

Riding On In Majesty Matthew

21:1-11; Psalm 118:1-2, 19-24, 3-16-08—Palm/Passion Sunday

This morning our scripture reading deals with Jesus' entry into Jerusalem to face his final earthly days. We commemorate this day as Palm or Passion Sunday. The color for the day is red. Palm or Passion Sunday opens the door to Holy Week and the walk through troubled days to death and then resurrection.

Jesus rode on "in majesty," we are told in song and word. His mount was a colt, the mount of royalty. But instead of riding on with the air of a conquering hero, Jesus rode forward in humility.

According to our story of his life, he knew what was to come and, yet, he moved forward to face death. He had his priorities in order. He understood what was important in the vast scope of life. He rode forward with the assurance that all would be well even in the darkest days. During this upcoming week he might have had a moment of uncertainty in the Garden of Gethsemane, when he asked, if it was God's will, that the cup of death be passed from him. That was not to be. He faced what remained of his life with calmness and steadiness.

In our lives we have many opportunities to choose whether we will move forward with calmness of spirit, steadiness and strength or whether we will let the problems in life tear us apart. Often we let worries enter our minds that blind us to the way in life we are to travel. We lose sight of what our priorities should be. We are sidetracked by events that hurt us and wear us down as we dwell on them. This happens to all of us.

When I found this happening to me a while ago, I decided I needed to think things through as logically as is possible for me. Quite often it helps me to visualize what is going on in my mind. Often I spend time writing pages in a journal to help me gain perspective on a problem or event. But, this time seemed different and required a different approach. So, I drew a circle and created a pie chart. A pie chart, as we all know, assigns certain percentages to things and ends up looking like a pie that has been sliced into various sized pieces according to their importance. As I created my little chart, I focused on what was important in life—just what my priorities are.

First, I considered myself as a mother and sister and friend. My brother-in-law has recently been diagnosed with inoperable cancer—things do not look good. So, I thought about what will be required of me to help my sister and her family through a difficult time with me being at such a distance. I also reflected on my daughters and their families and my obligations to them. And, I thought about all my dear friends and the many ways I hope to remain in touch with them and enrich our relationships. These priorities took up almost half of my chart.

Then I reflected on my life as a pastor, serving a church and a community, helping young pastors find footing when life seems to become very complex and difficult, helping old friends who are pastors make very difficult life transitions, finding time for reading and study and contemplation of our religious tradition, and helping those around me make some sense of life as they untie knotty problems. These challenges took up almost the rest of my circle.

Then I thought about problems that are always present and that keep dragging me forward and backward and not in a majestic manner. On my pie chart of life, these annoyances took up a very slim slice. When I considered my chart, it was very easy to see what my priorities needed to be. I could put life back into some sort of perspective and discover the focus I needed to have on those things that are most important to me. I keep this chart close at hand so that when I slide into worry over small things, I can regain a proper balance. It has been a very interesting exercise. Doing it has enabled me to ride on in some sort of humble majesty to accept new challenges and to assign to them a proper percentage of my thought process.

I am sure Jesus needed no pie chart to help him remember what was required of him to fulfill his mission for God. He simply knew, deep down, what it was he was called to do. We all need to strive for this level of understanding as we seek to organize our lives in the best possible way remembering what it is that should come first and foremost.

During this Holy Week we have time for increased contemplation on all the life and teachings of Christ have meant to us. We have time to realize that the promise given to us through his life is that we always have another chance to get things. We always have the opportunity to become more Christ-like in the ways we think and speak and act. There is always hope for us as we examine our lives and decide once again what the most important priorities are for us. When we understand where we're going we discover that we are able to "ride on in majesty" no matter what lies ahead.

-- Amen