

Yr. C, Palm Sunday  
April 2, 2023  
Preached by the Rev. Furman Buchanan  
Christ Episcopal Church  
720 words

Lessons:  
Isaiah 50:4-9a  
Psalm 31:9-16  
Philippians 2:5-11  
Matthew 26:14-27:66

Here he comes again! Jesus, riding on the colt of a donkey. We celebrate and remember this moment at every Sunday Eucharist when we say, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest!”

Blessed? *Really?* Today we hear all of what happened to Jesus—the One who arrived triumphantly in the name of the Lord—and then was betrayed, cursed, denied, tortured, and killed.

Isaiah predicted that the servant of God would have to give his blessed face to those who would curse him. Isaiah predicted that he would give his blessed body to those who would break him. Jesus—who studied the words of the prophet, Isaiah—knew that he was going to give his blessed face to those who would curse him and his blessed body to those who would break him.

And Jesus also predicted this *cursed* outcome over and over again to his followers. They simply couldn’t believe it. Two thousand years later, we still have trouble believing it.

Perhaps we should say, “*Cursed* is he who comes in the name of the Lord” each week during the Holy Eucharist. Maybe we should be careful how we celebrate Jesus’ coming into the Holy City of Jerusalem, lest we forget his coming into the curse of pain and suffering, inflicted by human hands.

There is a message of warning on Palm Sunday to all religious people of every faith, especially our own. And the message is this: Be careful when you celebrate triumph, that you do not exploit the privilege or the rewards as entirely your own. Remember that *even the Son of God* did not enter into glory without first suffering upon the cross.

And there is an equally strong message of hope on Palm Sunday to all who suffer. And the message is this: Be careful when you despair, that you do not shoulder it as entirely your own—because you are *not alone*. Remember that even the Son of God did not enter into joy without first suffering upon the cross.

Palm Sunday is the day when we are clearly reminded of the tension between celebration and suffering, the tension between singing “Hosanna in the highest!” on the one hand, and praying “Lord, have mercy” on the other hand.

St. Paul understood the tension of these prayers. He had sung the Hosanna’s of triumph as he violently persecuted the Church. And then he turned and followed Jesus Christ, and began to pray for the Lord’s mercy in the midst of repeated sufferings and defeats.

To the Philippians Paul wrote these words: “Let the *same mind* be in you that was in Christ Jesus...,” the *blessed* Son of God who did not exploit privilege, but who instead humbled himself to be as cursed as a slave—giving his blessed face to those who cursed him...and giving his blessed body to those who broke him.

We live our lives between these two poles of reality, don't we? We live alternately between the reality of celebration and triumph...*and also* the reality of suffering and defeat. We sing, “Hosanna in the highest!” and we also cry out, “Lord, have mercy.”

If we let the same mind be in us that was in Christ Jesus, we will remember that our Lord was defeated *before* he was exalted. We’ll remember that our savior suffered and died *before* he was resurrected.

Therefore, in the words of today’s opening prayer, we will be able to walk in the way of his *cursed* suffering with the assurance that we will also share in his *blessed* resurrection.

This blessed and cursed body which Christ gave to be broken...it became the most precious gift of God for the people of God.

So, on this Palm Sunday, take this gift *in remembrance* that Christ died for you, and feed on him in your hearts by faith, with thanksgiving.<sup>1</sup>

When we let this same mind be in us that was in Christ Jesus, we remember him with thanksgiving, because we can cry “Lord, have mercy,” to the One who shares our sufferings and, we can also sing, “Hosanna in the highest!” to the One who lives and reigns, forever and ever. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> The words of the Presentation of the Sacramental Gifts in the Holy Eucharist, *The Book of Common Prayer*.