it's hard to not sympathize with the disciples. As we know, fear, change, and death cause people to act in interesting ways.

For us as Christians, death is a transition. Change is a transition. We are moving from one thing to the next. It can feel scary. I mean the whole passion narrative we just read is a little scary. Every year when we read this, I get chills down my spine when the congregation yells, "Crucify him!". But the benefit we have of being followers of Jesus Christ in 2024 is that we know how this story ends. We know that Jesus is put on the cross, killed, and resurrected. We know that Easter day is right around the corner.

In our own lives, transition is scary because it's change. We don't always know how the story is going to end. The very definition of transition is a period or process of changing from one state or condition to another. Starting a new job, getting married, having a kid, calling a new rector, are all times of transition. It can be nerve racking and scary, especially having a kid. I know from experience. Yet, the one constant in all of it, is the love of God in Jesus Christ. It's a love that God offers to all of us.

A friend of mine recently shared a Youtube video with me entitled, Inside Cajun Country by a man named Peter Santenello. Peter has almost 3 million youtube subscribers and posts videos exploring different cultures throughout America. This particular video was about the Cajun culture in Louisiana which Peter described as a unique culture in America that, in a way, feels like its own country.

In the video, Peter meets all of these different people in order for him to get a real feel of the culture. He comes across this one gentleman named Tim. It appeared to me that Tim was some sort of blacksmith that lived in the woods of this particular part of Louisiana. Tim begins to tell the interviewer that he has been forging nails during the season of Lent, that might have been the same style and length as the ones Jesus was crucified with. Peter asked Tim why he was doing this, and Tim said, "because I want people to remember the crucifixion." Tim wanted people to remember that love. The sacrifice and pain that Jesus endured for us.

So, as we journey together through this Holy Week, I encourage us to remember that love. Remember the sacrifice that was made for us as we evaluate all of the transitions taking place in our lives. The moments where we might feel unprepared, nervous, or worried, try to focus on the cross and the love that it represents for all of us. **Amen.**