

Palm Sunday

We came for a parade, with songs and palms and olive branches waving. We leave in silence. A broken body lying cold in the tomb. If you feel confused about how to feel today, you're not alone. It's the way many of us feel. On this day, we hold up to the sunlight all that is the best in us: the grateful crowd welcoming with joy the Messiah of God; "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" And we hold up to the sunlight all that is the worst in us: the angry mob, driven by fear, demanding the torture and death of God's Messiah, and jeering him as he hangs from the tree.

We are all at each event. We each of us shout loudly with joy, and with contempt. It's the hardest fact to face in life. But the sooner that fact is faced, the better. Because facing that fact permits us then to come to see the miracle of Jesus' first words as he hung from that tree: "Father, forgive them, they don't know what they are doing."

We forgive each other all the time. But usually, our forgiveness comes only after the one seeking forgiveness has asked for it. Has recognized her wrong. Has, so to speak, confessed his sin.

We are so unlike Jesus. Who forgives first. From the paralytic man lowered by his friends through the thatch roof in front of Jesus: "My son, your sins are forgiven"; to the woman caught in the very act of adultery: "Has no one condemned you? Then neither do I condemn you."

Till today, hanging on the tree; no act of contrition by Peter, who denied him; no "sorry" from the apostles who deserted him; no remorse from Pilate who condemned him; or the Sadducees who arrested him; or the soldiers who nailed him,

or Judas who betrayed him. Only this: “Father forgive, they don’t know....”

We engage in “pre-emptive war”. Jesus engages in pre-emptive forgiveness. “Father, forgive them...” We hear in these words, the intimate exchange within the Holy Trinity itself. “Forgive them.” “Forgive them.” The Father is there with the Son. The Son has taken on the entire weight of humanities sin. Yours and mine. And Jesus utters the very prayer that set in motion God’s decision to rescue us, by becoming one of us: “forgive them.”

This week, we journey into the deepest mysteries of our faith. If you can, join us on Maundy Thursday as we experience those mysteries pushing in on us in the washing of the feet; in recalling that very night when the Holy Eucharist was first given to us. As the altar is stripped, the cross-covered in black, as we depart in silence.

Come, if you can, on Good Friday, as we walk to Golgotha, feel the mystery of this day press in upon you. And at night, on Friday, as we share the reserved sacrament; this night, as the Lord of Lords, the King of Kings, lies dead in the tomb.

Come and wonder at the mysteries of our faith. Come and wonder at our God who does not always work to our benefit. A God who, when it is dark, doesn’t rush in to turn on the lights. Ours is a God who come, and hangs with us on our own crosses. Ours is a God who comes and hangs with us on our own crosses*.

I don’t ask you to understand it. We aren’t here to figure it all out. Rather, this day, let us simply pray, and adore and reflect,

on the God whose strength is found in abject weakness, who
makes life rise up, out of death.

+amen

*W.Willimon