

Palm Sunday 2023

Today is, of course, Palm Sunday, also called the Sunday of the Passion.

These names actually refer to two different things, both of which we attempt to accomplish at a single service.

We start out waving palms and joyfully celebrating Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem, but then turn abruptly to the topic of his betrayal and crucifixion.

This was not always the case.

Palm Sunday once was dedicated solely to the joyful entry into Jerusalem, and the crucifixion was left for Good Friday, all in proper historical order—Palm Sunday, entry into Jerusalem, followed by the Triduum, the three holy days: Maundy Thursday, last supper with foot washing; Good Friday, crucifixion; and Easter Vigil, resurrection.

The problem was, people stopped going to church on Good Friday, so they moved from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday, from declaring Jesus king to proclaiming the resurrection, from triumph to triumph, but this betrayed the principles of our faith.

We worship Christ crucified.

In other words, we know that this world is not all pleasure.

We are passing through here, forming what relationships we can and learning what we are able on the way.

Liturgically, skipping from triumphal entry to triumphal resurrection suggests that our earthly goal is to be kings of our domains, the very thinking Jesus wished to turn on its head.

We Christians look for a different kind of success, the ability to be compassionate despite conditions that are sometimes uncaring, the ability to act with integrity in a world where people are often Machiavellian in their gossip, passive aggressiveness, and sniping, the ability to be vulnerable in a world where power is cultivated and admired, the ability to forgive in a world often bent on exacting a pound of flesh.

This is where our hearts are heading.

In a world of complaints and dissatisfaction, we choose joy and gratitude.

As a compromise, today I will focus on the betrayal of Christ and will save the topic of crucifixion for Friday.

People often point out that we do not know why Judas betrayed Jesus.

Some think it was because he wanted a political solution, an earthly king, and was disappointed to learn that Jesus wanted us to be servants of God, not masters of others.

Some read his preference for selling the nard and giving the money to the poor rather than “wasting” it on Jesus to mean that he valued his own ideology over actual relationships.

This may or may not be true, but what is clear is that any person who betrays someone who teaches love and integrity must be uncomfortable with himself, or Jesus’ message would have resonated, would have drawn him into self-acceptance and love.

Remember that I told you that Carl Jung said, “People will do anything, no matter how absurd, in order to avoid facing their own soul”?¹

Well, we might paraphrase that and say that ‘people will believe anything, no matter how farfetched, in order to avoid facing themselves.’

Try as we might, however, we are unable to escape our conscience, which is that part of ourselves that is connected to God and to others.

In the end, Judas could not face his actions and committed suicide.

Judas’ conscience was at work throughout, but he betrayed it.

When Jesus tells the twelve that he knows that someone is about to sell him out, to escape his own feelings of guilt, Judas immediately says, “Surely not I Lord.”

¹ICW 12, par. 126 (p 99) - Psychology and Alchemy (1952)

He creates an imagined self, which sets up a tension between him and reality.

We create such false images to avoid the truth, but have trouble accepting our own nonsense.

(There is a more colorful term for this, but I will leave that to your imagination.

People get upset when I speak too much Anglo-Saxon.)

The more people we can convince to join in our delusions, the more comfortable we imagine we will feel, but the reality is that the only thing that brings peace in our hearts, that reduces the tension caused by an imagined reality that conflicts with truth is facing ourselves, darkness and all.

Existence is an opportunity to grow, and we do this by facing reality squarely, though it is easier to live in an imagined reality in which everyone else is the problem and we can avoid any responsibility.

We just need to anesthetize the resulting tension.

“Thinking is difficult, therefore let the herd pronounce judgement,”² explained Carl Jung.

Judas may have been the most extreme case, but he was not the only disciple struggling with facing himself.

²Carl Jung, 'Flying Saucers: A Modern Myth of Things Seen in the Skies', 1959, p. 46. Later included in the Collected Works of C.G. Jung - Civilization in Transition - Volume 10.

When Jesus tells the twelve they will desert him, rather than accepting that possibility, much like Judas, Peter exclaims, “I will never desert you.” Unlike Judas, however, Peter continues to do the necessary yet challenging work of abandoning his false reality.

We want to believe that we are masters, but again, as Jung said in a letter to Valentine Brooke, “Individuals who believe they are the masters of their fate are as a rule the slaves of destiny.”³

Judas remained a slave; Peter continued to learn.

Freedom comes only to those who face themselves.

Whatever Judas wanted Jesus to do, we can be sure that he was hoping that the result would be to relieve him of the challenging nature of reality, but God has set up challenges for our advantage.

As Jung again said, “Be grateful for your difficulties and challenges, for they hold blessings. In fact . . . difficulties . . . are necessary for health, personal growth, individuation, and self-actualisation.”⁴

Some theologians nevertheless have turned Christianity into yet another form of escapism.

³ Carl Jung, letter to Valentine Brooke, 16 November 1959.

⁴ https://www.azquotes.com/author/7659-Carl_Jung. If Jung did not say it, it is still a valid statement.

Just believe and you are done.

Jesus paid the price for you.

In other words, Jesus did the work.

We do not have to bother with that pesky task of facing ourselves.

I am not saying that we save ourselves.

God does the saving, but, as in any relationship, we must work together.

We must allow God to work, which is impossible if we are wed to fantasy.

Some theologians essentially gave up on Jesus' project of relationships built on authenticity and instead created a nonsense story stretching from the fall of humanity through the atonement of Jesus.

In doing so, they portrayed *themselves* as holding the key.

Only they truly understood the complicated and self-contradictory theology that made God look like a colossal, sadistic blunderer.

We were left to spend our lives trapped in the tangled webs of their making.

We will speak more about freeing ourselves from this on Easter.

For now, it is important that we realize that the path is written on everyone's heart and we need believe nothing that does not accord with them.

People who are suffering often hope that religion will offer them some way out, but all I can tell them is that the struggle is part of the path.

The love of God, knowing that we are not alone and that existence is not meaningless, helps, but a life without suffering is never promised.

We either learn from our experiences, in which case we, like Peter, let go of our illusions one by one, or we can die in our ignorance like Judas.

The tension that we feel when we latch onto a fantasy is *the key*.

It tells us when we are going astray.

In a world where the majority of people prefer fantasy to reality, lies to truth, ease to the challenges that God has prepared for us, we Christians have chosen a path that leads to life, to freedom, to resurrection.

This week, we will walk with Jesus through the darkness, grow, and, like Jesus, come out the other side, the resurrection side.