

Palm Sunday Meditation

Luke 19:28-40; Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29, 03-28-2010

Years ago, during Holy Week, which begins with Passion or Palm Sunday and ends with Easter, I would hear a hymn on the radio when I would be driving the 42 miles to the church I was then serving. I would hear it on Maundy Thursday and on Good Friday. It was almost always sung by an Irish tenor. It stirred me every time it was played. I later found out this hymn was quoted by James Joyce in his novel, Ulysses. Recently, I could only remember words to the chorus of the song but, thanks to the magic of the Internet, I found it the other day. The words of this hymn “The Holy City” (Frederick E. Weatherly, Stephen Adams 1892) take us from Palm Sunday through Easter and beyond. They are:

Last night I lay asleeping,
There came a dream so fair;
I stood in old Jerusalem
Beside the temple there.
I heard the children singing,
And ever as they sang,
Me thought the voice of angels
From heav'n in answer rang;
Me thought the voice of angels
From heav'n in answer rang.

Jerusalem! Jerusalem!
Lift up your gates and sing,
Hosanna in the highest!
Hosanna to your King!

And then me thought my dream was chang'd,
The streets no longer rang,
Hush'd were the glad hosannas
The little children sang.
The sun grew dark with mystery,
The morn was cold and chill,
As the shadow of a cross arose
Upon a lonely hill,
As the shadow of a cross arose
Upon a lonely hill.

Jerusalem! Jerusalem!
Hark! how the angels sing,
Hosanna in the highest!
Hosanna to your King!

And once again the scene was chang'd,
New earth there seemed to be;
I saw the Holy City
Beside the tideless sea;

The light of God was on its streets,
 The gates were open wide,
 And all who would might enter,
 And no one was denied.
 No need of moon or stars by night,
 Or sun to shine by day;
 It was the new Jerusalem
 That would not pass away,
 It was the new Jerusalem
 That would not pass away.
 Jerusalem! Jerusalem!
 Sing for the night is o'er,
 Hosanna in the highest!
 Hosanna forevermore!

This hymn takes us from the joy of this day through the darkness of Good Friday and on, once again, to the brightness of a new dawn. This is the path Jesus walked during the last week of his earthly life.

This morning's scripture reading, from the gospel of Luke, follows him into the city. It goes on to tell us that he spent much of the following week leading to his death teaching in the temple as the darkness gathered around him, finally leading him on that "cold and chill morning to that cross on a lonely hill."

When we consider our own lives we often see the same kind of patterns repeated over and over again, in different ways. Through our ups and downs of life we walk through sunshine and through shadow and then back into the sunshine again. Often when we are in the shadows we might cry out to God, as did Jesus from the cross, "My God, My God why hast thou forsaken me?" But, knowing as he did that there is a future for us, we understand that we must keep moving forward. We cannot allow fearful events to defeat us. We must have the strength he had, during the last week of his life, to continue on our pathway. We meet many lesser ends in life and come to learn, as we become wiser, that each end signals a new beginning full of hope and promise for us.

This is what our faith is all about—the promise of renewal and hope and a future before us. On this special morning, when we formally receive four young people into our community of faith, we understand that their faith journey is far from complete. We know that they will travel many new roads through life and we hope that their faith grows as they come to understand more fully the mysterious way in which God moves. We hope they will come to understand that the growth of deep faith takes time and nourishment and that the journey is never complete. There is always something new to learn and understand.

As we move through this final week of Lent, we need to try to find some time to reflect on the life that has led us all to a greater understanding of God. We need to continue on our journey together, and as individuals, knowing that God goes with us in times of great joy and in times of deep despair, just as God went with Jesus from victory to death into the next level of life. - *Amen*