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AMDG

Palm Sunday - April 9, 2017

We began this service with a triumphal entry and end it with a death march.

We celebrate a sinless man brought up on trumped up charges and then executed.

In the readings we remember that a powerless Jesus was accused and stood silent before Pilate, and the powerful governor was greatly amazed.

The criminal Barabbas was allowed to go free, so that an innocent Jesus can be put to death.

Jesus was mocked as a king, and yet is the true King of Kings, and Lord of Lords.

God emptied himself and took the form of a slave, and then was exalted. Irony upon irony, one contradiction upon another.... And it's the perfect beginning to the bizarre and disturbing week that we call Holy Week. Because during this week we're supposed to feel disturbed, things are supposed to seem bizarre. It was certainly like that 2000 years ago; it still is.

The disciples and followers had been with Jesus for a long time - months, maybe even years. And they saw him do some amazing things - he healed sick people, made the blind see, brought dead people back to life, fed thousands from just a few loaves of bread and some fishes. He also told them stories that made them feel good, and made them feel hopeful. He favored scripture that emphasized God's loving-kindness and avoided passages that were legalistic, exclusive, and punitive. He made the privileged feel marginalized and the marginalized feel privileged. Everyone who spent time with Jesus felt beloved and special to God, even those he criticized. So, when entered Jerusalem, they wanted to celebrate. They thought Jesus would be their new king and would overthrow the Romans and the Temple elite. They paraded into the great city waving palm branches, shouting and singing. What they didn't remember, or maybe didn't want to remember was that Jesus had been telling them all along that he didn't come to change the law or

defeat any worldly powers; he came to change them, he came to turn their hearts around. They must not have been listening, all those times he warned them that he would have to suffer, all the times he said that he would be handed over and put to death...all the times he said **they** would have to take up their own crosses to follow him.

They of course were shocked and terrified when everything went so terribly wrong. Instead of overthrowing the Romans and kicking out the temple big shots like they expected, Jesus was captured, put on trial, sentenced to death, tortured, and hung on a cross to die.

This week, this holy week, is a week that begins with hope – hope that the Messiah has come and will be everything we want. Later, we experience joy and puzzlement, when we share Jesus' last meal and experience him washing our feet and then saying that the bread is his body and the wine is his blood. And then comes confusion and despair when Jesus is taken away; given an unfair trial, beaten and humiliated and finally put to death in a very horrible way. Hope and joy, then confusion, despair, and horror. Those are the feelings that Jesus' friends felt, and they're the feelings we're invited to feel this week as we think and pray about these amazing events again.

For us as Christians, this is the most important week of the year.

Everything that happens this week – the Last Supper, Jesus' arrest, trial, and death, and finally His resurrection – all of this is the center of our faith. All of Jesus' life and teaching, everything that God wanted us to understand about who we are and whose we are is all contained in this week. It's a week of contradictions and irony and tragic turns of events...and after 2000 years, it still makes us scratch our heads.

And it should make us scratch our heads; it should disturb us, because then we know we are truly living our faith. Some people think religion is for people who have all the answers about life. But the opposite is true. Religion is for those of us who continue to ask the big questions. Why do the righteous suffer, and the despicable prosper? Where is God in all of this? Is there any meaning to life? These are the questions we come up against again and again throughout our lives. We experience them when bad things happen that we can't understand. We experience these questions when wonderful unexpected things happen. We experience these questions when our best efforts go awry? It is in living these

questions that we experience God. And there is no time of the year more full of questions than this week.

So, I invite you all to live in the uncomfortableness of this week. Walk this confusing and painful road. There are many ways to do this.

Take a little time every day, maybe a few minutes in the morning, and a few minutes in the evening – to read some of the Passion. Put yourself in a different point of view each time – sometimes, Peter, sometimes Judas, sometimes Jesus, sometimes a bystander. Think about what it feels like. Look for paralleled in your own life experience. Ask yourself when have you felt this way before?

Or you could read a challenging book about this week. *The Last Week* by Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan is an excellent one that takes you through Jesus' last week, day by day. Or read a great book about the ironies of suffering and redemption, such as the *Book of Joy* by The Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu, or CS Lewis's *Surprisd by Joy* - one of my personal favorites is Dickens' *Great Expectations*.

And of course there are this week's services, Tuesday evening prayer and Eucharist, Maundy Thursday, and Good Friday's services. Come to some or come to all, and after the services, take some time alone to recall your feelings and sit with the questions and the discomfort.

Of course this bizarre and disturbing week would be pointless if it weren't for next Sunday...Easter...So, be sure to be here for the big celebration, because it is the Resurrection that bring meaning to this bizarre and disturbing week...and to our lives in Christ Jesus.