Sunday, April 10, 2022

Grace and Peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen

When I was growing up this Sunday, the Sunday before Easter, was known as Palm Sunday. Period. Later, of course, it became known as Palm/Passion Sunday.

Why the change? Some site the fact that over time fewer people were attending Maundy Thursday and Good Friday Services. Years ago, businesses and shops closed on Good Friday so that those who wished could attend worship services.

More recently we find that most churches offer one service on Good Friday, generally in the evening.

Times change and we change with them. And as we gather today, we have a great portion of gospel text before us encompassing nearly a week in the life of Christ. From Christ’s entry into Jerusalem to his death on a cross we span several days and read details that are important for us to understand not only as we look at the last days of Jesus’ life on earth, but as we look at our present lives.

We find that today is not just the day of triumph with the palms waving the beloved rabbi into Jerusalem. This is also not just the day of gruesome pain when Jesus was crucified. Today is all at once triumph and defeat, because we mark both the crowds rejoicing and the crowds standing back silently as they watched their teacher, healer, leader being killed. While we may think “Hosanna!” means “Hurrah!” it is actually the word for “Save us!”

Today there is no final hurrah. Instead, the gospel account gives us a portrait of Jesus’ last day: Jesus speaks the words of institution of Passover, the disciples argue about who is the greatest among them. Jesus prays in the garden of Gethsemane, Judas betrays, Peter denies, Pilate and Herod support the needs of the oppressor government. Jesus is crucified in the midst of thieves and forgives because humanity has no vision. Jesus dies and is buried.

The story is threaded throughout with the incapacities of human beings, even of supposedly loyal friends. It is the quintessential story of betrayal, of human self-preservation, and of Jesus standing in the midst, giving himself over to inevitable violence.

It is a story that we never tire of hearing. In fact, we look forward to this story each Sunday before Easter.

It is also important for us to understand that this story is not a tale of long ago. This story of Jesus’ final breath is the story of our lives, of our neighbors, and of strangers.

God’s word calls us to take Jesus’ story so that it resides in us: “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus” we hear Paul tell us.

With that in mind, it is now up to each of us to take this story home with us and study it, to allow it to inform us what the mind of Christ looks like in our world today of betrayal, ignorance, disbelief, and violence. What does the mind of Christ look like as we find a raging war in Ukraine, as we look at the divisions in our country, as we see the ills of society that do not seem to change for the better?

It is also important for us to understand that the mind of Christ has already been given to us. Through baptism we are “in Christ Jesus.” We are no longer Adam and Eve, who sought to be like God. We are in the garden with the One who teaches us what it is to be emptied.

Thanks be to God. Amen